

SAFER SPACE **BRIGHTER FUTURE**

A Guide to Supporting LGBTQ Youth





ABOUT THE TREVOR PROJECT:

Founded in 1998 by the creators of the Academy Award®-winning short film TREVOR, The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ young people ages 13-24. Every day, The Trevor Project saves young lives through its accredited, free and confidential phone, instant message and text messaging crisis intervention services. A leader and innovator in suicide prevention, The Trevor Project offers the largest safe social networking community for LGBTQ youth called TrevorSpace, best practice suicide prevention educational trainings, resources for youth and adults, and advocacy initiatives.

www.TheTrevorProject.org

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For detailed citation information, please visit Appendix V.

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Visit TrevorEducation.org for activities and additional resources!

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Did you know that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth face a disproportionately high risk of suicide? Studies show that LGB young people are actually 4 times as likely to attempt suicide as their straight peers; and questioning youth are 3 times as likely. Among transgender people, 41% of survey respondents reported attempting suicide (Grant et al., 2011, p. 2).

So, what's going on?

For LGBTQ youth, this elevated risk is not due to who they are attracted to or their being a gender non-conforming young person. In fact, for most, their risk is increased by the environment around them.

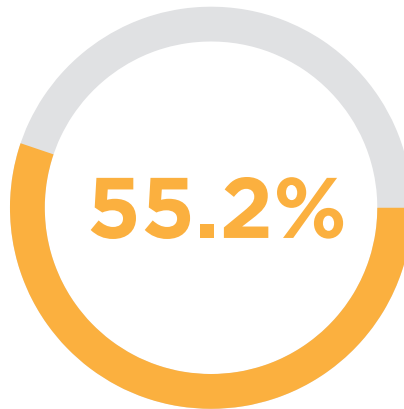
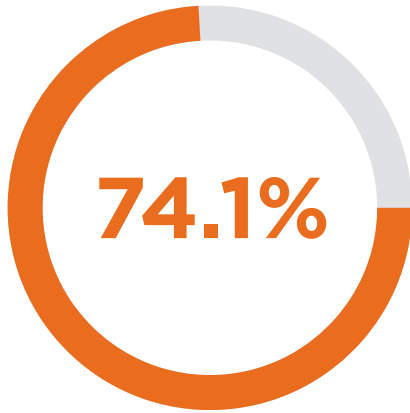
Research overwhelmingly shows that the way youth are treated in their homes, schools and communities, and the level of support they have in their life, can contribute to their risk for suicide. For example, youth who come from highly rejecting families are 8 times more likely to attempt suicide than youth who come from supportive families (Ryan, 2009, p.5).

Thankfully, there's something each of us can do to change that reality: create safer spaces that inspire brighter futures. This guide will help you build a positive, empowering environment for everyone, including LGBTQ youth – and that can be life-saving.



SAFER SPACES IN SCHOOLS

Unsupportive or unsafe school environments can lead to a range of challenges for all youth, especially if they are LGBTQ. According to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) National School Climate Survey, **74.1% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed in their school based on their sexual orientation, 55.2% are verbally harassed based on their gender expression** (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer & Boesen, 2013, p. 24).



Compared to their straight peers, LGBTQ youth who report experiencing higher levels of at-school bullying and victimization also report higher levels of:

- ◇ Suicidal thoughts, feelings, and actions
- ◇ Substance abuse and other risky behaviors

(Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002, p. 364-374)

In fact, these challenges have been shown to affect young people's development into healthy, successful adults. According to Birket, Espalage & Koenig (2009) these outcomes include:

- ◇ Negative academic performance, including absenteeism
- ◇ Mental health concerns, including increased depression
- ◇ Risky behaviors, including drug use
- ◇ Self-harm and suicidal thoughts

Fortunately, LGBTQ youth who feel they can talk about their problems to just one school staff member are **30% less likely to report making multiple suicide attempts than youth who do not have a safe adult to talk to** (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006, p. 573-589).

**THAT'S
WHERE
YOU
COME IN.**

BECOMING AN ALLY

The word “ally” means someone who advocates for and supports the people within a community other than their own. By supporting the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ youth, and taking steps to build a safer environment for all students, you can become a life-affirming ally.

BE VISIBLE

- Display symbols of support
 - ◇ Trevor Lifeline stickers
 - ◇ Trevor resource cards and brochures
 - ◇ Safe Space Poster activity
 - ◇ Examples of LGBTQ role models
- Promote or participate in LGBTQ visibility campaigns like: Spirit Day, National Coming Out Day, Ally Week, No-Name Calling Week, and Day of Silence.
- Use inclusive language that does not assume everyone is straight and/or cisgender.
 - ◇ For example, say “your date” instead of “boyfriend/girlfriend.”
 - ◇ Try not to assume what someone’s gender identity is or what pronouns someone uses.
 - ◇ Encourage other staff allies to show their support.

