Creating and Supporting a Gay-Straight Alliance

Fourth Edition

Compiled and printed by:

pride education Network

advocate! educate! celebrate!

www.pridenet.ca
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www.pridenet.ca

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Contact Pride Education Network for more resources on addressing homophobia in schools:
info@pridenet.ca, www.pridenet.ca or write to PEN at Box 93678, Nelson Park PO, Vancouver,
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Some of the information in this booklet comes from an article How to Start a Gay/Straight
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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. Another commonly used term is LGBTQ where the Q stands for Queer or Questioning. When the term “Queer” is used, it is understood to be a positive and inclusive term, rather than a derogatory word. Questioning may include LGBTQ or straight students.

Many groups meet in school settings, while others meet in outside community locations. Some are referred to as diversity clubs, human rights clubs, or social justice clubs, when the term GSA club is problematic. All students are invited to attend, but with absolutely no expectation that they must self-identify or reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity.

GSAs provide all students with a safe place for LGBTQ students and their allies to meet, make friends, and talk about their feelings and experiences at school. 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 such as LGBTQ parents, or PFLAG (Parents, Families, Friends of Lesbians & Gays) are invited.

Groups tend to change their agenda for each week, depending on the participants’ needs. Most try to strike a balance between consciousness-raising, targeting homophobia/transphobia 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 people.

A student in Maple Ridge formed the first GSA in British Columbia, in 1997. As of March 2012, there are about 75 high schools throughout BC with GSAs and the list is growing. (For a list of GSAs in BC, see http://pridenet.ca/gaystraight-alliances). As well, over 100 LGBTQ-inclusive clubs across all provinces and territories in Canada have registered with Egale’s website www.myGSA.ca (2012).

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.
Why gay-straight alliances are important in our schools

Research of GSA clubs carried out by Egale Canada (2011) shows that, in schools which have a GSA, students perceive their school to be a safer, more inclusive place.

Students know they have at least one or two adults who are allies whom they can talk to about gender issues or LGBTQ matters.

Students indicated that they felt their schools were supportive of LGBTQ people and their school climate was less homophobic/transphobic.

LGBTQ students also indicated that just knowing of the GSA’s existence (i.e., from a poster/bulletin) was enough to let them know that someone cared.

Students involved in GSAs show increased academic achievement, improved attendance, a sense of empowerment, and increased hope for the future.

Students revealed that they had new friendships, higher self-esteem, visibility, and acceptance, and better relationships with peers, teachers, and family members.

GSA clubs also:

♦ provide safe spaces to focus on support and activities
♦ give official acceptance and visible school-wide presence
♦ provide allies and normalization with the school community
♦ focus on human rights and understanding of diversity
♦ build networks with other like-minded groups or other GSAs
♦ focus on school climate and change through activities (such as Day of Pink, Day of Silence)
♦ strive to be inclusive across intersections of oppression (gender, race, class, sex, ability, gender identity, Aboriginals).

It is also important to note that LGBTQ students in schools and districts with specific LGBTQ policies reported significantly fewer incidents of harassment due to sexual orientation. However, anti-homophobic policies did not necessarily create safer schools for transgender students or those experiencing harassment due to gender. Policies must be explicit when dealing with gender.
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 allies. 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. If possible, it’s recommended that there are both LGBTQ and straight teacher sponsors.

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. Look in your school handbook for the school’s rules regarding clubs.

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

   Inform school administrators about your 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. Describe (in print and verbally) the GSA’s purpose, and emphasize how your GSA will help all students feel safe, valued, and cared for at your school. Once the administrator knows about the GSA, she or he can be a strong and very effective ally 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, or know someone who is LGBTQ, or are simply supportive 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 LGBTQ).

5. **Pick a meeting place.**

   If possible, find a location in the school that is relatively private and yet easily accessible 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 GSA club is a major step that can be taken to disrupt discrimination in the 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 LGBTQ. 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 the GSA, if they see the posters.

