



An Educator's Guide To Surviving Anti-Gay Harassment

If the offender(s) are students:

- Try to get the class back on task. (**K-5:** "We have a rule about 'no put downs.' So cut it out and let's get back to language arts." **6-12:** "I've been hearing murmured comments from the back of the room and I don't appreciate them. Can we please focus on the parallelogram?")
- If that doesn't quell the comments, get specific. (**K-5:** "That is a really mean thing to say. I don't let you call each *other* names and I won't let you call *me* names either. Whether or not I am gay, I don't deserve that." **6-12:** "My sexual orientation is not up for discussion. Besides, that's a really derogatory term. Repeating it when I've already asked you to cut it out is called *malicious harassment*. It's against school policy and it's against the law.")
- Under no circumstances should you resort to using other slurs as analogies, especially those that apply to your students. For example, never try to force empathy on a group of African-American youth by asserting that the use of *faggot* is like the use of the *N-word*. For more about why, see "If These Were Racial Slurs, Teachers Would Be Stopping Them" ... *Three Activists Object*" at www.safeschoolscoalition.org
- If necessary, use the same disciplinary procedures you would use if a student directed a religious or racial slur or a gender-based comment at another student.

If the offender(s) are adults:

- Tell them in no uncertain terms that you are offended and you expect the behavior to stop.
- If that doesn't work, write them a letter specifying what they have done that you consider harassing and that you want it to stop. Keep a copy.

If the problem is offensive graffiti or other damage to property:

- *Do not clean it* until others have witnessed it and (ideally) photographed it, as difficult as that may be.

Ask for protection:

- The earlier you get help, the better. Talk with your supervisor or with a school security person about:
 - what happened and you have *already* done, if anything, to get the offender(s) to stop harassing you.
 - how you would most like the investigation handled, if one is needed.
 - what might be done to counsel or educate the offender(s) about malicious harassment and why it isn't tolerated at school.
 - what sorts of reprimand or discipline would be employed if it were another form of malicious harassment (based on race, religion, or gender, for instance) and that you would like this problem handled equitably.
 - how possible retaliation (for your having sought help) will be handled.
- If that doesn't work, ask *their* supervisors for help. Use the appropriate channels in your building and your district.
- If you belong to a union, keep them informed, even if you have no need for their help at this time.

Talk with supportive colleagues.

- If you know sexual minority or gay-supportive employees in your district, ask if they are experiencing similar harassment. Find out how they have handled it and who has been helpful on a district level.
- Check with your professional association or union.
- Consult with GLSEN, the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (212-727-0135 or glsen@glsen.org)
- Consult with the Safe Schools Coalition (questions@safeschoolscoalition.org)



Keep a written record:

- Write down everything that led *up* to the harassing incident(s) as well as what was said and done *during* the incidents. Note the time, location and who was involved (including witnesses).
- Write down names of those in whom you have confided or from whom you have sought help *since* the incident. Note the time, location and what was said during those conversations.

The law may be able to help.

Some state and local laws prohibit employment discrimination or malicious harassment on the basis of real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. For information, contact:

- Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (212-809-8585; www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/pages/states/antidiscrimi-map)
- Human Rights Campaign (202/628-4160, TTY: 202/216-1572; www.hrc.org/ [click on "Laws in Your State"])

You have the right to report the attack to the police. If you decide to call them:

- Call as soon as possible after the incident. (You can make a report months or even years afterward, but it might be harder for the police to act on your case the longer you wait.)
- If you live in a state with an inclusive hate crime law, and if anti-LGBT slurs were used in the course of the incident, tell the police officer so. Stress that the crime was motivated by hate based on perceived sexual orientation or gender expression. You don't have to say whether you are actually gay and you shouldn't be asked.
- Describe *in detail* the hate or prejudice that was expressed and what caused you to fear harm. For example, "*They called me 'faggot' and said they would 'kick my butt.'*" Or, "*They asked me why 'dykes' liked other girls and said they would, 'teach me to like boys.'*" If the assault was physical and you have 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 badge number.

If necessary, you can also:

- Ask your union for legal advice and support.
- Contact the United States Department of Education's Regional Office for Civil Rights ... Phone: 1-800-421-3481, TDD: 202-205-5166; Email: OCR@ED.Gov; Web site: www.ed.gov/ocr
- Contact a lawyer about bringing a "civil suit" against the offenders:
 - Lambda Legal (212-809-8585; lambdalegal@lambdalegal.org)
 - National Center for Lesbian Rights (415-392-6257; info@nclrights.org)
 - American Civil Liberties Union (212-549-2585 or find your local chapter: www.aclu.org/community/community.html)

The bottom line is ...

If the school environment is hostile for *you*, it must be even *more* so for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and for children with sexual minority parents. Probably *every* child is feeling scared or anxious as long as the behavior is allowed to continue. Fear is not conducive to education. **Nobody can teach in an unsafe place. And nobody can learn in an unsafe place.**