

# Creating & Supporting A Gay/Straight Alliance

Third Edition

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pride education  
*Network*



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# An Introduction to Gay / Straight Alliances

There are many types of support groups for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. These are often called **GAY / STRAIGHT ALLIANCES** (also referred to as GSAs). The term “gay” in the title is meant to be inclusive of all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) students; some prefer the terms **LGBT or Queer**. When the term “Queer” is used, it is understood to be a positive and inclusive term, rather than a derogatory word. Most groups try to include transgender students; many others don’t, because of the relative invisibility of transgender individuals. “Questioning” youth are very welcome in most of these groups too.



Many groups meet in school settings, while others meet in outside community locations. Some are referred to as Diversity Clubs or Human Rights Clubs. GSA groups happily include heterosexuals and anyone who does not wish to self-identify. All students are invited to attend, but with absolutely no expectation that they will reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity.

GSAs provide all students with a safe place to meet, make friends, and talk about issues and feelings. GSAs can help to improve the school climate for everyone, by promoting discussion about homophobia and transphobia, and their effects on everyone, and by encouraging greater understanding among students and staff alike. Gay / Straight Alliances should be student-led, in the main, with one or two staff members to act as facilitators/advisors. Occasionally, guests are invited, such as LGBT parents, or PFLAG (Parents, Families, Friends of Lesbians & Gays).

Groups tend to change their agenda for each week, depending on the participants’ needs. Most try to strike a balance among consciousness-raising, targeting homophobia at school, and offering personal support. Forming and sustaining such school clubs involves considerable work and diplomacy, by both students and staff. All participants must be mindful of the purposes for creating GSAs. They must not become dating clubs, cliquish chat groups, or places for speculation about the personal lives of other persons.

GSAs are in existence in over 2000 schools in the USA, and some have been operating for over 12 years. Every Massachusetts high school has one! The experience there has been overwhelmingly positive in terms of educating students, staff and families alike about diversity issues, encouraging a greater degree of mutual understanding, and significantly reducing antigay violence and harassment.

A student in Maple Ridge formed the first GSA in British Columbia, in 1997. Since then, others have been formed in about 35 high schools (as of June 2004). These are located in various parts of the Interior and Vancouver Island, as well as in the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley. There will probably be many more formed in the near future.



In March 2000, the AGM of the BC Teachers’ Federation debated and passed a motion to support teachers and teacher locals who work toward the formation of GSAs. This action is in keeping with the BCTF’s longstanding concern for the needs of diverse students, and its tradition of activism and action in various areas of Social Justice. Part of this support includes the provision of workshops to teachers on starting GSAs [see page 22 for contact info].

# Why Have Gay / Straight Alliances in Our Schools?



Schools should prepare students to be willing to, and capable of, developing into citizens who respect Canada's anti-discrimination laws. These laws make it illegal to discriminate against anyone based on sexual orientation [and many other criteria as well]. Students in a school that has "straight" and gay [LGBT] students working side-by-side toward common goals will more likely grow into adults who can support the spirit of these laws.

Schools should work toward reflecting the diverse nature of our society so that all students feel included. Students are better able to function in a system if they feel that it mirrors their own world. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students who feel valued are naturally going to perform better academically, rather than dropping out or falling into apathy.

## **Schools should promote GSA clubs as part of developing good citizenship.**

Student clubs are a valuable part of teenagers' high school experiences. By facilitating student-run clubs that meet on school premises, administrators give students the opportunity to learn about running groups, planning social, spiritual, political or academic activities, and working with others. Abolishing all student clubs that are not curriculum-related, or imposing highly restrictive club policies (as some school boards have done) just because of a new club's controversial political or religious perspective is a disservice to all students.



## **GSAs benefit the students who form them, and future student members.**

Even by age 13 or 14, teens are becoming aware of their own sexuality. They are also aware of sexual orientation issues, in both the social and political spheres. Sexual orientation is made an issue regularly, via school activities (dances and other social events), cultural influences (films, tv, magazines), and by the many informal interactions that presume heterosexuality in everyone. GSAs do not introduce the concept of sexual orientation to students; rather, they provide helpful forums to discuss their already developing personal, social and political concerns.

School officials shouldn't ban these forums for discussion. Doing so just makes a somewhat difficult adolescent experience more fearful and confusing. GSAs (and groups with other names formed to address sexual orientation issues) should be treated like any other student-run clubs. Meeting at school during non-instructional time provides a safe, accessible venue for students with common concerns to gather and talk.



## **GSAs also benefit the school community as a whole.**

Anti-gay harassment and violence are very common in schools, and among teenagers. Perhaps the most common way for youth to disparage others today is to by the use of the terms "faggot" or "dyke". Teenage boys commit a disproportionate amount of physical violence against LGBT persons of all ages.

GSAs help combat an atmosphere of verbal/physical harassment, just by meeting and bringing up examples of bigotry. Even other students (not in the GSA) will be drawn into the school-wide discussion of anti-gay incidents and attitudes. This school-wide discourse is very productive. Even if many of the opinions expressed are negative, the necessary process has begun.

**Schools should address anti-gay incidents by disciplining the perpetrators, not by banning meetings of GSAs.**



When acts of anti-gay harassment, verbal or physical, occur in school, administrators should promptly respond by disciplining those who are creating the problem and supporting the students who have been harassed. Providing a safe, welcoming school environment for all students is a core responsibility of school officials.

Banning GSAs or similar groups because of anti-gay incidents (or their potential) is not a just course of action. Such a “blame-the-victim” argument is often made by officials not wanting to admit to, or take appropriate action against, the ugly bigotry of anti-gay harassment. GSAs and other such student clubs are not the problem; they are part of the solution to breaking down homophobic attitudes. If school administrators or school boards treat the student clubs as the problem, they are teaching all students that “might makes right” and that the school policies about respect and safety are not meant to be taken seriously.

**Gay / lesbian teens suffer from homophobic prejudice--not because of who they are.**

Adolescence is often stressful, as teens develop rapidly toward adulthood. That passage can be especially difficult for youth beginning to realize their lesbian, gay or bisexual orientation, because of the homophobic comments they’ve often heard. If these teens are isolated from supportive peers and adults, the outcome frequently is low self-esteem. Many will progress to self-destructive behaviours such as substance abuse and suicide attempts. Isolated queer youth often have a very difficult time focusing on their education; dropping out is common.



Such problems develop not because homosexuality and bisexuality are pathological; in fact, they are merely normal variations in human sexuality. But isolated queer youth often internalize the homophobic sentiments which are commonly heard in schools and other social settings, and then, based on this limited information, judge themselves harshly as bad, criminal or unworthy. GSAs help to reduce feelings of isolation, and to increase self-esteem in all members. Student-run discussions, social events, and political organizing are safe, healthy ways to work through a growing time that can otherwise be very confusing, depressing, or alienating.