The posters will stimulate school-wide discussion and raise visibility around issues of sexual orientation or gender identity. Breaking the silence is an important first step in addressing the common stereotypes and myths about LGBTQs. If posters are torn down or defaced, keep putting them up. Have some posters displayed behind glass, so that they cannot be vandalized. Advertise all year.

7. Provide snacks.

Providing food at the meeting is a great idea. It is a good icebreaker, and gives nervous attendees something to do, as well as an excuse to attend. Later, encourage students to take turns bringing 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 meeting. 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 activities. Discuss how meeting agendas will be set, who will facilitate them, and the rotation of responsibilities.

9. Establish guidelines or ground rules.

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.
♦ There is to be no gossiping about anyone, either in the group or elsewhere.
♦ If homophobic/transphobic things are said, don’t attack the person, but challenge the idea. We are all negatively affected by living in a homophobic/transphobic culture. People will make mistakes. Allow people to grow and change through constructive dialogue.


Develop an action plan. Brainstorm projects. Set goals for what you want to work on. Talk about succession of the group from one year to another. What advice do you want to pass on?
Preparing to be the adult sponsor for a gay-straight alliance

If you plan to be the GSA sponsor teacher please think about the following questions before the GSA starts. It’s far better to be prepared rather than surprised by the unexpected. Think about these questions and situations and discuss with other sponsors. The barriers will then be less daunting.

♦ Are you comfortable around LGBTQ people? Discussing sexuality?
♦ What do you think, or believe, about LGBTQ persons? Where did you learn this?
♦ Are you knowledgeable about LGBTQ 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 PEN’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 LGBTQ, will you be outed? Does it matter to you? Are you ready?
♦ If you aren’t LGBTQ, how will you deal with other people’s assumptions about you?

Learn from others’ experiences. Check out the various websites listed on the previous page, for the phone numbers/e-mails 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 LGBTQ issues from the Professional and Social Issues Division of the BC Teachers’ Federation. Call 604-871-2283 (in the Vancouver area) or toll-free 1-800-663-9163 (from other parts of BC) and ask for the staff person who is responsible for booking professional issues workshops.

The two workshops currently available are:

• Breaking the silence: Understanding and acting on LGBTQ issues in schools
• From silence to action: How to be an ally on LGBTQ issues
Great ideas for GSA meetings

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 breaks down some of their stereotypes about homosexuality.

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.

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).

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 homophobe 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? (For more information, see the film The Homophobia Project referred to on page 18.)

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.

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.

Games: (a) Common Ground (Source: Kerry Ashforth, Brooklyn High). Students and staff sponsors 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.

(b) 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.

The things you’ll learn…Some groups plan meetings where one student researches a topic related to LGBTQ life, culture, history, or oppression and then reports to the group what she or he has 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.

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.

**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. Inviting outside speakers to really spark interest in your group.

Source: (Massachusetts Dept. of Education) [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)

**Specific team-building activities you can do at your GSA meetings**

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 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 LGBTQ 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 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 LGBTQ 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 LGBTQ 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 LGBTQ youth in the schools. 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 measuring 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 the two techniques can be used to portray LGBTQ 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. Need at least 6-8 people, works best with 20 or more (must be an even number). Let 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 can talk in the large group about their responses.

Sample questions to ask:
• Growing up, what were all of the names (positive, negative, neutral) that you heard related to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals?
• Growing up, what were some of the stereotypes you heard about lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transsexuals?
• What were some of the things you heard about these groups growing up that you have come to find out are not true?
• What kind of support, if any, did you notice at school or in your community?

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. 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 your 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 4-5 are preferable. Maximum of four teams total.

Each person playing is instructed to write at least five names on five separate scraps of paper and put them into the hat. The names can be anyone related to LGBTQ issues (pro or con) - including politicians, sports players, actors/actresses, community leaders, performers, people from history.

Guidelines for choosing names: More obscure names are better. Easy to identify names are not as much fun. IMPORTANT: Don’t tell anyone what names you put in; if you do, those names can't be used. The name must be common. While it is not necessary for everybody playing to know who you are talking about, at least a few (3) must. Co-workers, friends, teachers, family, etc. are not allowed.

