



Make It Safe

A Resource Guide for Students Combating
Bullying, Homophobia, and Transphobia
in Schools





ABOUT THE COLORADO GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE NETWORK

The Colorado Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Network is a program of One Colorado, a statewide organization dedicated to securing equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Coloradans.

The Network was launched as part of a comprehensive plan to empower lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) and allied students to combat bullying in their schools. To support these student efforts, the Colorado GSA Network has developed tools and resources for Gay-Straight Alliances to educate their schools and communities.

Colorado GSA Network was also created to build a statewide network of Gay-Straight Alliances, to connect students from across the state, and to facilitate leadership development through regional and statewide engagement.

To learn more about the Colorado GSA Network, please visit our website at www.cogsanetwork.org or call 303-396-6443.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide serves as a resource for LGBTQ and allied students committed to combating bullying and creating a safer, more inclusive learning environment in Colorado schools. This guide includes information on laws and policies that protect students in schools and suggests activities that Gay-Straight Alliances can participate in to make their schools safer.

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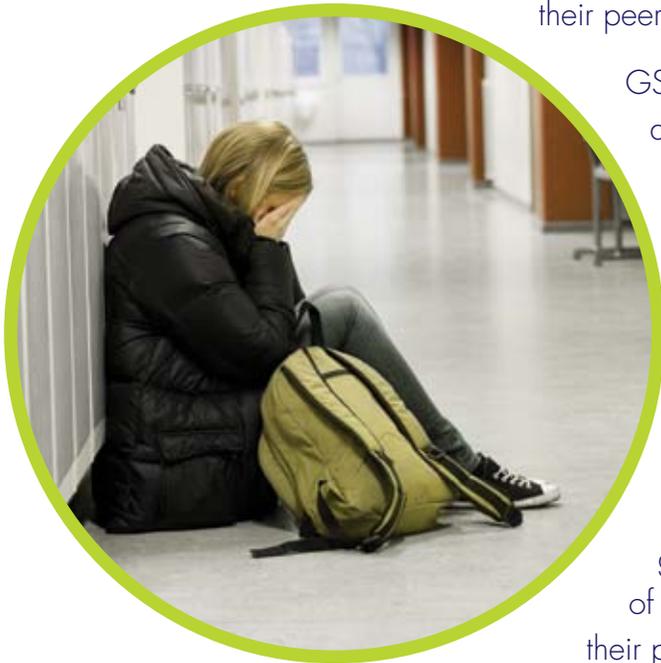
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ABOUT GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCES

Gay-Straight Alliances are student-initiated and student-run clubs for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ) students and their allies. These clubs provide a safe space for these students to meet, provide support, and educate their peers to end homophobia and transphobia in schools.



GSA also create safe environments for LGBTQ and allied students to support each other in their work to combat bullying and harassment in their schools.

According to the 2009 Climate Survey taken by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 87 percent of Colorado's LGBTQ students were verbally harassed in school because of their sexual orientation and 73 percent were harassed based on their gender identity or expression. Since 89 percent of LGBTQ students felt deliberately excluded by their peers, Gay-Straight Alliances play a major role in eliminating the isolation felt by these students.

The GLSEN survey also showed that students in schools with GSAs are less likely to feel unsafe in their schools than those without such a support group (54.3 percent vs. 66.5 percent). The positive and affirming environment of GSAs allows students to feel safe and respected in their schools.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A STUDENT

YOUR RIGHT TO FORM A GSA

Gay-Straight Alliances are student-initiated and student-run clubs for LGBTQ students and their allies. These clubs provide a safe space for these students to meet, provide support, and educate their peers to end homophobia and transphobia in schools. GSAs can take many forms and address different needs for the students involved in the club. As a social group, a GSA can provide a space, inside and outside of school, to meet supportive people and engage in a number of social activities, including movies, BBQs, dances, etc. A GSA focused on education creates a more supportive and affirming environment for LGBTQ students by educating their peers and bringing awareness to LGBTQ issues. Activist-focused GSAs seek changes to better protect LGBTQ students through nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies and also advocate for LGBTQ inclusion in class curriculum and school libraries. Gay-Straight Alliances play important roles in schools to create supportive communities for LGBTQ students and their allies by reducing the isolation often felt by LGBTQ students.