BE EDUCATED

- Learn more at [TheTrevorProject.org](https://www.thetrevorproject.org) or take a Kognito Interactive Training for a deeper understanding of LGBTQ youth, suicide prevention, and ways to help.
- Explore The Trevor Project’s resources for youth, including:
 - ◇ [TrevorSpace.org](https://www.trevorspace.org)
 - ◇ [TrevorSupportCenter.org](https://www.trevorsupportcenter.org)
 - ◇ [TrevorLifeguard.org](https://www.trevorlifeguard.org)
 - ◇ “Coming Out As You,” a guide that supports LGBT and questioning youth.
 - ◇ The Trevor Project’s Media List for LGBTQ Young People
 - ◇ More information on these resources can be found in Appendix I
- Identify local resources that are LGBTQ affirming.

NOTES

BECOMING AN ALLY

BE AN ADVOCATE

- Encourage reporting. Anyone who is the victim of harassment should tell a teacher, counselor, coach, school administrator or their parent/guardian.
- Invite organizations like The Trevor Project, GLSEN, and PFLAG to come talk to your youth.
- Emphasize respect and school safety by bringing our “Model School District Policy for Suicide Prevention” to your district, available at TheTrevorProject.org
- Advocate for school policies and infrastructure such as:
 - ◊ Inclusive school nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies.
 - ◊ Staff training for how to appropriately intervene when students are harassed.
 - ◊ LGBTQ-inclusive age-appropriate curriculum.
 - This can include history lessons on LGBTQ individuals, LGBTQ-inclusive or mindful health practices in health class, or even including LGBTQ representation in word problems in a math class.
- Address students who make homophobic, transphobic or anti-LGBTQ remarks.
- Use inclusive language that does not assume everyone is straight and/or cisgender.

Remember, becoming an ally is a continual process. This guide is just the beginning! A strong ally continues their education about the communities they support; they listen and respond to the stated needs of those communities; and they work to remove barriers to help that is often needed by those communities.

As an ally, it’s important to keep in mind that every young person is different and will have different needs. It is never our place to tell a young person the “right” or “wrong” way to identify.

To continue your learning process, check out the list of resources and partner organizations in the Appendix section of this guide!

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CREATING A SAFER SPACE

For many LGBTQ young people, the world can feel unsafe.

That's why safer spaces are so important. Regardless of what the environment outside might be, knowing that a young person has a safer space to be themselves is vital to promoting positive mental health and well-being. These spaces don't just help LGBTQ youth – they also support other minority youth or young people with marginalized identities.

We know that a key aspect of productive learning environments is when youth, regardless of their backgrounds, identities or experiences, can engage in constructive conversations. By making your classroom or youth group a safer space, you are taking an invaluable stand to support the dignity and respect of everyone, while vowing to maintain that environment for them and others.

SAFER SPACE POSTER ACTIVITY

The activity described on the next page is a great way to start building a safer space. You might choose to introduce this activity at the beginning of the year, or at the beginning of a particular learning module. No matter when you start, you can always revisit what you created later on. It's good to keep in mind that this activity is designed to make sure challenging conversations remain productive and meaningful for students of all backgrounds and experiences.

We encourage you to find whatever words work best for you – if it's not “safer space,” maybe it's “braver space” or “supportive space.” This is because for some young people, safer spaces may not feel realistic despite our best intentions. Talk to the youth in your group about what language makes the most sense for them.

**Over 55.5%
of LGBT
students
reported
feeling
unsafe in
school
because of
their sexual
orientation
and over
37.8%
reported
feeling
unsafe
because of
their gender
expression**

(Kosciw et al., 2013, p. 12).

Visit TrevorEducation.org to download more activities for young people!

SAFER SPACE POSTER ACTIVITY

Materials Needed: Safer Space Poster (Included in Kit)

Length: Approximately 10-20 minutes

Type of Group: Middle and/or high school youth

Size of Group: Any

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this brainstorm and activity, youth will be able to:

- List guidelines for themselves and their peers that create a safer space in their classroom;
- Follow the safer space guidelines created by the group;
- Revise the guidelines as necessary;
- Establish responses for when the safe space is broken.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduce the activity.

“It’s important to have an environment where everyone feels safe and supported. Today, I’d like us to make our [classroom/ youth group, etc.] one of these positive places. This is sometimes called creating a “Safer Space” or a “Braver Space” – but we can decide the name that fits our group best. The first step is to brainstorm guidelines that will help us have respectful, productive conversations, even when we are challenged or start talking about a difficult subject. What should we call our list of agreements?”

2. After agreeing on a title, begin writing guideline ideas on the board or poster. If your class comes up with more than 10 guidelines you can add to the list, or even vote on the top 10. Remind the class that the list can be revised at any time. Examples: Show respect; “One Diva, One Mic” (One person speaking at a time); confidentiality.

3. Confirm that the group agrees on the guidelines. Then, talk about consequences for breaking your new agreements.

“Let’s discuss what happens when someone breaks our guidelines. What kinds of responses do we want to have if that happens?
(Steer your discussion toward encouraging a dialogue between youth, and away from creating punishments or discipline.)”

4. After your agreements and conditions are finished, display your poster!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is it important to create a safer space for everyone?
- How could you react if you feel offended? If you offend someone?
- What should happen if someone breaks the safer space over and over again?
- What should we learn from the times when our safer space is broken?

NOTES

