

## **Gay-Straight Alliance Information**

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## **References**

GSA Network, [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org)

Queerly Elementary, [www.queerlyelementary.com](http://www.queerlyelementary.com)

# Gay-Straight Alliance 101

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## **What is a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)?**

A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student-initiated and student-run school club that provides a safe, supportive environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ), queer and straight ally youth. GSAs often discuss sexual orientation and gender identity issues, and work to decrease discrimination, harassment, and intolerance.

## **Why are GSAs important?**

GSAs can greatly improve the school climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning students and their allies. GSAs that facilitate or coordinate student and teacher sensitivity trainings typically see a decrease in slurs, name-calling, and harassment following their advocacy efforts. GSAs also create safe spaces for students to meet and socialize in a harassment-free environment.

## **What is a QSA?**

A QSA is a Queer-Straight Alliance. It is another name for a GSA.

## **Who are the members of GSA?**

Members of GSA care about stopping homophobia and transphobia in schools. They may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and straight allies, school personnel, and supportive community members.

## **Why do straight youth become members of GSAs?**

Straight youth join GSAs for a variety of reasons. They may have LGBTQ family or friends, or they may simply believe in the goals of the GSA.

## **Can GSA student clubs be banned from schools?**

No. GSAs cannot be banned if other non-curricular student clubs exist at the school.

## **Where should GSAs meet?**

Work with the GSA advisor to find a good meeting location. Hold meetings in a discrete location if you are concerned about potential harassment or maintaining privacy.

## **What if there are only a few GSA members?**

Small GSAs can have a large impact. Simply knowing the GSA exists may be a great comfort to some students and staff even if they don't attend a meeting.

However, if your goal is to increase membership ask yourself if a different day/time/location would make the club more accessible. Host fun activities such as: a movie screening (with popcorn!), a poster or poetry contest that reflects your goals, a campaign around Transgender Remembrance Day or Coming Out Day, or a craft meeting to create visuals and posters for the school.

# Tips to Start a Gay-Straight Alliance

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A Student Guide

## **Follow Guidelines.**

Establish a GSA the same way you would establish any other group or club. Look in your Student Handbook for your school's rules.

## **Find a Faculty Advisor.**

Find a teacher or staff member (counselor, nurse, librarian) who would be supportive or who has already shown themselves to be an ally.

## **Inform Administration of Your Plans.**

Share your plans with administrators. It can be very helpful to have them on your side. They may also work as liaisons to teachers, parents, and community members.

## **Inform Staff about your GSA.**

Guidance counselors, social workers, teachers, and other support staff may know students who would be interested in joining the GSA.

## **Pick a Meeting Place.**

Work with your GSA advisor to find a meeting location that is accessible to many, while still offering some level of privacy.

## **Advertise.**

Advertising may include bulletin boards, flyers in the hallway and classrooms, and by word-of-mouth. If your flyers are defaced or torn down, keep putting them back up and consider putting notes underneath the posters to spread messages of peace and respect. Laminate posters for durability. Eventually, whoever is tearing them down will give up.

## **Get Food.**

Food is a way to encourage participation and welcome new members.

## **Hold Your Meeting.**

You may want to start with a discussion about why people feel having this group is important. You can also brainstorm activities your club would like to organize this year.

## **Establish Ground Rules**

Ground rules help ensure that group discussions are safe, confidential, and respectful. Many groups have a ground rule that no assumptions or labels are used about a group member's sexual orientation or gender identity. This can help make straight allies and questioning students feel comfortable about attending the club.

## **Plan For The Future**

Develop an action plan, brainstorm activities, and set goals for what you want to work towards.

## How to Be an Awesome GSA Advisor

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### How can an advisor help new GSAs?

Encourage the students to take the lead whenever possible. This is their club.

Offer positive encouragement and advice when starting a GSA club.

Provide appropriate materials and a safe space to meet.

Assist in creating the GSA Constitution and Mission Statement.

Promote the club to teachers, staff, and administrators.

Speak up for students' rights to express themselves and form clubs.

Consistently stop the use of slurs or other name-calling.

Listen.

The GSA provides an opportunity for students to be decisions makers and leaders within their school.

### How can an advisor encourage already established clubs?

Encourage students to take leadership and run the GSA.

Allow students to put together meeting agendas, but make copies as requested.

Ask Questions.  
"How can I help?"  
"What additional support do you need?"

Address GSA concerns by posing questions before offering solutions.

Work with students to get the resources they need.

Help students gain leadership skills to run the club and facilitate meetings.

Evaluate the structure and group dynamics of the club. Did youth or adults start the group? Who leads the group? Have both youth and adults always participated?