Rules of play: Player to start pulls 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 President Obama, she could say, “As president of the United States, I repealed the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell legislation.” 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.

When someone in the group guesses correctly, choose another name and have exactly one minute to get each 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. Names cannot be rejected for any reason. Only if one name goes through all the teams without being guessed can it be discarded. 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 themselves". 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 multiethnic 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.

**Possible GSA activities and events you can plan**

♦ Promote and celebrate school-wide or community events such as:
  • Day of Pink
  • Day of Silence
  • International Day Against Homophobia
  • Week Against Homophobia

♦ Participate in multicultural, antiracism, pride or women’s marches in your community.

♦ Push to get good resources about LGBTQ persons and issues in your school library.

♦ Meet with teachers and other staff on Professional Days.

♦ Invite reps from college or university LGBTQ groups, especially any who may have attended your school.

♦ Invite members of PFLAG, or any local queer groups, such as GabYouth.

♦ 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 LGBTQ communities.

♦ Learn about the diversity within the lives and communities of LGBTQs.

♦ Learn more about specific transgender issues and persons (via books, videos, and speakers).

♦ Make oral/written representations about LGBTQ concerns to school boards, service agencies.

♦ 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.

♦ Submit a write-up and/or photos about your GSA and its events to the school yearbook.
♦ Have conversations about healthy dating and relationships.

♦ Share and discuss books, videos, and other community resources. Discuss the LGBTQ characters or relationships in TV shows, books, or movies.

♦ 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 backyard. If it’s fun, consider having them once a quarter or semester, or at the end of the school year.

♦ Plan a Pride Dance or Pride Party (or any party!): Who needs a good excuse to hold a party? 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.

♦ 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.

♦ 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.

♦ 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.

♦ Organize local bands/performers to perform either at your school or in a community hall or church. This show could raise funds for the GSA.

♦ Host a Graduation Party: "Lavender graduations" are a great 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.
Tips and strategies for sustaining GSAs

1. Plan for student turnover and accept that as natural. Encourage the GSA to meet the needs of the current students involved.

2. Develop a mentoring program to build leadership capacity. Often grade 12 students lead the GSA. A mentoring program ensures that younger members have the skills and confidence to step into a leadership role once the grade 12 students graduate.

3. Each year brings with it new student interests and needs. The possibilities for the GSA will depend on the experience level and the comfort level of the group. Sometimes the group members may want guest speakers and workshops and another year the group may want to carry out school wide Day of Silence Activities or Day of Pink. The group needs to determine its activities each year.

4. Networking with other schools and GSA groups will provide ideas on how to sustain your group. Join forces to create a larger group with more energy.

5. Make sure the GSA is inclusive and invites students from all diverse groups. Include Aboriginal students, students of color, and any other students who may have experienced oppression. Internal diversity is strength in the group.

6. Ensure that students of a variety of ethnic and cultural minority youth who are new to the school feel they can be part of the GSA. Many students from a wide variety of backgrounds may have learned to internalize homophobia or transphobia. These may be punishable by death or imprisonment in many countries in the world and so they may need support.

7. Change takes time. Celebrate the groups successes and look at the long term. Share the history of what the group has accomplished.

8. Make sure the GSA is a safe, and welcoming space where people are respected for their differences and unique contributions.
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 LGBTQ 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 public library systems, and can be accessed throughout BC via inter-library loans.

**Fiction**


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 LGBTQ. These stories will help anyone reflecting on their own anxiety, isolation, excitement, pride, or hope for the future.

Hartinger, B.; *Geography Club*; 2003; ISBN 0-06-001221-8; This is a fast-paced funny tale about teens who don’t learn anything about geography, but discover plenty about the treacherous social terrain of high school. The book’s themes are friendship, first love, social conformity, peer pressure and alienation by homophobic peers. Find out how their Geography Club eventually becomes a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club at their school.

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 LGBTQs, 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.

Heugel, K.; *GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens*; 2003: ISBN 1-57542-126-7. Strategies and advice for teens about coming out, responding to homophobia, dating, staying healthy and safe, exercising your rights, life at school, community building, dealing with religion and culture and planning for the future. It includes first person comments from GLBTQ teens who are happy, well-adjusted, and loved and supported for who they are.

