



OCTOBER 2020 | NEWSLETTER

SPUNO DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

Supporting LGBTQIA2S+ Youth

As the end of 2020 looms on the horizon, it can hard to recognize that it has been seven months since schools started closing due to the pandemic sweeping the US. While some districts are starting to move back to having students in the building full-time, not all schools are so ready to declare an end to the pandemic. Schools provide opportunities for students to socialize with others like themselves, explore and develop their identities, and sometimes avoid stress from the homelife. LGBTQ+ students, finding schools to be a place to be their true self surrounded by supportive staff and friends, can be affected by these barriers to socialization. This is especially true for students who feel unsafe at home.

In 2018, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation surveyed over 12,000 LGBTQ+ teenagers in the US, reporting the challenges and stressors they face in their lives.¹ Of the LGBTQ+ youth that responded, 67% reported hearing negative comments from their families. Broken down, of students who are not out to their families, 78% reported hearing negative comments from parents; and of students who are out to their parents, 48% reported that their families make them feel bad for being LGBTQ+. The survey found that transgender youth are over twice as likely to be mocked by their families than cisgender LGBTQ+ youth. Only 24% of LGBTQ+ youth reported that they felt safe at home. Homes can be a place of constant fear and anxiety for a student that is still developing their own identity. Schools can be a place of sanctuary for them, but schools aren't perfect either. Only 26% of LGBTQ youth reported they feel safe in school, and only 5% said that all of their teachers and staff were supportive.

Even if things may appear to be returning to normal, this can still be a time of change and crisis in LGBTQ+ students' lives. Just because some students are able to return to school, our job as school psychologists is still to provide an environment where LGBTQ+ students can find supportive staff, opportunities to develop, and resources to build resilience all without questioning or judgment. The number one thing you can do as a school psychologist is be there for the student. The number two thing is know how to teach coping skills in a crisis. And the third thing you need to know is how to provide resources to students and families. One caring adult, even virtually, can be enough.

The Trevor Project has drafted a research report in which they discuss the serious implications COVID-19 has on the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth. The report outlines how social distancing, economic strain, and increased anxiety related to COVID-19 may impact LGBTQ+ youth. Details about the issues and how the Trevor Project and others can work together to support LGBTQ+ youth during this time can be found [here](#).



"All young people, regardless of sexual orientation or identity, deserve a safe and supportive environment in which to achieve their full potential."

- Harvey Milk

Best Practices for Educators

According to NASP (2020), supporting the social-emotional well being of LGBTQ+ students is extremely important. Recommendations and strategies for schools and educators include:

- Establish written policies that protect staff and students from harassment and discrimination based on perceived or real gender identity and sexual orientation.
- Be understanding and respectful of their identity development.
- Be supportive and validate student concerns.
- Teach psychoeducation pertinent to self-care and coping skills.
- Form groups/activities with a goal of addressing heterosexism and homophobia in the school setting.
- Provide training opportunities on issues faced by LGBTQ+
- Support a curriculum including accurate information about LGBTQ+ people.
- In times of crisis, ensure students have a safety plan.

Establishing clear and visible supports for LGBTQIA2S+ students is one of the greatest ways to improve student mental health and foster a positive school climate. Some ways of doing this include:

- Forming a Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA; for more information, click [here](#)).
- Assessing your school or district's readiness to support LGBTQIA2S+ students using the "[Transgender and Gender Diverse Readiness Assessment](#)".

Legal Protections for LGBTQIA2S+ Communities in Schools:

- Title IX (Patsy Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act, 2002)
- FERPA
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973



Resources for Educators

GLSEN provides many educator guides, resources, and other tools to help ensure our LGBTQIA2S+ students feel safe and are able to learn. Check out the [GLSEN Educator Resources Website](#) for more information!



The Trevor Project provides a free online learning experience, called The LifeGuard Workshop. The LifeGuard Workshop includes curriculum and teacher resources that can be used in middle school and high school classrooms. They also provide Ally and CARE Training for youth serving professionals. Check out the [Trevor Project Education Website](#) for more information!



Community Resources

Proud Horizons: Youth group for Queer youth in Omaha ages 13-23. They have bi-weekly meetings via Zoom on the first and 3rd Saturday of the month from 4-5pm. Reach out to them for the Zoom link. They are active on Facebook so check them out [here](#).

OutNebraska: Local non-profit organization serving LGBTQ Nebraskans through advocacy, education, and celebration. More information can be found on their [Facebook page](#).

SAMHSA: Helping Families to Support Their LGBTQ Children: This website is a resource guide that helps practitioners understand how important family acceptance is to LGBTQ+ youth. Check it out [here](#)!

PFLAG Omaha: Local non-profit organization that seeks to provide support, education, and advocacy within the Omaha community. They hold virtual meetings for allies, LGBTQ folx, and families. More information can be found [here](#).

Academy LGBTQ: Local organization that works to educate and empower the community about LGBTQ topics. They provide many different services such as diversity trainings across many different fields (i.e. education, medical, mental health). Link to their website can be found [here](#).