**Schools do not create heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual identities in students.**

There is no empirical support for the notion (advanced by some who oppose the open and truthful discussion of homo/bisexuality) that some adolescents are “waverers”, and can be influenced during their teen years to adopt one sexual orientation rather than another. It’s true that some adolescents (and adults) only gradually come to realize their sexual orientation and/or gender identity; some even go through an extended period of uncertainty. But this slow process of self-awareness certainly doesn’t mean that anyone else has the right to attempt to shape or manipulate an individual’s sexual identity. Sexual orientation is still the subject of much study, but we do know that it is a very deep-seated part of one’s personality, probably determined by a complex interaction of genetic, biological, psychological and environmental factors.

# Steps for Students or Educators Starting a Gay / Straight Alliance

## 1. **Find supportive staff members to work with you.**

Spread the word at school that a GSA is starting up. If you are a teacher, bring it up at staff meetings or on the notice board, or approach colleagues whom you think may be supportive. If you're a student, approach the staff members whom you think would be receptive, and who would be effective facilitators. Explain to them what issues the group might address and why this group would make an important contribution to the school. Don't be discouraged if you can't initially find a supportive colleague to help you. Keep looking! If possible, it's recommended that the adult sponsors include both "gay" and straight staff.



## 2. **Follow established procedures in your school or district.**

Establish a GSA in the same way you would any other group or club in your school. Follow the set guidelines or policies within your school or district. You may need an administrator's permission.

## 3. **Enlist the support of the school administration.**

It's important to inform school administrators about plans to establish a GSA. Having them on side can be very useful; they can arrange special events or speakers for school assemblies, staff professional days or other events. They can also work as liaisons to the outside community and district officials. It is common for administrators to be initially reticent or anxious about a GSA forming, but it's usually possible to have them agree on the need for such a group, on the basis of human rights and social justice. Describe (in print and verbally) a GSA's purposes, and how such a group would function. Once the administrators know the true nature of a GSA, they can be very effective at countering negative comments.

## 4. **Inform counsellors and other school staff about your group.**

School staff may know students who would be interested in attending meetings, and they can encourage some students to attend (students who are questioning their own sexuality, know someone who is LGBT, or are simply supportive heterosexual allies). It can be useful to invite support staff, counsellors or outside professionals to help with discussions of difficult issues (e.g. "talking to parents about homosexuality", "coming out to friends and family" or "supporting a friend or relative who is LGBT"). Students may wish to discuss some issues in greater detail with a supportive, trained adult, away from the group of students.

## 5. **Pick a meeting place.**

If possible, find a location in the school that is relatively private, to give members a sense of security and comfort. At first, students may feel a little nervous about attending a GSA meeting; they may worry that others will harass them or make assumptions about their sexual orientation. However, making it clear that "straight" students are also welcome at meetings can help to reduce the assumptions made by others.

## 6. **Advertise.**

Advertising the group is a major step that can be taken to fight discrimination in school. Keep the tone positive. Include the meeting time and location, the group's purposes, and the fact that all students are welcome to attend, and need not share any personal details. For some students, seeing the words "gay", "lesbian", "bisexual" or "transgender" on a positively-worded poster may be their first experience of not feeling totally alone. Others may be questioning their own sexual orientation, or wanting more information because a close friend or relative is LGBT. Even if they never attend a meeting, these students will know and appreciate that some people at their school are addressing these issues. Many "straight" students who are committed to working for social justice issues might be motivated to participate in GSAs too, if they see the posters.



The posters will stimulate school-wide discussion and may lead staff and students to bring up their own feelings, opinions or questions around issues of sexual orientation or gender identity. Not all these comments will be gay-positive, but breaking the silence is an important first step in addressing the common stereotypes and myths about LGBTs. If posters are torn down or defaced, keep putting them up. Have some posters displayed behind glass, so that they cannot be defaced.



## 7. **Get snacks.**

Providing food at the meeting is a great idea. Food is a good icebreaker, and gives nervous attendees something to do, as well as an excuse to attend. Later, encourage students to take it in turn to bring some snacks to share with others (especially if you can get a little school money for this!).

## 8. **Schedule your first meeting.**

Now that there are facilitator(s), food, a meeting spot, and publicity, it's time to hold your first GSA meetings. Some groups begin by discussing the importance of having such a group, and continue with group-building exercises. Try to schedule meeting times that are convenient for the majority of youth. Allow time for students (and staff) to get to know each other before tackling difficult topics. Talk about the purposes of the club, and some possible topics or desired speakers. Discuss how meeting agendas will be set, who will facilitate them, the rotation of responsibilities, and the need to be patient sometimes.

## 9. **Establish guidelines with students; repeat and explain in full at every meeting.**

**Here are some examples to get you started:**

- ◆ "Members are in no way obligated to declare or define their sexual orientation or gender identity, nor are assumptions to be made about the sexual orientation/gender identity of any other group members."
- ◆ "Everyone must respect each other; remember, we're all learning about the issues together."
- ◆ "Meetings and discussions are confidential. Student identities, personal issues, and the comments made at meetings should not be discussed outside the group, unless participants specifically agree."
- ◆ "Adults participate on an equal basis with students; they may facilitate discussion or participation, but they are not there to lead or teach."
- ◆ "It's OK to say something that may sound homophobic. It's better to get it out in the open, and we will discuss why it is problematic."
- ◆ "There is to be no gossiping about anyone, either in the group or elsewhere."

# Activity Ideas for Successful Gay / Straight Alliances

## 1) Gender Stereotypes - Source: Various

Trace a male and a female body on butcher paper, then have a free-for-all where everyone writes/expresses as many gender stereotypes as they can think of, and place those stereotypes on the bodies where they would apply (i.e. "boys are smart at math" would be placed on the head of the male body). From here, you can talk about how gender stereotypes and traits relate to perceptions about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people - as well as how these stereotypes limit our possibilities, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. These exercises can also be done using stereotypes of gay men and lesbians - helping us to recognize that everyone has different traits that don't define our sexual orientation or gender.



## 2) Heterosexism in the Media - Source: Various



Bring in popular, mainstream magazines or other forms of media, and cut out images you perceive to be heterosexist. Explain what you think heterosexism is and how it affects people. This can be an eye-opening experience for those who have never looked at how media plays a part in the formation of our identity. With all the images you collect, your GSA can make a collage or exhibit that examines heterosexism. To go a step further, bring in LGBT publications, and make posters of images that are not heterosexist. Show lots of different sexual orientations, genders and gender identities exhibiting the

spectrum of diversity that is society. You can compare the posters you make, and even display them somewhere in your school, such as in the library or a display case. You might include some statements about what heterosexism is and how it affects all of us, especially LGBT youth.

