

Project AWARE Ohio Information Brief

BULLYING OF LGBT STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF LGBT YOUTH

School can be an unwelcoming and even harmful experience for many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students.^{5,10} These students may face hostile school environments that contribute to health and academic risks.^{2,17} One such risk is LGBT students' increased likelihood of being bullied in school.³ LGBT bullying is a subset of bias-based bullying, which is bullying based on one's prejudices against a particular group.⁷ This type of bullying is a widespread problem with serious short-term and long-term effects.^{10,19} Furthermore, there is very little in the way of protection for victims of LGBT bullying.^{8,10,21} This information brief aims to briefly describe the problem of LGBT bullying in schools and offer suggestions for ways in which youth-serving adults can make a difference.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Ohio broadly defines bullying as multiple written, verbal, graphic, or physical acts towards a student that are intentional. These acts cause mental or physical harm that is severe, persistent, or pervasive enough to create an educational environment that is intimidating, threatening, or abusive for the student. Ohio's definition also includes violence within dating relationships and notes that the harassment, intimidation, or bullying can be conducted electronically.¹⁴

Bullying of LGBT students is one type of bias-based bullying that can be defined as the bullying of another due to their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.²⁰ Any student can be a victim of this type of bullying, regardless of their actual sexual orientation or gender identity. A verbal taunt, such as "you're so gay," is an example of this type of bullying that can be aimed at, and negatively affect, any individual who is subjected to such harassment.²²

NEGATIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Bias-based bullying is just one aspect of the negative school climates that LGBT youth may face on a daily basis. For example, in Ohio schools, nearly 90% of LGB students have to endure hearing homophobic remarks "often" or "frequently," and about 18% hear such remarks from staff or teachers.¹¹ In addition to these remarks, school policies can often leave LGBT

students feeling discriminated against. For example, a lack of formal anti-bullying policies that could help protect LGBT students, along with potentially discriminatory rules regarding dress codes, the use of bathrooms or locker rooms, disciplinary actions, or school dances, may prohibit or discourage these students from asserting their LGBT identities.¹⁰ Finally, school curricula and library materials often exclude mentions of LGBT people, history, and issues.^{10,13}

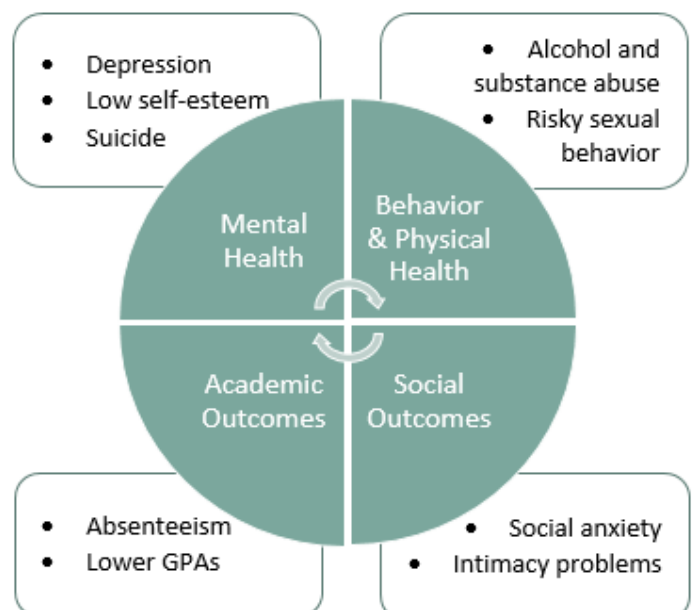
BULLYING OF LGBT STUDENTS

INCREASED RISK OF VICTIMIZATION FOR LGBT STUDENTS

Research studies have repeatedly reported that LGBT students are much more likely than their non-LGBT peers to experience bullying in school.^{3,4,12} For example, 51% of LGBT students, compared to 25% of non-LGBT students, reported experiencing verbal harassment in a 2012 study.¹²

EFFECTS OF BIAS-BASED BULLYING

Bias-based bullying has been found to be associated with a multitude of negative health, academic, and social outcomes in its victims, including in LGBT students.^{4,6,10,16,18} Furthermore, some studies have even suggested that victims of LGBT bullying may experience more severe outcomes than victims of other types of bullying.^{7,15,22} Some potential negative outcomes include:



LACK OF PROTECTION

LACK OF INTERVENTION EFFORTS & ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

Many schools offer very little in the way of protection for LGBT students and victims of LGBT bullying.^{10,21} For example:

- According to the 2013 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, frequent teacher intervention in cases of verbal harassment was only reported by 18% of LGBT students.¹⁰
- Anti-bullying programs in schools often neglect to include LGBT students.²¹
- Only 10% of students nationwide and 4% of students in Ohio reported the existence of anti-bullying policies at their schools that are *comprehensive* (i.e., enumerate 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity').^{10,11}

WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

IMPROVE NATIONAL, STATE, AND SCHOOL POLICIES

- Be familiar with pending legislation, such as the Student Non-Discrimination Act of 2015, a federal act that aims to outlaw LGBT discrimination in public schools.²⁰
- Advocate for enumerated anti-bullying legislation.
- Advocate for school policies that include, protect, and respect LGBT students (e.g., anti-bullying policies that prohibit harassment based on gender expression, dress code policies that are enforced equally for all students).

EDUCATION ABOUT LGBT PEOPLE, HISTORY, AND ISSUES

- Contact the Buckeye Region Anti-Violence Organization (BRAVO) for free workshops and trainings on LGBT anti-bullying- www.bravo-ohio.org. This is a statewide resource that offers anti-bullying, hate, bias, and violence trainings for educators, staff, administration, and students.
- Sign up yourself, your school, or your district for professional development workshops on LGBT-based bullying (e.g., <http://www.glsen.org/educate/professional-development/workshops>)
- Make your curricula more inclusive by checking out GLSEN's educator resources page: <http://www.glsen.org/educate/resources>

SUPPORT LGBT STUDENTS

- Organize or join a gay-straight alliance (GSA) in your school: <http://www.gsanetwork.org/get-involved>. In general, GSAs help students feel more connected and supported by others in the school, which can increase engagement and lower feelings of hopelessness and isolation they may experience from bullying.
 - Contact Kaleidoscope Youth Center (KYC) for GSA support. This center oversees the Ohio GSA Network and Ohio GSA Summit- www.kycohoio.org
- Intervene in instances of bias-based bullying, and designate yourself as a supportive staff member who is willing to serve as an ally for LGBT students. For a guide on how to do so, visit: http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/SSK_2013_book.pdf
- Be aware of personal attitudes and language used with LGBT students.
- Model positive and accepting interactions and support.
- Protect students' privacy regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Participate in school-wide prevention initiatives about LGBT bullying, respect, and school safety.
- Advise student councils and school clubs to help them implement programs that advocate for respect and anti-bullying.

THE FIVE STEPS TO INTERVENING:



Information reproduced from GLSEN's Safe Space Kit (2013)

EVALUATE ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMS IN TERMS OF EFFECTS ON LGBT STUDENTS AND LGBT-BASED BULLYING

- Conduct anti-bullying program evaluations that include data on LGBT student outcomes (including prior, during, and after anti-bullying interventions), as well as types and frequency of LGBT-based bullying.

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