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

Blumenfeld, W. (ed); *Homophobia, How We All Pay the Price*. 1992; ISBN 0-8070-7919-7. This collection of short essays addresses homophobia and other oppressions, families, and societal manifestations of homophobia. It would be useful as general background about homophobia, for all educators. The appendix offers ideas for conducting anti-heterosexism workshops, although Blumenfeld, a noted educator in the area, has since published some more up-to-date material on sexual identity issues.


Pride Education Network: *Challenging Homophobia in Schools*; 2000; revised 2004 (available from http://pridenet.ca). Sections of this comprehensive manual (240 pages) include Rationale for addressing homophobia, Background on a variety of LGBTQ issues, Strategies for educators, many Lesson Plans (elementary and secondary), and Resources (books, videos, community groups). There is information on transgender issues and on legal changes for LGBTQs in Canada and BC.

Wells, Kristopher; Canadian Teachers’ Federation; *Gay-Straight Student Alliance Handbook*; 2006; A comprehensive resource for Canadian K-12 teachers, administrators, and school counsellors, full of practical ideas for educators. It promotes an inclusive, safe, and caring school environment.
Recommended LGBTQ video resources

The following resources are available to borrow from the BC Teachers’ Federation Video Library. To order a video, please e-mail video@bctf.ca and provide the details of your request.

**Dangerous Living: Coming Out in the Developing World** (60 min) c2003. First Run Features
By sharing the personal stories coming out of developing nations, this film sheds light on an emerging global movement striving to end discrimination and violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people.

**From Criminality to Equality**
40 years of lesbian and gay movement history in Canada from 1969 to 2009. A collection of four films (listed below) directed by Nancy Nicol.

- **Stand Together** (124 min.) c2002
  The film is a documentary on the lesbian and gay liberation movement in Canada between 1967 and 1987 focusing on the human rights amendment campaign in Ontario.

- **The Queer Nineties** (91 min.) c2009
  This film focuses on Charter Challenges for the recognition of same-sex relationships in law and how lesbians and gays won relationship recognition and adoption rights in most jurisdictions in Canada. It also chronicles the Surrey School Board ban of three children’s books which depicted same-sex parents in B.C. (1997); the role of ethno-diverse communities and labour within the LGBT movement; and the litigants and lawyers at the forefront of key Charter rights cases. This film takes a look at an amazing decade in the struggle for lesbian and gay equality in Canada.

- **Politics of the Heart** (68 min.) c2005
  Politics of the Heart / La politique du coeur (available in French and English versions) is a moving portrait of lesbian and gay families who re-shaped the cultural and political landscape of Quebec by fighting for recognition of their relationships, families and homoparental rights.

- **The End of Second Class** (91 min.) c2009
  The End of Second Class is a powerful documentary that traces the debate on same sex marriage in Canada up to the passage of equal marriage legislation on July 20, 2005.

**The Homophobia Project** (56 min) c2008. Peer Productions
The Homophobia Project tells the story of Janet and John, two heterosexuals growing up in a world turned upside down and back to front. The film explores their experiences in childhood and the school system as they navigate a world where same-sex relationships are the norm and heterosexuality is not. The film is adapted from the highly acclaimed play which toured UK schools in summer 2007. Powerful and provocative, it has proven to be an extremely effective way to confront both homophobia and homophobic bullying. Suitable for Grade 8 and up. A full Teacher's Pack with follow up work is included as e-connect. **Highly recommended.**

**In Other Words** (27 min) c2001. National Film Board
Language and the power of words are the theme here. We see the impact of homophobic name-calling on the growth and development of youth, aged 14 to 22. They share details of their lives and their struggles with their identity and their place in society. Important definitions are given, with historical animations about the derivation of some terms. Very positive messages for LGBTQ youth and their friends. Information for teachers provides background, discussion points, and activities. **Highly recommended.**
**It’s Elementary** (78 or 38 min) c2007. [www.womedia.org](http://www.womedia.org)

Described as funny, touching and fascinating, this ground-breaking, award-winning production presents a powerful case for making anti-gay prejudice an educational issue. Featuring work by elementary/middle school (up to Grade 9) students and interviews with teachers of varied sexual orientations, it demonstrates how elementary schools can successfully address this sensitive area of teaching respect for all. It models excellent teaching about family diversity, name-calling, stereotypes, community-building, and more. A 24-page viewing guide is included. Highly recommended.