Under the Equal Access Act, students have the right to form a GSA in any public secondary school that receives federal funding and that allows at least one other noncurricular club to meet on school grounds. GSAs must have equal access to school facilities and be held to the same standards as other student clubs. Having access to school facilities means being allowed to use meeting spaces, advertise on bulletin boards, make announcements over the loudspeaker, and so on. Schools cannot single out student clubs based on content or viewpoint, nor can they hold these clubs to different standards. Again, if your school allows at least one other noncurricular student club to meet, it must recognize all student clubs. If your school refuses to allow you to form a GSA or holds your group to different standards, then it is in violation of the law under the Equal Access Act.

If your school isn't allowing you to form a GSA or is holding your GSA to different standards than those it applies to other noncurricular student clubs, contact the Colorado GSA Network.

Information from Lambda Legal's "So You Wanna Start a GSA"

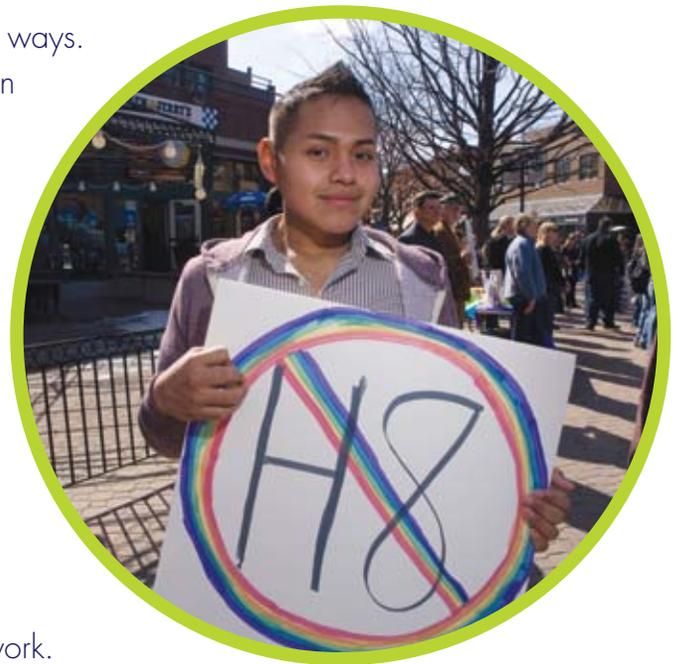
YOUR RIGHTS AS A STUDENT

YOUR RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH

For students, the right to free speech is granted under the Constitution, in most cases. This right also allows students to wear t-shirts and buttons to support a particular cause. School officials cannot censor this material simply because they disapprove of the information or cause. However, there are some limits on forms of expression during school-sponsored activities. For example, during the Day of Silence, students do not have the right to refuse to answer a teacher's question during class. This being said, they can likely avoid any conflict with their teachers simply by obtaining permission before the event.

In public schools, a club's speech is protected in many ways. If a school allows any noncurricular club to advertise on bulletin boards or in announcements, for example, the school must allow *all* noncurricular clubs to advertise in such ways. Again, schools cannot censor this information because they think it is disruptive. If a public school attempts to censor such information simply because they believe it is disruptive, they must prove that the speech will cause substantial harm. On the other hand, lewd and profane speech can be censored, so keep your language appropriate.

For any questions or assistance regarding students' speech rights, please contact the Colorado GSA network.



Adapted from Lambda Legal "Your Speech Rights"



YOUR RIGHT TO ATTEND PROM

Prom is an exciting time of year for many students, but it can also be a difficult time for LGBTQ students. As described by Lambda Legal, attending prom with a same-sex date is an “expressive activity” — that is, an expression of speech protected under the Constitution. Since all students have the right to equal treatment by their schools, same-sex dates cannot be treated differently from any other students. Schools have the responsibility to protect all of their students and to make prom a safe environment for everyone.