## 3) Three Chair Listening Exercise - Source: Various

Three Chairs are set up, the outer two turned toward the inner one. The chair on the left holds the position of the "specialist"; the middle chair, the "listener"; and the right chair the "real story". The specialist person and the real story person talk to the listener simultaneously, while the listener tries to listen and respond to both, as best they can. The two talkers are competing for the listener's attention, and the goal is for the listener to see which talker holds their attention more.

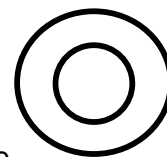


The Specialist talks as if they're a doctor or religious leader or professional in some field related to LGBT youth and issues in the schools. He or she may cite statistics, give medical information, etc. The Real Story person is the one who speaks as if they're someone you met on the street. He or she can tell a true story from their life or make up a story related to the experiences of LGBT youth in the schools. The story should be "personal". When playing with more than three people, let each trio act for two minutes and then call time. The Real Story person then leaves the trio, and the other two players move into the seats to their left (the Listener to the Real Story Chair and the Specialist to the Listener chair). The next player in line takes the chair of the Specialist.

This is a good exercise for gagging your own personal feelings. After the game has been played for a while, your group can discuss which "chair" they found themselves listening and responding to more attentively. You can then discuss how different techniques are used to portray LGBT persons in different lights. You can discuss how your own listening style might make you more apt to internalize information presented according to one approach or the other.

4) **Concentric Circles, Inner/Outer Circles** - Source: Jason Fleetwood-Boldt.

This exercise works great to open dialogue. Recommended for 6-8 people, works best with 20 or more (must be an even number). Lets people talk in pairs. Have people count off by twos (1, 2, 1, 2...). Tell the ones to make an inner circle and the twos to make an outer circle. The inner circle should face outward and the outer circle should face inward, each person having a partner in the opposite circle. If it is a group that doesn't know one another, you can have them introduce themselves to their partners before they begin answering the question asked.



The facilitator instructs that she will ask a question and the outer circle is to talk for one minute as the inner circle listens. After the minute is up, the inner circle answers the same question. Then the outer circle moves clockwise two people over, so everyone has a new partner. A new question is asked of the outer, then inner, circles. When finished, the participants should talk in large group about what kinds of things came up.

Sample Questions to ask are:

- *Growing up, what were all of the names (positive, negative, neutral) that you heard related to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals?*
- *Growing up, what were some of the stereotypes you heard about lesbians, gays, bisexuals?*
- *What were some of the things you heard about these groups growing up that you have come to find out are not true?*

5) **Dictionary** - Source: Linda Boldt.

A fun word game for groups of four or more. Requires a good large dictionary, pens, paper.

Each round: A player is chosen to be the dictionary. (At the next round, someone else is the dictionary) That person chooses an unfamiliar word in the dictionary and says it out loud. If anyone in the room knows what the word is, they must say so (this is on an honour code). Everyone writes down a fake definition-- but one that sounds like it could be the real definition (remember-- the players don't really know what the word means) except for the person who selected the word-- who writes down the real definition. On each card the players should write their definition along with their name. The dictionary person collects all the papers and reads them aloud, but doesn't read whose definition it is. Once all the definitions have been read twice, they are read a third time and everyone votes for the one they think is the real definition. If you vote for the correct definition, you get a point. If someone else votes for your definition, you get a point. (If you vote for the wrong one, there is no penalty.) *Optional: The dictionary person gets a point for each person who votes for the correct definition. Also optional: You get two points if someone votes for you definition (instead of just one).*



6) **Name That Person** - Source: Ann-Bevan Hollis; Adapted by Chris Tuttle.



Entertainment game with teams; for fun; too long to be an ice-breaker.

Materials: Pencils/pens (1 per person), paper, hat or box for holding names.

SETUP: Teams of 4-8 people work best (teams of 4-5 are preferable). Maximum of four teams total. Each person playing is instructed to write at least five names and rip off each one. (That is, each person should put five scraps of paper into the hat, each scrap with one name on it.) The names can be anyone related to LGBT issues (pro or con) - including politicians, sports players, actors/actresses, community leaders, performers, people from history. Rules for choosing names: (1) More obscure names are better. Easy to identify names are not at much fun. IMPORTANT: Tell no one what names you put in, if you do, those names can't be used.

(continued...)

(2) The name must be common. While it is not necessary for everybody playing to know who you are talking about, at least a few must. Co-workers, friends, teachers, family, etc. are not allowed.

**RULES OF PLAY:** Player to start grabs a name out of the hat and proceeds to describe that person or name to her team-mates in the first person. For example, if her clue were Bill Clinton, she could say, "As president of the United States I signed into law the anti-gay Defence of Marriage Act". The teammates call out any name they think it may be. She may not say any part of the name unless her teammates have already called out that part. For example, if the clue was Bill Bradley, you can't say: "Rhymes with 'key'" because sound "ey" is written on the paper. You may, however, describe what it rhymes with by saying "Rhymes with that metal thing you stick in a lock to open a door...".



When someone in the group guesses correctly, she chooses another name. She has exactly one minute to get her team to guess as many names as possible. For each name they guess, the team gets one point. If a team gets stuck on a name and the time expires in the middle of a name, that name must be passed on to the next team. You may not reject a name for any reason whatsoever. Only if one name goes through all the teams without being guessed can it be discarded, and the team who first started with it gets one point for it. Team members who do the reading rotate each time around. Play continues until hat is emptied.

OPTIONAL SCORING RULE: Team to empty hat gets double points for that round. VARIATION: Play without teams altogether.

#### 7) **Cultural/Identity Linking** - Source: BiGLTYNY Leadership

Cultural Experiment. Everyone is instructed to close their eyes and look into the "inner mirror of them". Examine what culture means to you and what you think of as your own cultural identity. Look for the cultural identities you claim and, when you are ready, open your eyes and look around the room. Without talking, find someone who you think shares a cultural identity with you. Approach that person and link hand. If you do not think that person shares a common cultural identity, you may refuse to link hands. If someone offers his or her hand to you, try to find a cultural commonality. Link hands only if you think you have found one. Remember, no talking. Once everyone is linked, stand the group in one large circle, and go around and answer the questions "Why did you offer your hand to someone you linked to, and why did you accept/refuse someone's hand?" Other questions:  
- How did it feel to assume someone's cultural identity? - Were you always correct?  
- Was it easy to find a cultural connecting? - How did it feel to not make a link?

