

# Why Is There a Gay Pride flag on My 9-Year-Old's Backpack?

By Paul James "P. J." Sedillo, Ph.D.

Gifted children are often empathetic, morally sensitive, and feel a responsibility toward others. As they become aware of the injustices in their surrounding communities, they may embark on a quest for justice for individuals who are oppressed, marginalized, or misunderstood.<sup>1</sup> With Gay Pride Month in June bringing increased visibility and awareness to the issues affecting the GLBTQQ+ (gay, lesbian,

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bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and others) community, the justice-focused gifted child or adolescent may gravitate to events and groups that support gay rights.

So, how can parents empower and educate the gifted child who now has a Pride flag on their backpack or who plans to attend the Annual Gay Pride Festival? How can you support your child when she signs up for a lesbian poetry reading at a local bookstore, or when he helps design a float for a local Alternative Sexual Expressions group for the Gay Pride Parade?

**1 Start by educating yourself.** It's important that parents educate themselves on the issue their child is passionate about. With respect to GLBTQQ+, it's important to have a foundational understanding of what GLBTQQ+ children face in schools, whether or not your child identifies as GLBTQQ+. In a groundbreaking survey of more than 10,000 LGBT-identified youth ages 13–17, the Human Rights Campaign found high incident rates of both verbal and physical harassment in schools.<sup>2</sup> For GLBTQQ+ students, faculty, and staff, the school environment can pose numerous threats and obstacles: Hateful language, physical and emotional harassment, and the threat of physical violence are a reality.

**2 Talk to your child about GLBTQQ+ culture and history.** American history as it pertains to the GLBTQQ+ community is marked by many inequities and discriminating obstacles; however, there are numerous milestones of moral courage and victories that are not usually shared in mainstream history. School libraries rarely have GLBTQQ+ book titles for students to read and check out—an upsetting fact for many children. *(See sidebar for suggestions.)*

You may also research the history that defined the Gay Rights Movement. Here are a few historical events for you and your child to explore further:

- **The Stonewall Riots.** The catalyst behind the many Pride celebrations held throughout the world, the Stonewall Riots have become the defining event that marked the start of the Gay Rights Movement in the U.S. and around the world.
- **Harvey Milk.** The first openly gay man to win a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, Milk was an advocate for many marginalized groups of people on the fringes of society, including gay people and senior citizens.
- **The Briggs Initiative of 1978.** Requiring the termination of any teacher or school employee who publicly supported gay rights, this proposed California legislation faced a huge backlash and was defeated.
- **Legalization of same-sex marriage.** On February 8, 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage.

**3 Acknowledge that your gifted child may challenge authority and question rules.** Remind your child of the many famous individuals—such as Mahatma Gandhi, Harvey Milk, and Martin Luther King—who were rule breakers and change agents. Encourage letter-writing to challenge unfair laws, and help your child use her intelligence, critical thinking, and creative skills to identify alternative solutions to the unjust practices she sees in the world around her.

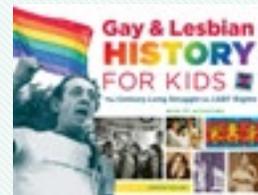
**4 Locate role models and mentors.** If possible, locate a GLBTQQ+ role model and go-to person who can inspire, provide knowledge, motivate your child, and provide the wider perspective that you may lack. A good mentor can mold and provide resources and connections for new ideas, which can in turn further sharpen your gifted child's intellectual and emotional skills.

## Just for Kids

### ***Gay and Lesbian History for Kids: The Century-Long Struggle for LGBT Rights***

by Jerome Pohlen

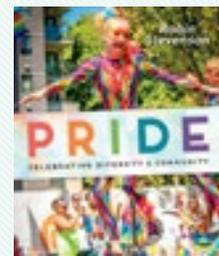
This book looks at the positive gains and struggles with the GLBT movement with the intent to provide information for the perspective of our adolescents.



### ***Pride: Celebrating Diversity and Community***

by Robin Stevenson

This book goes into detail about Pride events not being just a party but an event for social justice that began with a riot. The book showcases about fighting for freedom and equality by protesting and celebrating around the world with an event known as Pride.



### ***This Day in June***

by Gayle E. Pitman

This book welcomes readers to experience a Pride celebration and share in a day when we are all united. The book also includes facts about GLBT history and culture.





**5** **Direct her passions.** Allow your child to participate in community service or volunteer activities with GLBTQQ+ organizations. You can contact your local GLBTQQ+ Pride organization and volunteer through [interpride.org](http://interpride.org); attend Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) events to support confidential peer support, education, and advocacy in communities in nearly all states; and/or identify if there is a Gay-Straight Alliance at your child's school.