Generally, schools can establish dress code standards for the prom (most likely to be formal attire). However, they cannot make students dress according to gender. Female students in tuxedos and male students in dresses are protected under sex-discrimination and freedom-of-expression laws. Based on these laws, transgender, genderqueer, and gender nonconforming students are protected in the same ways. In all cases, it is best to communicate with your school before the prom to avoid or address any issues that may arise.

If your school isn't allowing you to attend prom with your same-sex date or you are experiencing other issues regarding prom, please contact the Colorado GSA Network.

Adapted from Lambda Legal's "Your Prom"

UNDERSTANDING THE LAWS THAT PROTECT YOU

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT LAWS

SB 08-200: Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act

In May 2008, Colorado expanded its anti-discrimination law to include protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity, making it illegal to discriminate against LGBT Coloradans in housing and public accommodations such as hotels, restaurants, stores, hospitals, clinics, and other places of business. This law also protects LGBT students and adults from harassment and discrimination in schools across Colorado.

HB 11-1254: Anti-Bullying Legislation

During the 2011 legislative session, the Colorado General Assembly passed a bill aimed at reducing bullying and harassment in schools. On May 13, 2011, Governor John Hickenlooper signed that bill into law, making Colorado the 13th state in the nation to pass an anti-bullying bill that enumerates the personal characteristics often targeted for bullying, including race, religion, sex, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The new law also clearly defines bullying, requires each school district to adopt comprehensive anti-bullying policies, and creates a grant program to which schools can apply in order to fund anti-bullying programs.

How is bullying defined in HB 1254?

According to HB 1254, "bullying" means any written or verbal expression, or physical or electronic act or gesture, or a pattern thereof, that is intended to coerce, intimidate, or cause any physical, mental, or emotional harm to any student. Bullying is prohibited against any student for any reason. This prohibition includes, but is not limited to, any such behavior that is directed toward a student on the basis of his or her academic performance; or against whom federal and state laws prohibit discrimination upon any of the bases described in section 22-32-109 (1) (II) (i). This definition is not intended to infringe upon any right guaranteed to any person by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or to prevent the expression of any religious, political, or philosophical views.

The schools in the district are subject to all federal and state laws, and constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, ancestry, or need for special education services.

When is bullying a civil rights violation?

Schools that receive federal funding are required by federal law to address discrimination on a number of different personal characteristics. The statutes enforced by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) include:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;
- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex; and
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504); and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II), which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability

School districts may be in violation of these civil rights statutes and the U.S. Department of Education's regulations when peer harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability is sufficiently serious that it creates a hostile environment; interferes with a student's education; and/or is encouraged, tolerated, ignored, or simply inadequately addressed by school employees.

While current laws enforced by the OCR do not protect against harassment based on religion or sexual orientation, they do include protection against harassment of members of religious groups based on shared ethnic characteristics, as well as gender-based and sexual harassment of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Colorado's anti-discrimination laws include protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion.

A school is responsible for addressing harassment incidents about which it knows or reasonably should have known.

UNDERSTANDING THE LAWS THAT PROTECT YOU

EQUAL ACCESS ACT (EAA)

Students who attend public “secondary schools” that receive federal funding and allow at least one other noncurricular student club to meet must provide all noncurricular clubs with equal access to school facilities. Noncurricular student clubs meet outside of class time since they don’t directly relate to class material. They include groups like the chess club, hiking club, diversity club, or volunteer club. Under the Equal Access Act, a school that permits the formation of any student-initiated club cannot legally prohibit the formation of any other such club, even if it disagrees with its philosophy, political views, or other content. Nor can it limit a club’s access to school facilities on this basis. Having access to school facilities means being allowed to use school meeting spaces and equipment, advertise on bulletin boards and in the school newspaper, make announcements over the loudspeaker, and so on.