*Note 1: The word culture is used to keep this activity open-ended. People often interpret "culture" as race, ethnicity, religion, colour, queerness, gender, gender identity, clothing, multiracial or multi-ethnic identity, ethnicity, etc.*

*Note 2: You can expand on this game if everyone ends in a large pretzel, or knot (see game #8 below).*



#### 8) **Pretzel, Knots** - Source: Various.

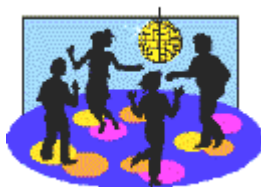
Group building co-operation game. Everyone stands in a circle. Everyone puts his right hand forward into the middle and grabs the right hand of someone. Then, take your left hand and grab the left hand of someone else in the circle. Thus, with your right hand you are attached to one person's right hand, and your left hand is attached to someone else's left hand. You are all now in a tangled ring of bodies. Without letting go, untangle yourselves. You may switch positions of your hands, but do not break the ring. Sometimes the group is tangled in one big loop; sometimes it is tangled in several smaller ones.

**Fun GSA Events:** Source: [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org) See this site for complete details

a) **Movie Night:** Attend a screening of an LGBT themed film, or rent movies and get together to watch them and hang out.



b) **Host a BBQ or Picnic:** Involve the other GSAs in your area for a potluck picnic or barbecue. You can have the event in a public park or someone's back yard. If it's fun, consider having one once a quarter or semester, or at the end of the school year.



c) **Plan a Pride Dance:** Dances can be a great way to bring GSA members together and reach out to the school community, and Pride Proms are the highlight of the year's social activities for many GSAs. Large dances require a lot of planning so it's a good idea to have several GSAs sponsor and coordinate the event.

d) **Plan Outdoor Activities:** Meet at a park to play frisbee, softball, flag football or whatever you want. These activities can be combined with a BBQ and are a great way to network and socialize with other GSAs. You may also want to plan a camping or hiking trip.

e) **Arts and Crafts:** Get together after school or during lunch and make your own pride gear, a banner to use in marches, or art to display in the library and display cases.

f) **Hold a Pride Party** (or any party!): Who needs a good excuse to hold a party? Be creative with food and decorations--- there are lots of possibilities.

g) **Meet up with other GSAs** at a local queer or queer-friendly café: It's cool to just hang out in a "safe-space" and chat and it's good to get to know GSA members from other schools.

h) **Organize local bands / performers to do a Show:** If you can't do this at your school, ask to use space at a local community college or supportive church. This show could raise funds for the GSA.



i) **Host a Graduation Party:** "Lavender graduations" are a neat way to show appreciation for the seniors in your club and give them a meaningful send-off. Consider investing in small gifts to present to them at an end of year event.

**More Great Ideas:** Source: (MA Dept. of Education) [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)  
See this site for complete details on the following 10 ideas

1) **Bring a Friend Day:** Everyone is to try to bring someone new to the meeting. It helps to change a lot of people's minds about the group and destroys some of their stereotypes about homosexuality.

2) **Q & A Day:** "Things I've always wanted to know but was afraid to ask...." Students anonymously write down questions on any subject they want and then spend the rest of the meeting discussing questions and coming up with answers.



3) **"No Adults Allowed" (Or only one):** Some groups have complained that their advisors are too domineering. Having this sort of meeting could be a good change of pace. Tell the adults that only one of them can come to this special meeting (and isn't allowed to talk unless absolutely necessary).

4) **"What would the world be like if 10% of people were straight and 90% of people were gay?"** This activity can help participants better understand what it feels like to be devalued. Ask the group to imagine living in a homophobic society. What would it be like if parents wanted their children to grow up gay? What would it be like if you had to come out as straight? How does it feel to be labelled a minority?

5) **How can the GSA work with other school groups?** Plan a meeting with other school groups to discuss how all can work together and educate each other to make the school better for everyone.

6) **Coming Out:** Some groups have found that coming out discussions are very helpful and important. Plan a meeting where people will talk about how they think people would react, what might happen, how to establish support networks, etc.



7) **Games:** Brookline High's GSA plays "Common Ground" (*Source: Kerry Ashforth*). Students and staff advisors stand in a circle. Someone begins by saying, "I've got a younger sister," or some other statement that is true for them. Everyone else, for whom this is also true, steps into the centre of the circle. Everyone else stays on the outside. (You can always lie and choose not to step into the circle.) The game often brings up personal and important issues that students may not want to discuss in a more formal setting.

The Newton GSA recommends a game called "Culture Walk" (*Source: Kerry Ashforth*). There are one or two mediators and they begin by asking one group, for example the women, to move to one side of the room. Then the men ask them questions they've always wanted to know and the women give them the answers. Then the women get to tell the men what they (the women) want them to know about women. This game gradually becomes more personal. You don't have to walk or talk.

8) **The things you'll learn...** Some groups plan meetings where one student researches a topic related to LGBT life, culture, history, or oppression and then reports to the group what they've discovered. Topics don't have to be dry and boring. They could include entertainers coming out, the Stonewall Riots, lesbian pulp fiction, etc. Other groups pick current events from the newspaper, such as same-sex marriage, and discuss how they feel about these issues.

- 9) **Working for Change:** Most groups have spent at least some meeting time working to institute change in their schools or communities. Some have written in their school newspapers describing the work of their group, plans for the future, or what they'd like to see change in their school and how to combat anti-gay prejudice. Other groups have detailed instances of homophobia at school including the defacing of GSA posters and anti-gay slurs or remarks they've heard and then distributed them to students, teachers, administrators and school board members. Other groups have written editorials for their school and community newspapers (e.g. "Homophobia Hurts Everybody" and "Why I'm a Straight Ally." Some groups have also planned political action strategies or letter writing campaigns.
- 10) **You're invited!** Inviting other GSAs or other clubs to your meetings or functions can be a great way to build support in your school and to network with other schools. And inviting outside speakers can really spark interest in your group. Newton North holds an annual GSA conference which is attended by numerous groups from around the state. Boston Latin held a social for GSAs in their area. Winchester High invited Michael Smith from the gay and lesbian show "1 in 10" on Boston's 101.7 WFNX. Newton North attended a special talk by a history teacher on "Gays in Popular Culture", and invited William Johnson from the Boston Hate Crimes Division to address the school.