**Laramie Inside Out** (56 min), c2004. New Day Films.

In October 1998, Wyoming college student Matthew Shepard was brutally beaten and left to die. His shocking murder pushed Laramie into the media spotlight and sparked a nationwide debate about homophobia, gay-bashing and hate crimes. Filmmaker Beverly Seckinger, a Laramie native, returns home to the site of her own closeted adolescence to investigate the impact of Shepard’s murder.

**Let’s Get Real** (35 min) c2003. [www.womedia.org](http://www.womedia.org)

Told entirely from a youth perspective, this video gives young people the chance to tell their own stories. It examines many issues that lead to taunting and bullying, including race, perceived sexual orientation, religion, learning disabilities, sexual harassment, and others. The film not only gives a voice to targeted kids, but also to those who bully, to find out why they lash out and how it makes them feel. The most heartening stories are those of kids who have mustered the courage to stand up for themselves or a friend.

**One of Them** (25 min) c2000. National Film Board

Six high school students plan a Human Rights Day, and have to confront their own difficulties in addressing homophobia that is manifested in several ways. The focus is on graffiti, name-calling, discrimination, and stereotypes, rather than sexual activity. Some characters seem very stereotypical, but they nonetheless portray the negative reactions and behaviours often seen in high schools. This dramatization prompts viewers to examine their own feelings, easily leading into class discussion. Background information and class activities are included on the video liner.

**One Summer in New Paltz: A Cautionary Tale** (54 min) c2009.

Set against a backdrop of the Bush administration’s policy of endless war and assault on civil liberties, One Summer in New Paltz is a cautionary tale of a young mayor of a small village who stunned his neighbours and the nation by performing 25 same-sex marriages in defiance of state law. As a result, thousands of gay couples flooded New Paltz seeking to be married. The film probes the debate on same-sex marriage and also documents the first day of legal same-sex marriages in Boston in May, 2004.

**Out in the Silence** (56 min); c2009. Qwaves Documentary Films

This video captures the remarkable chain of events that unfold when the announcement of filmmaker Joe Wilson’s wedding to another man ignites a firestorm of controversy in his small Pennsylvania hometown.

**StraightLaced: How Gender’s Got Us All Tied Up** (67 min) c2009. Groundspark

Straightlaced 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.
**Ugly Ducklings** (56 min) c2006. [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)
This documentary explores the realities of harassment, bullying and homophobia and its devastating effects on today's lesbian and gay youth. It promotes awareness, understanding and advocacy and supports a call for change in behaviours and policies regarding LGBTQ youth.

**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) e-mail: 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* (27 min) c2000. [www.educationalvideosplus.com](http://www.educationalvideosplus.com)
"Our Faces", from Seattle, is a compassionate look at the lives, trials and joys of LGBTQ 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) e-mail: 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) e-mail: 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.
Some useful websites, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers for GSAs

www.pridenet.ca—Pride Education Network
e-mail: 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.

GSA link with info about GSAs in BC
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, e-mail: glsen@glsen.org
212-727-0135
Lots of resources, articles, advocacy suggestions, news, links for students and educators

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.egale.ca—National climate survey of LGBTQ

www.qmunity.ca—GabYouth 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 for many PFLAG groups around BC, call 604-626-5667
Support for anyone with LGBTQ family members/friends and links to many resources and groups.

www.transalliancesociety.org—Trans Alliance Society (TAS)
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.

This site from the BC Teachers’ Federation offers LGBTQ resources, handbooks, lesson plans, posters, advocacy dates, free professional develop workshops and videos.
Notes on creating your own GSA