There are many examples of the ways that your GSA is protected under the Equal Access Act. One of the major court cases that demonstrated the ways GSAs are protected was *Colín v. Orange Unified School District*. In this case, the school board refused to recognize a GSA as a student club and also suggested it change its name and limit its content. The court ruled in favor of the club, citing its protection under the Equal Access Act and its right to be recognized as a GSA with the same access to school facilities enjoyed by other school clubs.

For help forming a GSA at your school, contact the Colorado GSA Network.

If your school isn’t allowing you to form a GSA, please contact Lambda Legal at 1-866-542-8336 or send an e-mail to legalhelpdesk@lambdalegal.org or the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Colorado at 303-777-5482.



Information from Lambda Legal and the American Civil Liberties Union

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SCHOOL

School officials are obligated to protect all of their students while they are in school. Acting in their role as “substitute parents” (a legal term known as *in loco parentis*), schools must take reasonable steps to ensure the safety and success of their students and create a safe learning environment by immediately and appropriately addressing incidents of bullying and harassment.

One major court case that affirmed the schools’ responsibility in this regard was *Nabozny v. Podlesny*. In this case, Jamie Nabozny suffered verbal and physical abuse at his public high school in Wisconsin. At one point, the abuse was so severe that Jamie required surgery. The repeated harassment and abuse was reported to and ignored by school officials, who stated that Jamie should expect it since he’s gay. After a successful lawsuit, the school was held liable for the harm caused to Jamie, and his case was settled for nearly \$1 million. This unprecedented case highlights the responsibility of schools to protect students from verbal and physical abuse in schools.

Information from Lambda Legal

» THE COMPLAINT PROCESS

To create a safe school where all students are safe and respected, all incidents of bullying and harassment must be reported and handled appropriately. Although the reporting procedures for each school and school district may not be the same, school principals or designated administrators have the responsibility to hear reports, investigate reported incidents, and take appropriate disciplinary actions, if necessary. To make sure your complaint is addressed, it’s important to do the following:

✓ Use the Appropriate Reporting Procedure

One way to determine the appropriate reporting procedures for incidents of bullying or harassment is to ask a supportive teacher, counselor, or advisor of your Gay-Straight Alliance. If there are no active supporters in your school, you can always refer to your Student Handbook Policies and follow the appropriate reporting procedures.

✓ Ask Teachers, Counselors, or Other Staff for Help

All educators and staff are responsible for reporting instances of bullying and harassment. While they may not have the authority to take action on your complaint, they can be great advocates and guide you through the complaint process in your school.

✓ Keep Detailed Written Records

Descriptive details will help your administrator address your complaint. It’s important to write every detail of an event down, every time. If you experience cyberbullying or harassment, which includes text messages, voice mails, e-mails, and posts from websites, print these out and keep them for documentation purposes. For the incident you are reporting, you’ll want to include details of what happened, who did what to whom, what was said before, during and/or after the incident, and whether there were any witnesses (and, if so, who). It is just as important to document the complaint process as the event you are complaining about. Every time you have a conversation with someone, including conversations about what happened, where to report, follow-up about the report and/or actions taken, you’ll want to document this in detail. If your school has a formal reporting or information tracking form, use it. Write your details in a journal, or find another way to track your information.

MAKE YOUR SCHOOL SAFE

As a student, you have the power to create real change in your school. From advocacy to trainings, events to coalition building among student clubs—you can make your school a safe place for LGBTQ students.

YOU AND YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT

- **Advocate for the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression** in your school district's Anti-Discrimination Policy. Working with the school board is way to share your stories and experiences and to make sure that LGBTQ students are protected by your district's policies.