### More possible activities for GSAs:

- ◆ Push to get good resources about LGBT persons and issues in your school library.
- ◆ Share and discuss books, videos, and other community resources, re LGBT history.
- ◆ Make connections with other school groups concerned with social justice or safety issues.
- ◆ Meet with teachers and other staff, on Professional Days.
- ◆ Invite reps from college LGBT groups, especially any who may have attended your school.
- ◆ Invite members of PFLAG, or any local queer groups, such as Gab or YouthQuest.
- ◆ Invite parents who are interested in dialogue and sharing. Organize a joint event.
- ◆ Invite health professionals, police, lawyers, media reps, municipal leaders, MPs, MLAs, etc.
- ◆ Learn about resources / youth groups in the organized LGBT communities.
- ◆ Learn about the diversity within the lives and communities of LGBTs.
- ◆ Learn more about specific Transgender issues and persons (via books, videos, and speakers).
- ◆ Make oral / written representations about LGBT concerns to school boards, service agencies...
- ◆ Plan school-wide homophobia-awareness events (theme day, assembly, poster contest, film...)
- ◆ Participate in multicultural, anti-racism, pride or women's marches in your community.
- ◆ Give out awards to students, staff or other persons who make positive contributions.
- ◆ Survey the students to assess general levels of awareness / support. Publicize your findings.
- ◆ Host "Diversity Panels" with students from various racial, ethnic, religious (etc.) communities.
- ◆ Host a "Day of Awareness," focussing on some aspect of LGBT life, community, or history.
- ◆ Discuss the LGBT characters or relationships in any TV shows, books, movies that are current.
- ◆ Vary the pace and topics of the meetings.
- ◆ Keep advertising the group's meeting time and place all year!
- ◆ Use clear words like Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender in your advertising.
- ◆ Submit a write-up and/or photos about your GSA and its events, to the school yearbook.
- ◆ Talk about healthy dating and relationships.
- ◆ **And ...** organize the best and most unusual social events at your school.

## Advice from GSA Student Leaders (Source: [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org))

Here are their words when asked, “If you were graduating today, what words of advice would you have for future student leaders?”

- ◆ “Make members of the GSA feel that they are an integral part of the group... If people have individual responsibilities they are more likely to show up and be excited every week.”  
- Elizabeth, Hartford High School (Vermont)
- ◆ “Make your goals clear in the beginning, and stick to those goals. Every once in a while reassess what your events are and make sure they further your group goals.”  
- Becky (Massachusetts)
- ◆ “Keep your club active and visible in the community. It is important that the community sees that you are not a 'sex club' and that you are sincere in your desire to strengthen the community as a whole.” - Brianna, Amador High School (California)
- ◆ “Set group goals together. If group member’s hopes for the group aren't being met, they won't remain active.” - Heather (Virginia)
- ◆ “I would say to always remember to take things seriously, but HAVE FUN!!! Sometimes I think things get too serious and you need to keep them fun and light at the same time so you keep people’s interest, event after event.” - Courtney (Virginia)
- ◆ “Do not try to do too many things at once. Plan what you want to do or hope to achieve and then give it a lot of time to develop. (Party, fundraiser, etc.)”  
- Jon, El Camino High School (California)
- ◆ “Have fun at your meetings. Icebreakers or group activities are great ways to get everyone involved and interested. Try to get everyone involved. ... Stick to your schedule. Whether your group is very laid back and hangs out or participates in national campaigns and provides community service, you have some sort of schedule. It could be huge or only involve making intercom announcements before meetings. Either way, I think sticking to the schedule helps you as a leader to stay on task and helps the group to meet its goals.”  
- Anonymous Student
- ◆ “Stay inclusive and educated. Try to include everyone, but don't be half-assed about it. If you're going to include transgender and/or intersex folk under your banner then know what it means to be doing so and keep conscious of it. Also, remember that including bisexuals means more than just adding them to the list as well. You need to remain conscious of the different issues that each group has.” - Adam Free (Iowa)
- ◆ “Never drop an idea because it isn't good; one small idea can blossom and evolve into a great project. Keep those ideas in the back of your head.”  
- Pandora, Dickinson College (Pennsylvania)
- ◆ “Everyone has a different reason for being involved. Try to get to know their reasons.”  
- Joe Hecht, Cornell College (Iowa)
- ◆ “... keep the privacy of all involved with the group as a sign of respect (if people want to find out what we talk about they should come to a meeting). ...allow all people in the group an equal opportunity to express opinions, concerns etc.” -Anthony R. Colin (California)
- ◆ “ALWAYS plan your meetings ahead of time; advertise constantly; focus on projects.”  
- Melissa, Analy High School (California)
- ◆ “Keep all information talked about in meetings private; provide a warm, caring environment; and be there for everyone.” - Jen



# Book Resources for Gay / Straight Alliances

*This short list is intended as a starting point for students, parents and educators who wish to learn more about LGBT issues and persons. Look for these books and others at libraries and bookstores (some have special sections on queer studies). Any bookstore should be able to locate these books for you, if still in print, if you can give them the title, author and ISBN number. Many of these books are in the larger library systems, and can be accessed throughout BC via inter-library loans. (New books are being published every year, but some books go "out-of-print" each year.)*



## Fiction

Bauer, M. (ed); ***Am I Blue? Coming Out of the Silence***; 1994; ISBN 0-06-440587-7; 16 short stories address different issues for gay and lesbian youth: coming out, friends, hopes, parents and grandparents, relationships, even a "fairy godfather". Each story, accompanied by a short biography of the author, makes compelling reading.

Benduhn, T.; ***Gravel Queen***; 2003; ISBN 0-689-84994-X; Life gets complicated when Aurin and Neila start getting very close. As well as handling her own feelings, Aurin has to maintain her existing friendships, despite her excitement about the uncertain future. The author says she "had to" write a novel that shows the celebratory and fun parts of teen life, and offers a positive outcome, because of the negative messages and stereotypes she grew up with.

Block, F. L.; ***Baby Be-Bop***; 1995; ISBN 0-06-447176-4; One of a series of books that follow the adventures of a group of friends. The main character, Dirk, has always known he was gay; we share in his coming out to his friends and grandmother, as well as portraying his hopes for love.

De Oliveira, E.; ***Lucky***; 2004; ISBN 0-439-54655-9; Sam is attracted to both boys and girls. He meets Toby, who has the same likes and attractions. What will happen to their friendship and relationship? Love comes in many shapes and sizes, sometimes all at once. The author shows there's more to life than labels, and more to love than a simple definition.

Feinberg, L.; ***Stone Butch Blues***; 1993; ISBN 1-55583-853-7; A novel about the journey of a transgender person coming out as a "butch" lesbian in Buffalo, NY, in the late 1960's, and later transitioning from female to male and searching for community.

Grima, T. (ed); ***Not the Only One***; 1994; ISBN 1-55583-275-X; 21 stories capture many of the fears, joys, confusion and energy of teens coming face-to-face with lesbian / gay issues, in their own coming out, or in learning that a friend or family member is LGBT. These stories will help anyone reflecting on their own anxiety, isolation, excitement, pride, or hope for the future.

Kerr, M. E.; ***Night Kites***; 1986; ISBN 0-06-447035-0; This story centres on Erick, aged 17, who learns about prejudice and family bonds when his older brother, gay and living with AIDS, moves back home. The novel also portrays Erick's own discoveries of love and relationships.

