



A Student's Guide To Surviving Anti-Gay (LGBTQ) Harassment And Physical or Sexual Assault

The first thing is to get safe. You can:

- tell the person to back off (You can say something like, "Maybe you didn't mean anything by it, but ..." or, something more angry than educational, such as, "Cut it out! Get your hands off me!"). But **don't escalate** the situation by calling the offender names or threatening to get physical.
- defuse the situation, if it seems to be getting physical ("Never mind; let's forget it."), and go to a safe place.

Think about your possible choices:

- Is there a safe place nearby? Are there people close by who could help you?
- Is there more than one assailant? Does the assailant have a weapon? Could you use your voice and your body to protect yourself by yelling, running away, fighting back, or attracting someone's attention?
- Sometimes people decide that not resisting is the best way to minimize physical injury or further danger.
- **However you respond, remember that the assault is not your fault.**

After you are safe:

- Talk with someone you trust, someone you feel safe and comfortable with, such as a good friend.
- Tell an adult. Maybe there's an adult *at school* whom you trust ... a particular counselor or teacher, the nurse, the principal, a school security person, or whomever you trust most. If that doesn't work, ask their supervisors for help. Go to the school board if necessary.
- Maybe you feel you need to go outside the school for help, to a parent or guardian or a family friend. Whomever seems safest, do tell an adult. As understanding as a friend your own age may be, there are some times when only an adult can provide protection or legal advice or that sort of thing.
- Write down everything that happened (who said and did what, the time and place, and who was involved, including witnesses).

Treat the assault seriously.

Even if other people minimize what happened by acting as if it doesn't matter or by saying that it's not "that bad," physical and sexual assault are very serious. And verbal harassment can feel like torture. **You deserve to be safe.**

Understand that you may have many different kinds of reactions to the assault.

Sometimes people who are assaulted feel upset, angry, scared, ashamed, or hopeless. Other people don't feel anything. **There is no "right" way to feel after an assault.**



The law may be able to help.

Sexually assaulting somebody or beating somebody up is a crime. In Washington and some other states, so is attacking or threatening a person or damaging their property because of their sexual orientation, race, religion, gender, disabilities, etc. You have the right to report the attack to the police or Child Protective Services.

If you decide to call the police:

- 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 the assault was sexual and you do report immediately, it's best not to shower or change your clothes so that you don't lose any physical evidence that might help the police.
- If anti-gay slurs were used in the course of the incident, and if it happened in Washington State, tell the police officer that the crime (or one of the crimes) you are reporting is "*malicious harassment as defined by RCW 9A.36.080.*" Stress that the crime was motivated by hate based on perceived sexual orientation. **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 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 that doesn't work or you are scared to try those things, you are still not alone. Community agencies may be able to help.

- You can call a local crisis line for information and support. Look in the front few pages of the phone book.
- To talk with a counselor who knows about gay issues:
 - **The Trevor Helpline**, a national 24-hour confidential hotline, staffed by trained counselors familiar with gay, lesbian, bi, trans and questioning youth. Web site: www.thetrevorproject.org/ ... **Phone: 1-866-4-U-TREVOR (1-866-488-7386)**
 - **Safe Schools Hotline**, in Washington State: *Information, referral and advocacy for students, families and educators struggling with anti-LGBTQ bullying, harassment or violence in a public or private elementary, middle or high school. The hotline is run by the King County Sexual Assault Resource Center and an intervention specialist from Safe Schools will call you back within 24-hours. Phone, 24 hours: 1-877-SAFE-SAFE (1-877-723-3723); Email, 7 days/week: intervention@safeschoolscoalition.org*
- There are also support groups for gay and lesbian youth in some communities and schools. And for teens who are being harassed because somebody *thinks* they are gay, even if they are not.
- A local sexual assault center can help. Most sexual assault centers have 24-hour hotlines with trained, supportive staff that can answer questions and share information about your options. You don't have to give your name. Some sexual assault centers have legal advocates who can help you go to the police. And they usually help with sexual *harassment* as well as actual assault.
- For information about support in your area, see the Safe Schools web site <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/blackboard-organizations.html>



Some people also decide to:

- Contact the **Washington State Human Rights Commission**, Toll Free: 1-800-233-3247 (Se habla Español), TTY: 1-800-300-7525, <http://www.hum.wa.gov/>
- Contact the **Equity & Civil Rights Office of the Washington State OSPI (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction)**: 360-725-6162, equity@k12.wa.us, <http://www.k12.wa.us/Equity/>
- 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 Defense and Education Fund (212-809-8585 or lambdalegal@lambdalegal.org)
 - American Civil Liberties Union (212-549-2585 or find your local chapter: <http://www.aclu.org/community/community.html>)
 - Youth Legal Information Line at the National Center for Lesbian Rights, Staffed (Pacific Standard Time): Monday - Friday 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. [noon-8, Eastern] Web site: www.nclrights.org ... Phone: 1-800-528-3257
 - ACLU of Washington State (206-624-2180 or www.aclu-wa.org)

In the end, your safety is what matters. Leaving is *not* the same as failing. Sometimes your only alternative may be transferring to a safer learning environment.

- It isn't legal to just drop out if you are under the age of sixteen, and, besides, you deserve an education! So contact your school district if you need help making arrangements for a safer place to learn ... a different school or home-schooling, a GED program, Running Start, etc.

Remember, it is not your fault!

- If you were attacked "because" you were gay or lesbian or bi or trans – or somebody thought you were – what caused the assault was their prejudice and hatred, ***not*** your sexuality.
- If you were attacked when you were in a dangerous place (like a party with no adults, or a hitchhiking situation), it may be a good idea not to go there again, but that does ***not*** mean you are to blame. The offender is the only one to blame.
- If you are a guy and you think this kind of thing only happens to women, think again. Guys get beaten up and raped, too. Sometimes the offenders are male; sometimes, they are female. Either way, it does ***not*** mean you are any less a man.
- If you were attacked and decided not to fight back, that is ***not*** the same as consent. That may have been the smart – or only – thing to do. It does ***not*** mean you "wanted" it and it does ***not*** make the attack your fault.

The bottom line is ...

You deserve to be able to be yourself, without having to face verbal or physical violence ... and to be able to get an education without having to lie about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender or about having gay friends or family members or about believing in civil rights for gay people. **And no matter how alone you may sometimes feel, you deserve help and support.**