

# Responding to Anti-LGBT Bias

Homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism manifest themselves in many different ways, from physical violence and verbal harassment to assumptions of heterosexuality and exclamations of "that's so gay!" Different situations call for different responses, but all situations call for a **calm, non-inflammatory response**. Bullying back is never a good idea. Your role as an ally is to diffuse situations of anti-LGBT bias, educate others about why it's harmful and unacceptable, and provide support to the person who has been targeted. Below are some ideas for dealing with anti-LGBT bias.

## Name It, Claim It, and Stop It!

This technique is great in most situations where someone is being teased, name called, or verbally bullied. It gives you an opportunity to spotlight the behavior, take a personal stand on it, and attempt to keep it from happening again.

- **Name it:** When you witness bias, call the offending party on it by saying, "That term is not cool," or "Using words like that is hurtful and offensive."
- **Claim it:** Make it *your* issue. Say, "I have people I care about who are LGBT, and I don't like to hear those words."
- **Stop it:** Make a request for the behavior to stop by saying, "Please don't use those words," or "Cut it out, please."

## Get Help

In situations where talking to the bully hasn't stopped the harassment, or where you have a feeling the trouble will continue to escalate despite your intervention, get adult help immediately. Trust your instincts. Being an ally does not mean you should compromise your safety at any time. Similarly, if you know repeated incidents of harassment are occurring despite intervention, report it to an adult member of the school community. Reporting harassment is not "tattling". It's taking a mature and proactive stance for the right of every student to feel safe.

## Give Emotional First Aid

Don't get so caught up in addressing the bias that you forget the person who was being picked on. If you've diffused a situation, always be sure to ask the person if they're all right, if there's anything you can do to help, and if they'd like to talk further or take a short walk to cool off. Remind them that the behavior was not their fault by saying something like, "That person was being a jerk. They obviously have a problem, and it's not you. You're all right just the way you are."



## Easy Does It

Some situations call for a lighter hand. If nobody is being bullied or harassed, and the comments being made seem to be the result of ignorance and not a desire to hurt, try to keep these tips in mind:

- **Use humor.** Some teasing is misguided, not vicious. Sometimes a little humor can help diffuse a situation that's becoming tense. For example, if someone says something like, "That shirt she's wearing is so gay", you might respond by saying, "I didn't realize shirts had sexual orientations." This gives you a chance to point out the senselessness of homophobic language while keeping the mood light.
- **Don't personalize.** Homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism are the products of beliefs. So don't take it personally when someone makes a misguided conversational remark or asks a question that makes you want to bristle. Instead, take a step back, and remember that there is a belief behind that comment or question. It's up to you to challenge that belief without losing your cool.
- **Ask.** Many people use anti-LGBT slurs without giving thought to how hurtful they are. Sometimes a well-placed query can stop them in their tracks and make them consider the language they use. Ask, "What do you think an LGBT person would think of that comment?" to open up a dialogue.

## Remember Everyone's Rights

There is a difference between free speech that is the expression of a value or belief, and using words as weapons. Every student should be allowed to be who they are, and express opinions that speak to that end, so long as that speech is not depriving other students of their rights to obtain an equal education. So if a student respectfully states a belief ("I believe homosexuality is a sin"), you can certainly challenge that belief by opening up a debate, but you cannot tell them to stop it. Of course, beliefs can be used as fodder for harassment, (e.g., saying, "God hates you because you're queer.") in which case you *can* request that the behavior stop. It's sometimes a subtle distinction, but an important one, as we must guard everybody's First Amendment rights, whether or not we agree with how they use them.