Peters, J.; ***Luna***; 2004; ISBN 0-316-73369-5; Liam can't stand his daytime appearance and identity, but transforms in the evenings into Luna, a female identity. Luna's sister Regan describes Luna's progress as s/he prepares to be more open with the world. Regan's alternate use of "he" and "she" helps us to think about the power of pronouns and our assumptions about gender. This is an excellent novel about a transgender teen's struggle for identity and acceptance.

Plum-Ucci, C.; ***What Happened to Lani Garver?***; 2002; ISBN 0-15-205088-4; Lani is a new kid at school, and others are asking questions, mainly “Is Lani a boy or a girl?” Claire befriends Lani, but soon has to deal with shattered friendships and her own personal demons. The events that follow are tragic, and somewhat ambiguous, but the book does a wonderful job of introducing the concept of androgyny. The last few pages offer info about the author.

Sanchez, A.; ***Rainbow Boys***; 2001; ISBN 0-689-84100-0 and ***Rainbow High***; 2003; ISBN 0-689-85477-3; Both books are easy to read, thought-provoking, and informative. They feature 3 very different young gay men, as they deal with sex, love, virginity, body image, homophobia, bashings, activism, parental / peer reactions, and internet predators. The second book follows their progress to the end of high school, and their decisions about future plans.

Scoppettone, S.; ***Happy Endings Are All Alike***; 1978, 1991, and 2004; ISBN 1-55583-177-X; A love story of 2 young women graduating from a small town high school. Many stereotypic ideas about lesbian relationships are presented, and then sensitively dispelled. The story also deals with the issues of family members' reactions and also sexual assault / rape.

Wieler, D.; ***Bad Boy***; 1989; ISBN 0-88899-083-9; [Gov. Gen. Literary Award] AJ thinks that all he wants in his life is to make the Triple A hockey team, with his best friend Tully. But when he learns that Tully is gay, AJ's world spirals out of control. He can't keep his fear and aggression from coming out onto the ice. He has to learn about friendship and to rebuild his trust in Tully.

## Non-Fiction

Bass, K. and Kaufman K.; ***Free Your Mind***; 1996; ISBN 0-06-095104-4; A stimulating, practical guide for LGB youth and allies, with comprehensive chapters on Family, Friends, Lovers, Self-Discovery, School, Spirituality, and Community. There are stories from LGB youth, info on famous LGBTs, and great suggestions on coming out, relationships, health, workshops, school climate, hostile questions, resources, groups, religious conflict, supporting LGB friends/family, etc. This book really enables youth to understand and to celebrate their lives.

Borhek, M. V.; ***Coming Out To Parents***; 1993; ISBN 0-8298-0957-0; Outstanding and enlightening, this book is a practical guide with concrete strategies to help queer youth and their parents understand the “coming out” experience. Provides suggestions on how and when to come out, what reactions to expect and how to deal with the ensuing awkwardness.

Bornstein, K.; ***My Gender Workbook***; 1998; ISBN 0-415-91673-9; This is Bornstein's playful guide to exploring “Gender”. The topics include living without gender, thwarting the “gender police”, and examining one's own beliefs, values and feelings about gender identity.

Cowan, T.; ***Gay Men & Women Who Enriched The World***; 1996; ISBN 1-55583-391-8; This great book tells little-known facts about the lives of many famous LGB people from history, including Sappho, Plato, Michelangelo, Tchaikovsky, Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein. It provides good insights into these LGB lives, and gives queer youth a sense of their history.

Feinberg, L.; ***Transgender Warriors***; 1996; ISBN 0-8070-7941-3; An excellent history of transgender people through history, including pre-industrial societies. In searching for his/her own community and history, Feinberg found a vast body of evidence of people who have long been defying / challenging cultural boundaries of gender. Many historical images illustrate this excursion into the history of so many hero/ines and visionaries, both rebellious and visionary.

Feinberg, L.; ***Trans Liberation***; 1998; ISBN 0-8070-7950-2; Feinberg argues passionately for the acceptance of all "Trans" people (cross-dressers, transsexuals, inter-sex people, Two Spirits, drag queens, etc.), and makes analogies with the struggles of LGBs to break down the doors of shame and silence. Interwoven into the essays are portraits of 10 trans persons.

Heron, A. (ed); ***Two Teenagers in Twenty***; 1994; ISBN 1-55583-282-2; Over 40 lesbian and gay American teenagers write about their lives, feelings, experiences, coming out, -- and some advice. These articles portray the diversity within the range of young LGB people.

Jennings, K.; ***Becoming Visible***; 1994; ISBN 1-55583-254-7; An interesting reader in gay and lesbian history, with sections about ancient Greece, Rome and China, early Native Americans, Europe and the USA in recent times, and current struggles / trends. Chapters include study questions. Jennings is the founder / director of GLSEN in the USA.

Marcus, E.; ***Is It a Choice?***; 1999; ISBN 0-06-251623-X; This excellent, clearly written book should be in every elementary and secondary school. The author clearly answers 300 questions about lesbians / gays, touching on areas of religion, family, sex, discrimination, self-discovery, media, dating, aging, AIDS, work, relationships, coming out, and more. **Highly recommended.**

Pharr, S., ***In The Time of the Right, Reflections on Liberation***; 1996; ISBN 0-9620222-8-4; A clear analysis of the growing power of the political right. Pharr shows how we can begin building a community where everyone is valued and where equality, justice and freedom are realities.

Rashid, N. & J. Hoy; ***Girl 2 Girl***; 2000; ISBN 1-873-74145-6; This enjoyable little British manual for young lesbian and bisexual women is full of poetry, stories, and short essays. Topics include dreams & dilemmas, friends & family, being out in the world, and love / lust / loss.

Russell, P; ***The Gay 100***; 1995; ISBN 07582-01001; Short biographies of 100 of the most influential gays / lesbians, past and present. Apart from the usual names are many figures from history (Socrates, Hadrian, St. Augustine, Hafiz, Petronius, Edward II, David and Jonathan, Queen Christina, etc). Most of the people are American, but at least 30 are European.

Singer, B. L.; ***Growing Up Gay/Growing Up Lesbian***; 1994; ISBN 1-56584-103-4; Well-known and respected lesbian / gay authors tell their stories in this anthology, including excerpts from their books on topics of self-discovery, friendships, relationships, family, and facing the world.

## Professional Resources

Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia; ***Challenging Homophobia in Schools***; 2000, revised in 2004 (available from GALE-BC [www.galebc.org](http://www.galebc.org)). Sections of this comprehensive manual (240 pages) include *Rationale* for addressing homophobia, *Background* on a variety of LGBT issues, *Strategies* for educators, many *Lesson Plans* (elem. and sec.) and *Resources* (books, videos, community groups). The second edition includes more information on transgender issues and on legal changes for LGBTs in Canada and BC.