YOU AND YOUR SCHOOL

- **Coordinate a school-wide assembly.** This is a great opportunity for your school to highlight its anti-bullying policy and reporting procedures. Working with the school board is a great way to share your stories and experiences and to make sure that LGBTQ students are protected by your district's policies. Contact the Colorado GSA Network for event ideas or help planning your assembly.
- **Partner with a teacher.** Since historical LGBTQ contributions are often overlooked in textbooks, there are a number of other ways to integrate these topics into your classroom. Work with a teacher to develop a lesson plan that includes LGBTQ contributions in supplemental class materials or offer to contribute firsthand to a lesson with your teacher. Visit www.glbthistorymonth.com or contact the Colorado GSA Network for information on LGBTQ history and famous LGBTQ figures.
- **Write a paper and give a presentation on your topic.** Use these class projects as an opportunity to share your research and educate your class on a particular LGBTQ-related topic.
- **Host a Safe-Space Training.** After identifying supportive students, staff, faculty, and administrators, collaborate with a community organization to host a safe-space training. As part of this training, your organization and allies will be equipped with the tools to create a more inclusive and accepting climate in your school. To find partner organizations that offer this training, please contact the Colorado GSA Network.
- **Organize a student panel at a staff meeting.** Recruit students to talk about their experiences in school as LGBTQ students to educate staff about the ways that bullying and harassment impacts students.

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- **Participate in a Student Club Fair.** If your school hosts a club or information fair, be a part of it. If your school doesn't have one, organize a fair with other student groups. This event is a great opportunity for your club to sponsor a table to recruit new members and inform other students about the work that your club does. You can also learn about other clubs in your school and find new ways to build partnerships and coalitions to engage your student body.
 - **Make a float and walk in the homecoming parade.** Take advantage of homecoming season by participating in the homecoming parade to bring awareness to your group and to help others to recognize the supportive environment that your Gay-Straight Alliance provides. To prepare for the parade, have a group sign-making or t-shirt designing party to get your group excited about the parade.

YOU AND YOUR PEERS

- **Start a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or become an active member.** GSAs are student-run, student-led clubs that exist to create a safe space for LGBTQ and straight (ally) students to educate and support one another in their work to make their school safer and fight homophobia and transphobia. Starting a GSA can be a process, so make sure to be organized and prepared in beginning your club by following these quick steps:

Know Student Club Policies

- Use your Student Handbook to find information on how to start a club at your school. Oftentimes, all you need is a staff member to sponsor your group. Before you seek an official sponsor, spend some time thinking about why you want to start the group and brainstorming potential mission statements. Note that supportive teachers or potential sponsors are also great resources for information about policies relating to starting student groups.

Find a Sponsor and Notify Your Administration

- Identify a staff person that you think is supportive, including staff members who have already demonstrated support for LGBTQ issues. Note that you may be able to find more than one staff member who is interested in sponsoring your GSA.
- Inform your administration of your intentions to begin a Gay-Straight Alliance right away. It can be much easier to have a supportive administrator that can help you get your group started, identify supportive staff, and serve as an advocate to groups outside the school such as parents, community groups, and the school board.

MAKE YOUR SCHOOL SAFE

- It's also a great idea to find supportive community members and parents, in case your group experiences resistance.
- After completing the process to become a student group, get ready for your first meeting. Find a location, advertise for the meeting, bring food to the meeting, and start planning. The first meeting is a great opportunity to plan for the school year. The group should make plans for the organization and also plan which activities to participate in to bring more awareness to LGBTQ issues.

Engage Your Peers

- **Stay active as a student club and educate those outside of your group.** Student club activities can bring new people into your group and engage your current membership. There are a number of LGBTQ Days-of-Action and other activities that GSAs can participate in throughout the year.
 - **LGBTQ History Month in October**
In October, LGBTQ History Month recognizes different figures and events that have shaped LGBTQ History. Celebrating this month, and the figures and events they honor, can help bring awareness about the LGBTQ movement to your group, school, or community. Check out www.glbthistorymonth.com for more information.
 - **National Coming Out Day, October 11**
Observed by members of the LGBTQ and allied community, National Coming Out Day brings awareness to LGBTQ issues and celebrates coming out, the process of disclosing one's LGBTQ identity to others.
 - **Ally Week**
In October, Ally Week acknowledges the partnership of LGBTQ and allied students to make their schools safer through education, support, action, and advocacy. The week also encourages straight students to become allies to create more inclusive schools that protect all students from bullying and harassment. Visit www.allyweek.com for more information.
 - **Transgender Day of Remembrance**
In November, Transgender Day of Remembrance memorializes the lives lost due to hate crimes committed against transgender folks. The day also brings awareness to transphobia. This irrational fear of those perceived to blur gender roles can be expressed through stereotyping, harassment, or violence. Visit www.transgenderdor.com for more information.



