



U Choose to Know

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Being an Ally to Youth Who Identify as LGBTQ

Young people consume more media than ever before. The images they see and messages they receive impact not just how they view the world, but how they view themselves. The messages young people who are LGBTQ receive are often negative, leading to undue stress which can in turn impact their health outcomes. As teachers, it is critical we support these young people the best we can, not just to improve health outcomes, but to support the positive development of all the students with whom we work.

For the first time, in 2015, the [National Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) included questions about sexual identity, gaining new data on the [1.3 million high school students in the United States who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual](#). A [summary](#) of key findings of the report shows that these young people, particularly youth of color who identify as LGBTQ, are at a higher risk of being physically forced to have sex, sexual dating violence, and physical dating violence, as well as an increased risk of negative sexual health outcomes. Previous [research](#) has shown that students who identify as lesbian or bisexual are twice as likely as their heterosexual peers to experience unintended pregnancy.

How You Can Support Youth Who Identify as LGBTQ

Despite these increased risks and unique challenges, [fewer than 5% of students who are LGBTQ had health classes that included positive representations of LGBTQ-related topics](#) like safe sex practices for same-sex couples or positive examples of same-sex relationships, and [only 12% of millennial students said their sex education classes covered same-sex relationships at all](#). As educators, it is important for us to not only make sure classroom materials are relevant for students who are LGBTQ, but to ensure that our classrooms are safe,



A group of national organizations—Advocates for Youth, Answer, GLSEN, Human Rights Campaign, Planned Parenthood, and Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States—describe the following tips for teaching LGBTQ-inclusive sex education on page 6 in [A Call To Action: LGBTQ Youth Need Inclusive Sex Education](#):

- Include information for all students about sexual orientation and gender identity that is medically accurate and age-appropriate
- Be designed with the needs of LGBTQ students in mind and be implemented with awareness that all classes are likely to have some LGBTQ students
- Include depictions of LGBTQ people and same-sex relationships in a positive light in stories and role-plays
- Use gender-neutral terms such as “they/them” and “partner” whenever possible
- Ensure that prevention messages related to condom and birth control use are not relayed in a way that suggests only heterosexual youth or cisgender male/female couples need to be concerned about unintended pregnancy and STI prevention
- Avoid making assumptions about students’ sexual orientation or gender identity

welcoming spaces, and that we as teachers are supportive allies to these young people.

So, how do we reach these youth in a positive and meaningful way? For starters, *Making Proud Choices for Youth in Out-of-Home Care*, the evidence-based program being implemented in Baltimore City high schools, has been adapted to be more inclusive of youth who are LGBTQ, but not all interventions have been adapted to be more inclusive. Below, you'll find additional tips and resources to help you be the best LGBTQ-ally you can be and to really reach youth who are LGBTQ in your program.

Tips for Being an Ally:

- Educate yourself, just like you're doing right now! Talk with social workers, counselors to learn more about how they reach LGBTQ youth in your school.
- Speak up! If you hear anti-LGBTQ bullying or harassment, address it right away. How often do we hear "That's so gay!"? Nip it in the bud right then and there. Make it clear negative comments about LGBTQ youth offend you. Challenge stereotypes young people may have about LGBTQ people.
- Be open and supportive of people who are LGBTQ.
 - When giving examples of healthy relationships in class, use same-sex couples as an example.
 - Give examples of prominent or successful people who are LGBTQ in the media.
- Make your classroom a safe zone, identifying it with a [safe zone sticker](#) to show that you are supportive of youth who are LGBTQ. Work to ensure that your school is an accepting place for students who are LGBTQ. [The Safe Zone Project](#) is a great resource! You can get a free [Safe Space Kit](#) from GLSEN.
- Sponsor or support your school's Genders and Sexualities Alliance (GSA), also known as a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Check out the [GSA Network](#) and [GLSEN](#) for more information about GSAs.



For more information, visit uchoosebaltimore.com.

Resources for Supporting Youth Who Identify as LGBTQ:

- [GLBTO Youth: A population in need of understanding and support](#)
- [Supporting and Caring for Our Latino LGBT Youth](#)
- [Supporting and Caring for Our Bisexual Youth](#)
- [Supporting Gender-Expansive Youth](#)
- [The Unique Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of LGBTQ Youth](#)
- [Helping Families Support Their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender \(LGBT\) Children](#)
- [GLSEN LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum Guide for Educators](#)