**6** **Become an ally.** As an ally, you honor the efforts of all activists. Celebrate the historic events of the past by honoring GLBTQQ+ Pride Month. Attend a local Pride parade or find out what other GLBTQQ+ events are occurring in your city during Pride Month and throughout the year. Demonstrate pride, love, and acceptance.

**7** **Start or support a Safe Zone Program at your child's school.** Safe Zone Programs are common in schools and are usually designated by a placard outside a teacher's classroom, the principal's office, the school cafeteria, or other school entryway. A Safe Zone is a place for a person who needs help, advice, or just a safe space to talk. For more information, contact [thesafezoneproject.com](http://thesafezoneproject.com).

**8** **Start or support an anti-bullying policy at your child's school.** A strong policy protects all students, but many schools need explicit guidance on safeguarding GLBTQQ+ students. If starting an anti-bullying policy at your child's school, be sure to include language specifically prohibiting harassment based on nonconformity to gender norms, gender identity, and gender expression, as well as give examples of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Once in place, evaluate the effectiveness of your school's anti-bullying program annually using student and staff surveys.

Staff and faculty members specifically trained to prevent and respond to bullying incidents play a pivotal role in developing and maintaining your school's anti-bullying program and are essential if a bullying incident occurs. It's important, then, to also designate an anti-bullying coordinator and an anti-bullying task force. Communicate effectively and often with students, parents or guardians, and the community about issues such as bullying. Post the name and contact information for your school's anti-bullying coordinator in the office, on the school website, and in the student handbook. Ensure that reactions to reports of harassment do not further stigmatize students who were targeted for their real or perceived GLBTQQ+ identities.

By becoming educated and involved, we can unlearn or dispel negative perceptions and attitudes of others by replacing malice

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and hostility with positivity and love.

The catalyst for your child's interest in GLBTQQ+ issues could be the seemingly unfair reprimand a classmate receives for an infraction he did not commit, a rebuff from an unrequited love because of an imperfect body type or same sex attraction, questions about his own emerging sexual identity, or the developing awareness of poverty, racism, gender discrimination, homophobia, and other forms of social injustice. We must remember that while many gifted children have a desire and intense passion to change unjust individuals and unfair situations, they are still children.

As a parent, you can help your gifted child become more educated and feel more comfortable to manage situations that may arise. Honor your child's questions, concerns, and anxieties—not only about GLTBQQ+ issues, but all injustices in our lives—with understanding and respect. ♡

## Resources

### Print

Friedrichs, T. P., Manzella, T. R., & Seney, R. (2017). *NAGC Select: Needs and approaches for educators and parents of gifted gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students*. Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children.

### Web

#### Interpride

[interpride.org](http://interpride.org)

#### PFLAG

[pflag.org](http://pflag.org)

#### Safe Zone Project

[safezoneproject.com](http://safezoneproject.com)



## Staggering Statistics

Educating yourself about the issues GLBTQQ+ children face is a vital step, and it can spark thoughtful, action-oriented conversations with your gifted child.

- GLBTQQ+ students are more than twice as likely to have skipped school in the past month because of safety concerns.
- Ninety-seven percent of LGB students hear derogatory phrases used in school. Half of the teachers fail to respond to homophobic language when they hear it.
- Ninety percent of 15–24-year-olds have been called names because of their sexuality.
- The majority of respondents who are out or perceived as transgender while in school (K–12) experience some form of mistreatment, including verbal or physical harassment (54%) or sexual assault (24%).

### Sources

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National Center for Transgender Equality. (2015). *U.S. transgender survey*. Retrieved from [www.ustranssurvey.org](http://www.ustranssurvey.org)

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### Author's Note

Paul James (P. J.) Sedillo, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at New Mexico Highlands University, where he teaches courses in special education and gifted. His work has been published in *Gifted Child Today*, and his recent book, *Solidarity through Pride*, is a historical account of the GLBTQ Albuquerque Pride movement from 1976 to 2016. He is past president of the New Mexico Association for the Gifted, chair of NAGC's GLBTQ Network, and local arrangements co-chair of the 2019 NAGC 66th Annual Conference to be held in Albuquerque, NM.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Silverman, L. K. (1994). The moral sensitivity of gifted children and the evolution of society. *Roeper Review*, 17, 110–116.

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Campaign. (2017). *Growing up LGBT in America*. Retrieved from [www.hrc.org/youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/youth-report)