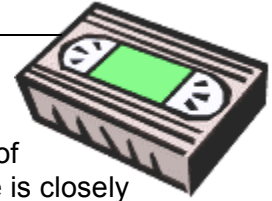
Johnson, O.; ***The Sexual Spectrum***; 2004; ISBN 1-55192-681-4; In this witty and engaging book about human sexual diversity, Johnson (a Vancouver neuro-psychologist and clinician) writes calmly about the complexities and variations in sexuality, orientation and gender identity. She details many current findings about neuro-biology, behaviour, and many social / legal questions affecting LGBTs. Extensive bibliography is included. **Highly recommended.**



## Video Resources for Gay / Straight Alliances

**Note:** Some of these videos can be purchased from **Little Sister's Bookstore**, 604-669-1753 or 1-800-567-1662 [www.littlesistersbookstore.com](http://www.littlesistersbookstore.com)

*These videos are produced and distributed by the NFB (National Film Board of Canada). They cost \$39.95, plus taxes & shipping. Call 1-800-267-7710, or go to [www.nfb.ca](http://www.nfb.ca)*



**In Other Words** (27 min) c2001 NFB **Highly Recommended**

The main topic here is the power of words and the impact of homophobic name-calling on the development of youth, aged 14 to 22. The youth share details of their lives and their struggles with their identity and their place in society. Language is closely examined, with word definitions and historical animations about their derivation.

**One of Them** (25 min) c2000 NFB

High school students planning a Human Rights Day have to confront their own difficulties in addressing homophobia. The focus is on name-calling, discrimination and stereotypes. This is a good portrayal of the negative reactions / behaviours seen in high schools.

**OUT: Stories of Lesbian and Gay Youth** (39 or 78 min) c1993 NFB

Discrimination, racism and homophobia are addressed in this video, made in Toronto, Winnipeg and Thunder Bay. It provides awareness, understanding and hope to parents, counsellors and educators and LGBT youth. Many queer youth talk candidly about their struggle with personal identity, made more difficult by societal and familial conflicts..

**School's Out!** (24 min) c1997 NFB

Jane Rule and 5 members of TEACH (Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia) talk about sexuality and the issue of sexual orientation in today's society.

*The following videos are available for purchase or rent, from **Moving Images Distribution**  
Tel: 604-684-3014 or Toll-free: 1-800-684-3014 [www.movingimages.ca](http://www.movingimages.ca)*

**Too Close for Comfort** (27 min) c1990 Moving Images

A drama about homophobia and discrimination. At a video store, David overhears a supervisor firing his friend Nick because he's HIV-positive. Word spreads quickly to others. Both boys are challenged by their fears of AIDS, homophobia and discrimination.

**Eric's Video** (24 min) c1991 Moving Images

This video features interviews with different people about discrimination stemming from their HIV+ status and/or sexual orientation. It includes candid interviews with lesbian, gay and heterosexual individuals and couples, and examines the ignorance they face.

**Little Sister's vs. Big Brother** (71 min) c2002 Moving Images

Since 1983, Little Sister's (Vancouver bookstore) has resisted bigotry, bombings, and book seizures. The battle with Canada Customs went all the way to Canada's Supreme Court. Here are all the key moments in their battle against censorship, and also insights into the passions that have driven the 4 key persons in this long struggle. Writers and BC Civil Liberties Association speak out about our right to read and view what we choose.

**Gay Spirit** (52 min) c1996 Moving Images

Six gays and lesbians talk about their struggle to be out and to be part of their faith communities. They are: a Muslim man with AIDS, a man raised Pentecostal, a Jewish lesbian, a Seventh Day Adventist, and two lesbian partners and former nuns. Dr. Martin Brokenleg provides insight into the challenges these individuals have faced.

**Women's Educational Media (WEM) produced these videos. Tel: 415-641-4616**  
*email: wemfilms@womedia.org website: [www.womedia.org](http://www.womedia.org)*

**It's Elementary** (78 or 38 min) c1996 WEM **Highly Recommended**

This video presents the case for making homophobia an educational issue. Featuring work by elementary / middle school students, and interviews with teachers of varied sexual orientations, it demonstrates how schools can successfully start teaching respect for all. It models excellent teaching about family diversity, name-calling, stereotypes, community-building and more. A viewing guide is included. Both versions are great for discussions.

**Let's Get Real** (35 min) c2003 WEM

This video examines the issues that lead to bullying, including race, religion, perceived sexual orientation, learning disabilities, and others. The film gives a voice to targeted kids, but also to those who bully, to find out why they lash out. The most heartening stories are from those who have mustered the courage to stand up for themselves or a friend.

**Amazon Books sells these videos. Their website: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)**

**Living With Pride; Ruth Ellis @ 100** (60 min) c1999

This documentary recreates the life of Ruth Ellis, the oldest living "out" African-American lesbian, born in 1899. In addition to exploring her rich past, we get a rare chance to experience a century of history as lived by one proud and inspiring woman.

**Outside the Lines: The World of the Gay Athlete** (17 min) c2000

This video features two students competing as openly gay athletes in very different climates. Both students movingly reveal their courage and resilience. The viewing guide gives lessons, discussion questions and other ideas for building equity in athletics.

**Ma Vie en Rose** (My Life in Pink) c1997

Ludovic, 8, is a little girl in a boy's body. For him, nothing is more natural than to change his gender. He believes that a miracle is going to happen, and he will be a girl. He's in love with another boy, but his behaviour frightens most adults. The situation elicits intense reactions from parents, neighbors, and teachers, but has a profoundly optimistic ending.

**Out of the Past** (65 min) c1998 **Highly Recommended**

Kelli Peterson, 17, tells of her experiences forming a GSA in her high school in Salt Lake City, Utah. The protests, legislative battles and national media attention serve as a modern counterpoint to the history of the human rights movement. The struggles and triumphs of Bayard Rustin, Barbara Gittings, and other [US] civil rights activists are also profiled in this powerful film. Audience Award Winner at the 1998 Sundance Film Festival.

**The Laramie Project** (96 min) c2003

Although much shorter than the play of the same name, the harrowing nature of the subject matter - Matthew Shepard's brutal murder - and the clarity of the voices of the inhabitants of Laramie, Wyoming, give this film a remarkable emotional power. *The Laramie Project* was created from over 200 interviews conducted with Laramie residents before, during, and after the trials of the 2 boys who killed Shepard. The interviews create an amazing cross-section of American views on class, homosexuality, religion, privacy, and more. A winner at the 2002 Sundance Festival.