- **No Name-Calling Week**

In January, No Name-Calling Week is a week of education and awareness about the impacts of name-calling, harassment, and bullying. Additionally, there are educational tools available to students and staff to help your group eliminate name-calling and bullying in your school. Visit www.nonamecallingweek.org for more information.

- **Day of Silence**

The Day of Silence draws attention to the silencing effects of anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment in schools. To represent this silencing effect, students vow to be silent throughout the day. The event's website, www.dayofsilence.org, has many tools available to help students prepare for the Day of Silence, including talking points to cover with teachers and administrators about why they are participating, an information card students can show their teachers and others on the day to explain why they are being silent, as well as t-shirt and button ideas to show support for the day. A "Breaking the Silence" event after school is a great way to discuss and debrief the events of the day and share the experience with others. Consider partnering with other schools or your community to bring more awareness to the Day of Silence.

- **Gay-Straight Alliance Day**

Gay-Straight Alliance Day is a Day-of-Action that recognizes the work that Gay-Straight Alliances do to eliminate bullying, harassment, homophobia, and transphobia. For GSAs, the day serves as an opportunity to bring awareness to and educate others about their group. The day also celebrates the contributions that GSAs make within their school and community. Visit www.gsaday.org for more information.

- **Host a book or film series.** To educate your organization and its allies, plan a book or a film series. Read a book and host a discussion on the themes of the book or watch a film and invite a panel to discuss the messages in the film. Consider partnering with other organizations to expand the perspectives of your panel or group discussion. For more ideas or information on books and films, contact the Colorado GSA Network.
- **Develop a workshop or panel for training.** To discuss issues impacting your school, organization, and allies, host a panel to bring different perspectives to a certain topic. Create a training or educational workshop that provides your group with new skills and information to further the mission of your group. For panel, workshop, or other training materials, contact Colorado GSA Network.

MAKE YOUR SCHOOL SAFE

- **Engage student media with your GSA.** The student newspaper can be an excellent avenue for advertising your group or sharing LGBTQ-related information with your school. Write a story about an event that your organization is having, share stories about the impacts of bullying in your school, or find new ways to educate your school on LGBTQ issues through your student media.
- **Involve student government or get involved in student government.** Run for student government and work on LGBTQ and bullying issues for your students. As a member of the student government, offer support to different organizations and involve them in your awareness events and activities. If you're not a member of the student government, meet with your representatives to highlight the issues that LGBTQ students experience. Talk to them about how homophobia and transphobia impact all students, and include them in your efforts to combat bullying in your school.

Train Your Peers

- **Coordinate a Safe-Space Training.** These trainings provide useful skills and information for working with LGBTQ people. These trainings include discussions on definitions and language to more effectively advocate the rights and safety of LGBTQ people and their allies. These trainings also help to create a supportive community by identifying members who are committed to ending homophobia and transphobia.
- **Partner with community organizations to offer bullying intervention and upstander trainings.** To combat bullying behavior and make your school safer, it is useful to know successful and appropriate tactics and intervention strategies. These hands-on trainings will equip your group with effective ways to intervene and turn these incidents into teachable moments as a method for reducing bullying and harassment.
- **Host a diversity or multicultural-based training.** To build stronger coalitions and allies, it is important that our organizations be more inclusive of other identities. These trainings give students the skills to build partnerships with other marginalized communities and help them understand the importance of our diverse and multicultural communities.

For training requests or to find a local organization that can offer these trainings, please contact the Colorado GSA Network.

For more details on starting your Gay-Straight Alliance, contact the Colorado GSA Network for their GSA Development and Programming Manual.

