



# Gifted LGBTQ Toolbox

## *For Parents and Caregivers*

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## Introduction

Many educational groups are concerned about how best to meet the particular needs of students with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Parents want to see curriculum and planned activities that respond to the learning needs of their children. However, not all schools and districts have leaders and teachers with backgrounds in gifted and talented education who *also* know how best to address the particular needs of gifted students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and/or questioning (gifted LGBTQ).

Because of the limited information available regarding gifted learners with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, NAGC convened a task force of administrators and gifted educators to develop tools that parents can use to inform themselves and leverage as the starting point for advocacy and implementation of services for their gifted LGBTQ children.

NAGC believes in supporting the success of all gifted students. Factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, level of English proficiency, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientation, and gender identity should not become barriers to opportunities for gifted students. The purpose of this toolbox is to supply information specific to gifted LGBTQ to participate and thrive in school.



## Statistical Information

The recommendations offered by NAGC can assist parents and guardians in advocating for their child's needs. The statistical information included below are not intended to shock or frighten family members of gifted LGBTQ youth—they are provided to deepen knowledge of the issues that can exist at school. Often, having statistics, in addition to the statistical information, knowledge of relevant legislation, and legal cases (for more information, see Administrator's Toolbox), to cite can help parents and guardians combat complacency, should they encounter it in their advocacy efforts.

According to the 2015 National School Climate Survey, conducted and compiled by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2016), LGBTQ students in American schools continue to face aggression and negative environments on a regular basis.

- Almost all of LGBTQ students (98.1%) heard “gay” used in a negative way (e.g., “that’s so gay”) at school; 67.4% heard these remarks frequently or often, and 93.4% reported that they felt distressed because of this language.
- 95.8% of LGBTQ students heard other types of homophobic remarks (e.g., “dyke” or “faggot”); 58.8% heard this type of language frequently or often.
- 95.7% of LGBTQ students heard negative remarks about gender expression (not acting “masculine enough” or “feminine enough”); 62.9% heard these remarks frequently or often.
- 85.7% of LGBTQ students heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people, like “tranny” or “he/she”; 40.5% heard these remarks frequently or often.

- 56.2% of students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff, and 63.5% of students reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or other school staff.

These statistics inform educators and parents about the experiences of LGBTQ students in school. When the element of giftedness is compounded with gender/sexual minority status, the students are, in the view of classmates, teachers, and administrators, twice *Other*. This dual status makes these youth even more vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse at school than either giftedness or gender/sexual minority status would on its own (Manzella, 2012). And the youth themselves may not only feel different from other youth because of their gifts, but may also feel isolated due to their sexual orientation and/or gender expression (Cross, 2013; NAGC, 2015; Sedillo, 2013; Treat, 2008, 2016; Whittenburg & Treat, 2009).

## Empowering Parents/Guardians

Some states have parent-centered associations affiliated with NAGC, and some districts have local gifted parent groups, but few offer information for parents of gifted LGBTQ students. Parents may experience feelings of isolation similar to that of their children and may wonder what their rights are, what they can do to support their children, and what parents and advocates have done in the past that will provide a basis for action.

Parents should be aware that NAGC recommends that educators demonstrate compassionate understanding of these students and support them in maximizing their potential. (Keener, 2013; NAGC, 2015; Sedillo, 2013; Treat, 2008, 2016). Interventions are necessary to support unique psychosocial needs of gifted LGBTQ students as well as the academic needs (Friedrichs, 2012; Peterson & Rischar, 2000; Treat, 2016; Whittenburg & Treat, 2009). Administrators, teachers, and counselors require specific, ongoing professional development to understand the needs of Gifted LGBTQ students (NAGC, 2015; Sedillo, 2013; Whittenburg & Treat, 2009).

Having this toolbox available will afford parents the opportunity to become familiar with resources similar to those used by educators and administrators, helping to level the playing field in parental advocacy efforts.

### Networking

One of the most important and rewarding activities in which parents and other family members of gifted LGBTQ youth can engage is networking in the community.