### How can the advisor support the GSAs mission and goals?

Share updates with staff at faculty meeting and leave club flyers in the faculty lounge, counseling and nurses office.

Invite faculty and administration to GSA events and meetings.

Ask other adult allies if they are interested in supporting the GSA.

Intervene whenever co-workers engage in anti-LGBTQ comments or actions.

Become familiar with state laws, and district policies that protect LGBTQ students.

# Promoting Your GSA's Goals and Mission

A Student Guide

## Develop a goal and mission.

Before the GSA can promote and reach their overall goal, it is important to discuss what your GSA would like to accomplish. Consider brainstorming answers to questions such as: What role would you like the GSA to play within the school? How can the GSA positively impact the school? How can the GSA be relevant for students from various backgrounds? What resources are available? What resources are still needed?

The *GSA Network* has a wide range of helpful materials.  
[www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org)

## Train the teachers and faculty.

Work with administrators to schedule and develop a training where the GSA could help faculty learn about non-discrimination laws and increase their understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) students and related issues. Print out pages from the OUSD LGBTQ Tool Kit to distribute and help frame your discussion.

## Educate your peers.

Team up with other equity and social justice clubs to establish anti-bias workshops and/or to create anti-bias seminars for the larger student body. Use these events as opportunities to educate your peers about LGBTQ issues and other matters of social justice.

## Get adults talking.

Ask your GSA advisor to talk to teachers or staff who may have questions about LGBTQ students, the GSA club or related issues. The GSA advisor may know of other adults who are interested in helping with the GSA's mission and goals. At a staff meeting, the GSA advisor may promote the GSAs upcoming activities or propose that all willing and supportive teachers show support for LGBTQ youth by attending upcoming events or by posting rainbow flags or ally signs in their classrooms.

Distribute pages from this binder for people who want to learn more about these topics.

## Get published.

Write an article or editorial for the school newspaper. Article topics may be: a description of the GSA's goals and why these goals were chosen, an interview with teachers and students on a specific topic, an overview of the negative impact sexual orientation and gender-based harassment has on all students or a review of the GSA's recent accomplishments.

## Visuals

Display posters designed to raise awareness and explain the importance of your club. Follow your school's guidelines on posting flyers throughout the school.

## Reach out to individuals.

Let individual students know they have somewhere to go, that people support them, and that you and the GSA are there when needed.

# Strategies to Build Diverse/Multi-Cultural GSAs

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A Student and Advisor Guide

## **Why it is importance to be a diverse GSA.**

GSAs that truly represent the diverse school community including those from different races, cultures, abilities, ages, etc. will more likely be able to successfully address the complex issues related to homophobia and transphobia. By not working to be inclusive, your GSA runs the risk of discriminating and isolating groups of people within your community.

## **Create a broader Image & Build Coalitions.**

Coalitions unite different organizations around a common issue such as ending hate crimes at your school. Work with other clubs and groups to organize campaigns and sponsor activities that help meet common goals. Common goals may be around: health, civil rights, social justice, oppression, public policy, or school policy. Consider having long-term coalitions with other diversity-focused groups at your school.

## **Ask the Hard Questions and Work Together to find the Answers.**

Are there certain groups that are over represented within your GSA while others are missing? Are there overt or covert cultural/racial biases within the GSA members and activities? Why might certain groups not feel welcomed or comfortable attending a meeting? What challenges and successes does your group face when considering how to welcome people from different backgrounds?

## **Educate the GSA and School Community.**

Have an anti-oppression/anti-racism workshop, engage in a dialogue about racism within the school and/or within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) community. Encourage different student clubs to give trainings/facilitate dialogues for your GSA on topics such as how sexual orientation and homophobia is understood and acknowledged in different cultures.

## **Write Posters and Flyers in different languages.**

If your school has a large population of students who do not speak English as a primary language, create materials different languages and have a translator at the GSA meetings.

## **Celebrate Diverse LGBTQ People.**

Create posters/bulletin boards or write articles in the school newspaper that celebrate LGBTQ celebrities, political figures, authors, civil rights leaders and people in history who represent a wide range of races, religions, cultures, abilities, ethnicities, and other identities.

## **Welcome LGBTQ People of Color.**

Invite members from other student clubs with similar goals that address respect and diversity. Ask LGBTQ people of color to visit your GSA/school as speakers or trainers.

## **Possible Activities that Encourage Multicultural Collaboration:**

Put together a photo exhibit on diverse families, organize a rally, assembly, or peer-education program, or host a diversity-themed film festival, poetry slam, or concert.