RESOURCES

COLORADO RESOURCES

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
of Colorado

www.aclu-co.org

Anti-Defamation League

www.adl.org/mountain-states

Branching Seeds of Resistance, a Project
of Colorado Anti-Violence Program

www.coavp.org

Colorado Springs Diversity Forum

www.cospdiversityforum.org

Healthy Colorado Youth Alliance

www.healthycoloradoyouth.org

Inside/Out Youth Services

www.insideoutys.org

Lambda Legal Center

www.lambdacenter.org

One Colorado

www.one-colorado.org

Rainbow Alley

www.glbtcolorado.org/rainbowalley.aspx

NATIONAL RESOURCES

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
National

www.aclu.org

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education
Network (GLSEN)

www.glsen.org

Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Network

www.gsanetwork.org

Human Rights Campaign (HRC)

www.hrc.org

Lambda Legal

www.lambdalegal.org

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
(NGLTF)

www.thetaskforce.org

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gay
(PFLAG)

www.pflag.org

Safe School Coalition

www.safeschoolcoalition.org

Southern Poverty Law Center

www.splcenter.org

United State Civil Rights Commission

www.usccr.gov

DEFINITIONS

Cisgender refers to those whose gender expression or identity conforms to socially assigned gender roles or expectations; people whose gender identities are congruent with their assigned birth sex; not transgender.

Gay is the adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, “lesbian” (noun or adjective) is often a preferred term for gay women.

Gender expression refers to an individual’s characteristics and behavior (such as appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions) that are perceived as masculine or feminine.

Gender identity refers to a person’s internal, deeply felt sense of being male, female, something in between, or something else entirely. Everyone has a gender identity.

Gender nonconforming refers to a person who is or is perceived to have gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations. Gender nonconforming people may or may not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

Genderqueer refers to people who do not identify as, or who do not express themselves as, completely male or female. Genderqueer people may or may not identify as transgender.

Homophobia is fear of lesbians and gay men. Prejudice is usually a more accurate description of hatred or antipathy toward LGBT people.

Homosexual is an outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many gay and lesbian people. The Associated Press, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* restrict usage of it. Gay and/or lesbian accurately describe those who are attracted to people of the same sex.

Heterosexual is an adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. “Straight” is a term often used to describe heterosexual people.

Lesbian refers to a woman whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adjective) or as gay women.



LGBTQ is an umbrella term that stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer.” The category “questioning” is included to incorporate those who are not yet certain of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The category “queer” is used by some people as a statement of empowerment.

Queer began as a pejorative term but is being reclaimed by some people and used as a statement of empowerment. Some people identify as “queer” to distance themselves from the rigid categorization of “straight” and “gay.” Some transgender, lesbian, gay, questioning, nonlabeling, and bisexual people, however, reject the use of this term due to its connotations of deviance, and its tendency to gloss over and sometimes deny the differences between these groups.

Sexual orientation refers to a person’s emotional and sexual attraction to other people based on the gender of the other person. People may identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. It’s important to understand that sexual orientation and gender identity are two different things. Not all transgender young people identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. Not all gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer young people display gender nonconforming characteristics.

Transgender is an umbrella term that can be used to describe people whose gender expression is nonconforming and/or whose gender identity is different from their birth-assigned gender.

Transphobia is the irrational fear of those who are perceived to break or blur stereotypical gender roles. It is often expressed through stereotyping, discrimination, harassment, and violence that is frequently directed at those who are perceived to be expressing their gender in a transgressive way, thereby defying stereotypical gender norms.

Transsexual is a term most commonly used to refer to someone who transitions from one gender to another. It includes students who were identified as male at birth but whose gender identity is female, students who were identified as female at birth but whose gender identity is male, and students whose gender identity is neither male nor female. Transition often consists of a change in style of dress, selection of a new name, and a request that people use the correct pronoun when describing them. Transition may, but does not always, include necessary medical care such as hormone therapy, counseling, and/or surgery, and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations.

Reference: <http://internationalspectrum.umich.edu/life/definitions>, glad.org, www.transgenderlawcenter.org/pdf/beyond_the_binary.pdf

THIS RESOURCE GUIDE WAS
DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