*Other miscellaneous and worthy videos available from different sources.*

**Stand Together** (124 min) c2002

Distributed by Vtape [www.vtape.org](http://www.vtape.org) email: [distribution@vtape.org](mailto:distribution@vtape.org)

This documentary of the lesbian / gay rights movement in Ontario (1967 - 1987) includes many documents, archival footage, dramatizations and interviews, to tell a story of outrage, injustices and victories. Included: RCMP's "Fruit machine", the first woman to publicly fight her homophobic dismissal by the Armed Forces, gay bashing on Toronto's Yonge Street, anti-gay opposition from politicians/ police/ church groups, the campaign by the CGRO, and the legislative vote in Dec. 1986 to add "sexual orientation" to the Human Rights Code.

**Our Faces: We'd love to show you our faces, they're just like yours** (22 min) c2000

[www.educationalvideosplus.com](http://www.educationalvideosplus.com)

"Our Faces", from Seattle, is a compassionate look at the lives, trials and joys of LGBT youth, adults and their families through their own eyes. It's intended to raise awareness for people of every sexual orientation and to replace stereotypes with the experiences of real people. It includes a brief portion of specific interest to counsellors.

**Gender Line -- Extended** (60 min) c2002

Video Out Distribution 604-872-8449 [www.videoout.ca](http://www.videoout.ca) email: [videoout@telus.net](mailto:videoout@telus.net)

This excellent video was made by Vancouver trans activist W.G. Burnham. It features 20 individuals representative of the diversity and fluidity within the BC trans communities, with a specific focus on the intersect across age, ability, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality. Viewers will see their trans stereotypes deconstructed.

**Some of the Stories: a Documentary about Trans Youth** (33 min) c2001

Video Out Distribution 604-872-8449 [www.videoout.ca](http://www.videoout.ca) email: [videoout@telus.net](mailto:videoout@telus.net)

This video was made by Vancouver's Jacob Simpson. It features 5 youth discussing trans issues: What does "trans" mean? Who are transgender people? How does society's treatment of trans people affect us? The youth talk about how transgenderism intersects with other issues in their lives, such as poverty, disability and culture. The video addresses the legacy of colonization and how the struggle for trans rights is intimately linked with the struggle for Aboriginal rights.

**Straight Laced: How Gender's Got Us All Tied Up** (67 min) (Secondary) c2009 Groundspark

Straight-laced reveals the toll that deeply held stereotypes and rigid gender roles have on all our lives. It offers both teens and adults a way out of anxiety, fear, and violence. This documentary highlights fifty diverse students who take viewers on a powerful, intimate journey to see how popular pressures around gender and sexuality are shaping the lives of today's teens.





## Some Useful Web Sites, Email Addresses, and Phone Numbers for GSAs

*The following information may not always be correct, but was current at the time of publication.*

**www.pridenet.ca - Pride Education Network** email: info@pridenet.ca  
Box 93678, Nelson Park PO, Vancouver, BC V6E 4L7  
(Resources, teaching suggestions and support for educators and allies working to make schools more safe and welcoming for LGBTQ students, families and staff. Website has many articles and links to other groups.)

**Check out the GSA link with info about GSA's in BC** [www.pridenet.ca](http://www.pridenet.ca)  
(GSA development, decision-making, school surveys, web resources, facilitation, coalition-building, events, trans issues). We hope to have up-to-date listings of all GSAs operating in BC high schools, with names and contact info for students and staff associated with each one. Let us include info about your GSA group here!

**www.glsen.org - Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network** email: glsen@glsen.org  
(lots of resources, articles, advocacy suggestions, news, links for students and educators)  
212-727-0135

**www.gsanetwork.org** - lots of info about GSA development, leadership, decision-making, school surveys and events, web resources, facilitation, coalition building, trans issues.

**www.mygsa.ca** - National GSA site for educators and students.

**www.qmunity.ca - Gab Youth Services** 604-684-5307  
(support, outreach, education for queer youth in Greater Vancouver area)

**www.pflag.ca - PFLAG** (Parents, Families, Friends of Lesbians and Gays – Canadian national website). For local contact info contact for many PFLAG groups around BC, call 604-626-5667. (Support for anyone with LGBT family members / friends, and links to many resources and groups.)

**www.transalliancesociety.org - Trans Alliance Society** (TAS) is a BC-wide organization for all trans persons, allies and professionals. TAS is devoted to personal development, promoting understanding of trans culture, building a sense of community, and removing all barriers that negatively impact transgendered persons. The site offers news, events, workshops, and outreach services.

**BC Teachers' Federation** (Professional Development Division.) - to book free teacher workshops on Supporting GSAs, or other LGBT / Homophobia topics. See the bottom of the next page for details.



# Preparing to be the Staff Advisor for a Gay / Straight Alliance

***If you plan to be the staff advisor, please think about the following questions. It's far better to be prepared, rather than surprised by the unexpected. Think about these questions and situations, and discuss with other staff facilitators, before the GSA starts. The barriers will then be less daunting.***

- ◆ Are you comfortable around LGBT people? Discussing sexuality?
- ◆ What do you think, or believe, about LGBT persons? Where did you learn this?
- ◆ Are you carrying around some amount of (internalized) homophobia within you?
- ◆ Are you knowledgeable about LGBT issues, resources, history, politics, and health issues?
- ◆ What resources are available to you? Where can you go to learn more?
- ◆ How do you respond to jokes about "fags", "queers", "dykes", "trannies", etc.?



***You may wish to begin by reading "As an Educator, What Can I Do, Starting Tomorrow?" in GALE BC's handbook Challenging Homophobia in Schools [Strategies section].***

- ◆ Is there another GSA (or similar group) in your area that you may visit and learn from?
- ◆ Identify the likely barriers to setting up a GSA in your school. Can you deal with them?
- ◆ What anxieties do you have about setting up a GSA? (e.g. "What if no one shows up?")
- ◆ Will people at your school assume that you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender?
- ◆ If you are LGBT, will you be outed? Does it matter to you? Are you ready?
- ◆ If you aren't LGBT, how will you deal with other people's assumptions about you?

***Learn from others' experiences. Check out the various web sites listed on the previous page, for the phone numbers/emails of student or staff contacts at other GSAs, in BC or elsewhere. Contact them.***

- ◆ What will be your role within the GSA?
- ◆ Who else will support you within the school community?
- ◆ Will you be comfortable with your role changing, as some students take over GSA leadership?
- ◆ How will you sustain the club, if students are too nervous to attend for a few months?
- ◆ How will you react if a GSA student member is harassed at school?
- ◆ What supports do you have in place to help students wishing to come out to their family / friends?

***You might consider booking a workshop on Supporting Gay / Straight Alliances, from the Professional Development Division of the BC Teachers' Federation. Call 604-871-2283 in the Vancouver area, or toll free 1-800-663-9163 in the rest of BC. Ask for the staff person in the PD Division who is responsible for booking workshops. Other related workshops are also available.***

