

Suggestions for Creating a Non-Homophobic Campus Environment

- 1. Make no assumption about sexuality.** If a student/peer has not used a pronoun when discussing a relationship, don't assume one. Use neutral language such as "Are you seeing anyone" instead of "Do you have a boyfriend". Additionally, do not assume that a female who confides a "crush" on another girl is a lesbian. Labels are often too scary and sometimes not accurate. Let students label themselves.
- 2. Have something gay-related visible in your office--**a sticker, a poster, a flyer, a brochure, a book, a button. This will identify you as a safe person to talk to and will hopefully allow a gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning youth to break his/her silence. SAFE ZONE campaign stickers and resources can provide this visibility.
- 3. Support, normalize and validate a person's feelings about his/her sexuality.** Let them know that you are there for them. Be sensitive to issues of oppression and appreciate the strength and struggle it takes to establish a positive LGBT identity. Provide nurturing support to colleagues and students in phases of that process. If you cannot be supportive, please refer to someone who can be. Then work on your own biases by reading, learning and talking to people comfortable with this issue. And always remember, the problem is homophobia not homosexuality.
- 4. Do not advise to disclose to parents, family and friends as they need to disclose at their own safe pace.** Studies show as many as 26% of gay youth are forced to leave their home after they tell their parents. IT IS THEIR DECISION and they have to live with the consequences. Help them figure out what makes sense for them. The process of coming out is one of enlarging a series of concentric circles of those who know. Initially the process should be in control of the individual until (and if) they consider it public knowledge.
- 5. Guarantee confidentiality with students.** Students need to know their privacy will be respected or they will not be honest about this important issue. Do not include sexual orientation information in letters of reference or answer specific or implied questions without first clarifying how "out" the person chooses to be in the specific process in question. Because your environment may be safe does not mean that all environments are safe. If you cannot maintain confidentiality for legal reasons, let students know this in advance.
- 6. Challenge homophobia.** As a role model for your students, respond to homophobia immediately and sincerely. Object to and eliminate jokes and humor that put down or portray LGBT people in stereotypical ways. Encourage in-service trainings for staff and students on homophobia and its impact on gay and lesbian youth.
- 7. Combat heterosexism in your classroom.** Include visibly gay and lesbian role models in your classroom.
- 8. Learn about and refer to community organizations.** Familiarize yourself with resources and call them before you refer to make sure they are ongoing. Also, become aware of gay-themed bibliographies and refer to gay-positive books.

9. Encourage school administrators to adopt and enforce anti-discrimination policies for their schools or school systems which include sexual orientation. The language should be included in all written materials next to race, sex, religion, etc.

Counter statements about sexual orientation or gender identity that are not relevant to decisions or evaluations being made about faculty, staff, or students.

10. Provide role models. Gay and straight students benefit from having openly gay teachers, coaches and administration. Straight students are given an alternative to the inaccurate stereotypes they have received and gay students are provided with the opportunity to see healthy gay adults. You, as teachers, can help by making gay and lesbian students feel more welcome.

Invite “out” professionals to conduct seminars and provide guest lectures in your classes and offices. Invite them for both LGBT topics and other topics of their expertise. Do not refer all LGBT issues to LGBT staff/faculty. Check with staff about their willingness to consult on LGBT issues with other staff members.

Recruit and hire “out” LGBT staff and faculty. View sexual orientation as a positive form of diversity that is desired in a multicultural setting. Always question job applicants about their ability to work with LGBT faculty, staff, and students

NOTE: Be prepared. If you truly establish a safe and supportive environment, people that you never thought of will begin to share their personal lives and come out in varying degrees. Secretaries, maintenance personnel, former students, and professional colleagues will respond to the new atmosphere. Ten percent is a lot of people.

View the creation of this environment as a departmental or institutional responsibility, not the responsibility of individual persons who happen to be LGBT. Always waiting for them to speak, challenge, or act, adds an extra level of responsibility to someone who is already dealing with oppression on many levels.

(Suggestions compiled by Youth Pride, Inc and Buhrke & Douce, 1991)