



A Family's Guide To Handling Anti-Gay Harassment

The following has been adapted for use by GALYIC (UK) <http://www.galyic.org.uk>
with the permission of The Safe Schools Coalition. www.safeschoolscoalition.org

First, take pride in your child's trust.

Only half the young people who experience anti-gay harassment feel safe going to their families for help. Your child clearly sees you as a resource.

Then, support your child:

- Listen. If you ask questions, try to make them supportive, not blaming, questions.
- Make sure your child knows that you ...
 - love and believe in your child, no matter how you may be feeling about the fact that he or she is gay or lesbian (or *may* be gay or is *perceived* to be gay).
 - do not blame him or her for what happened or think he or she "deserved" what happened.
 - are upset that it happened – but angry not at your child, just at the offenders and those who let them think it was OK to hurt someone they thought was gay.
 - will do what you can to make sure school is a safe place for him or her.

You may want to gather information and support for yourself:

- Call a trusted school nurse, teacher, youth worker or social worker.
- Contact GALYIC (Gay and Lesbian Youth in Calderdale) **01422.320099**.
- Contact another parent. GALYIC are in touch with several parents or you could contact FFLAG (Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) **01454.852418**.
- Borrow a book from GALYIC: GALYIC have a wide selection of books aimed both at young people and parents (as well as teachers).

Next, you may want to talk with your child's teacher, if the problem is confined to a specific classroom:

- **Explain what happened** and what makes you think the harassment or violence was **bias-based**.
- **Explain that you want the teacher's help** to ensure your child's emotional and physical safety at school and in transit.
- **Discuss** with the teacher ...
 - how the **investigation** will be handled and how your child's safety might be considered in that process.
 - what the possible **disciplinary** outcomes are, if the offender(s) is/are identified, and whether that is **consistent** with the way other forms of malicious harassment are generally handled.
 - what the teacher will do to **stop** the harassment from continuing ... by the same offender(s) or any others.
 - what the teacher will do to reduce the chances of **retribution** against your child for speaking up and what to do if there is retribution despite his/her best efforts.
 - what the teacher will do to avoid a **recurrence** of the harassment ... against your child or anyone else's child next year or next year.
- **Send the teacher a letter** thanking him/her for meeting with you and spelling out your understanding of what was agreed upon. Keep a copy of the letter.

If meeting with the teacher doesn't stop the abuse, or if it is happening in the halls and on the playground rather than in a single classroom, you may want to go through exactly the same steps

- with your **head teacher**,
- and if that doesn't solve the problem, with the **chair person** of the **school board**,
- and if that doesn't solve the problem, the Group Director, Schools and Children's Service and finally, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Of course, you can also contact your local M.P.

If you do find yourself climbing this ladder of responsibility,

- Keep in mind that each new individual with whom you speak must care about children or s/he probably would not have become an educator. You have this in common, although of course you know and love your own child better than anyone does.
- Keep track of all the events, including dates, times, and witnesses to each act of harassment and each meeting of adults.

Do not hesitate to involve the police if your child is the victim of a crime ...

if, for example, his or her belongings were damaged or stolen or your child was threatened or physically injured because the offender thought she or he was gay or lesbian.

- If anti-gay slurs were used in the course of the incident, you could contact the Hate Crime Officer (P.C. Ian Firth): **01422.318152**.
- Describe *in detail* the hate or prejudice that was expressed and what caused your child to fear harm. For example, "*They called him 'faggot' and said they would 'kick his butt'.*" Or, "*They asked her why 'dykes' liked other girls and said they would, 'teach her to like boys'.*" If your child has any physical pain, make sure it is written down in the police report. Get the incident number from the officer and ask how to get a copy of the police report. Get the officer's name and number.
- Or you can contact Child Protection Services: ring Social Services **01422.353279** and ask to speak to a Customer Service Adviser or Child Protection Unit (West Yorkshire Police) **01422.337042** or contact the Education Welfare Service **01422.392503**.

Some people also decide to:

- Contact a lawyer about bringing a "civil case" against the offenders: Victimisation and harassment are illegal (The Prevention of Harassment Act 1997). The local authority may be taken to court for not doing "all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area." (Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Section 17). The school and local authority may also be liable to prosecution under the Human Rights Act 1998, Article 2, Protocol 1 - the right to education (failure to provide the right to education to LGBT young people). And the teacher might be liable to prosecution under the 1974 Health and Safety Act if it can be proven the teacher was negligent (insurance will not cover cases of negligence). If the Equality Bill is passed in Parliament, attacking or threatening a person or damaging their property because of their sexual orientation, race, religion, gender, disabilities, etc., will become illegal.

The bottom line is ...

Your child deserves a safe education no matter what his or her race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, language of origin, or physical or mental abilities. You obviously agree or you wouldn't have read this far. Your child is lucky to have you for a parent. Together, you can help your school become a safe place.

The original Safe Schools Coalition version of this handout is online at:
http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/guide_family_handleharass.pdf