Connecting with others who are facing the same challenges can provide much-needed support, offer suggestions, and advice (Friedrichs, Manzella, & Seney, 2017). Parents and guardians may inquire at school about opportunities for connecting with other families of gifted LGBTQ students, perhaps through a gay-straight alliance, if one is available.

### Affirming the Whole Child

Parents of gifted youth often find themselves spending a lot of time advocating at school—or opting to pursue a homeschooling alternative—to ensure that their children get the appropriate levels of academic challenge and pace necessary to keep them engaged, in order to develop lifelong learners (Davidson & Davidson, 2004). When a student is also a member of a gender or a sexual minority, the scope of that effort expands. In many cases (as indicated by the GLSEN statistics referenced earlier), assuring a student’s safety in the school setting requires its own advocacy work.

Not every lesson in every subject will need (or be able) to encompass all facets of the student’s identity. Parents should involve teachers and mentors who will acknowledge and affirm the whole child. In doing so, they can support—not only the child’s intellectual abilities, but also the teen’s emerging adult identity. If parents/guardians do not provide this kind of support, gifted LGBTQ youth may struggle with self-esteem issues and question whether their parents acceptance them unconditionally (Brown, 1997; Friedrichs, Manzella, & Seney, 2017).

## Role Models

Gifted LGBTQ students benefit from seeing themselves in positive role models, as represented in the curriculum (Whittenburg & Treat, 2009). The sexual orientation or gender identity of eminent leaders in various fields, such as Alexander the Great, Susan B. Anthony, James Baldwin, Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer, George Washington Carver, Leonardo daVinci, James I of England, Sir John Gielgud, Barbara Jordan, Frida Kahlo, Audre Lorde, Michelangelo, Bayard Rustin, Bessie Smith, Socrates, Gertrude Stein, Alan Turing, Walt Whitman, Oscar Wilde, and Tennessee Williams, amongst others, are omitted, especially in elementary and middle school curricula. What is assumed is heterosexuality. The omission of their orientation or gender identity implies that these groups have less value, importance, and significance in our society and leaves gifted LGBTQ students without positive role models except perhaps in the media. Even if the sexual orientation or gender identity of famous individuals are absent in the curriculum, revealing their orientation to gifted LGBTQ children would help him/her understand that others like them have made great achievements. Learning about renowned LGBTQ individuals can bolster their self esteem and increase confidence (NAGC, 2015). There are several books and websites available that can help parents and guardians identify notable LGBTQ persons.

Below are some things to consider when pursuing ways to support a gifted LGBTQ:

- Respect a child's privacy. Just because a parent knows their child is LGBTQ, does not mean this is a license to tell others (Keener, 2013). Check with the child

in private first before revealing information that could result in harassment or lack of acceptance.

- Be patient about grades. Many supportive families report a drop in grades both shortly before and after their children begin the “coming out” process. Patience and understanding, combined with a loving message of acceptance may help him or her academic performance bounce back more quickly (Keener, 2013).
- A passion for social justice may result in wanting to promote LGBTQ causes, such as participating in a local Gay Pride community event (staffing a booth/table for an LGBTQ organization) or volunteering at a shelter for homeless LGBTQ youth. Please check with the child to see if he or she is ready for such public support (Keener, 2013).

Parents are encouraged to explore the links in the resource section, to find more information for use in advocating and to deepen their own understanding of the challenges their child may face.



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## Resources

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## Web Links

- **[Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network \(GLSEN\)](#)**: GLSEN's goal is to ensure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.
- **[GSA Network](#)**: Connects school-based Gay-Straight Alliances to each other and community resources through peer support, leadership development, and training.
- **[G2 Youth Advocate](#)**: Created by Teresa Manzella, offers multiple resource ideas and links to other sites for Gifted LGBTQ.
- **[Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays \(PFLAG\)](#)**: PFLAG is the extended family of the LGBTQ community, made up of LGBTQ individuals, family members and allies.
- **[Safe Schools Coalition](#)**: Offers resources in support of GLBTQ youth for educators, parents/guardians, and youth, including resources for youth and by topics, type, people who use them, and location.
- **[Transforming Family](#)**: Offers multiple resources for all transgender youth and their families. Some states have local groups.