



An Administrator's Guide To Handling Anti-Gay (LGBTQ) Harassment

To protect and support a targeted young person, you should:

- **assure the targeted student that:**
 - you take what happened seriously.
 - you believe he or she deserves a safe learning environment.
 - he or she is **not** required to talk face-to-face with the offenders, even with a mediator present (bias-based harassment is substantially different from ordinary peer conflict).
- **offer the targeted student:**
 - first aid, if necessary, and a private room in which to recover and a telephone in case he or she wants to call a parent or guardian or some other responsible adult (e.g., counselor, spiritual advisor) or the police.
 - the chance to tell his or her side of the story.
 - help to problem-solve ways he or she might protect him or herself in the future ... but make *very* clear that you are not assuming that he or she is to blame for what happened.
 - the option of removing him or herself from danger (e.g., to drop the class where the harassment is happening, to change for PE somewhere else, etc.) ... but recognize that this might contribute to his or her social isolation, hence feeling more like punishment than protection.
- **remove the offenders** from the situation (transferring them to a different PE class, banning them from the bus, etc.).
- **arrange for staff to be present** wherever the harassment has been occurring (e.g., in the south corridor before and after lunch or next to the basketball court during second grade recess).
- **encourage the targeted student to report retribution**, if the offender(s) are disciplined, but also **arrange for your staff to be vigilant** so that if there is retribution the targeted young person won't have to be the only one reporting it.
- **keep a record** of the events in the permanent files of the targeted student, with his or her permission, and of the offenders, if there has been any disciplinary action. Also keep an incident report on file in a malicious harassment log, so that patterns can be discerned and on-going problems can be addressed.

To investigate what happened, you should:

- **interview all the witnesses**, as well as the protagonists, so that if the offenders are disciplined it will not be *only* the targeted student who turned them in.
- **involve the police** if you believe a crime may have been committed (including malicious harassment), or **Child Protective Services**, especially if you believe a child is in serious jeopardy of further harm.

To discipline and educate the offenders, you can:

- **explain to them why** their behavior is so wrong, beyond its simply violating a rule.
- **reprimand them** in a serious no-nonsense tone.
- **warn them** that if the behavior continues they'll be disciplined.
- **require them** to write a note of apology or to make restitution or do relevant community service.
- **discipline them** in a way that is consistent with what is done for other forms of malicious harassment (for example, if the offender used a gay slur while hitting someone, you might want to discipline him/her not just for assault but in whatever way an assault accompanied by a racial or religious or disability-related slur would be handled).



- **call their parent(s) or guardian(s)**, if the offenders are students.
- **counsel them**, if the offenders are employees, and if their actions don't improve, **use progressive discipline**.

To support your staff, you should:

- **assure a targeted staff person that:**
 - you take what happened seriously.
 - you believe he or she deserves a safe working environment.
 - you will do everything in your power to make sure school is safe for him or her.
 - you will not tolerate retribution for his or her having reported the incident.
- **consider an employee's professionalism and competence to be the ONLY criteria for working in your school** and say so to any student, employee, or parent who questions whether someone they perceive to be gay belongs in this career.
- **provide your staff on-going training** in how to enforce your school's malicious harassment policy ... how to intervene, educate, discipline and protect students, visitors and staff.
- **follow up when an employee enforces your school's harassment policy**, ensuring that the students (accused offender, target, and bystanders) know that you endorse what the teacher (secretary, counselor) said were the rules.

To prevent future incidents, you should:

- **announce and post a firm anti-harassment policy** (one which explicitly prohibits orientation-based harassment along with other forms of harassment and which spells out specific consequences) in faculty meetings and student assemblies every year.
- **educate your student body** so that even if they don't like homosexuality they will not turn a deaf ear on harassment. Education should dispel stereotypes, provide accurate information, and build students' skills for standing up for themselves and their peers non-violently.
- **provide age-appropriate forms for written reports and also systems for informal reporting** (which can be done confidentially) **and anonymous reporting**. Explain to students and staff that you can't initiate *discipline* with an anonymous or confidential report, because it would violate an accused person's rights, but that you can and will launch an *investigation* ... not of an individual but of a dangerous location or time of day. Explain that you will take all reports seriously.

For the sake of consistent, aggressive policy enforcement:

- **inform your supervisor** (superintendent, school board president, or whomever you report to) of serious infractions of your school district's harassment policy, especially if you take disciplinary actions and you have the slightest concern that your judgment will be challenged. Your supervisor can support you only with full understanding of your investigation and conclusions.

The bottom line is ...

Legally and ethically, you must do whatever is necessary to stop harassment against all students and staff, including harassment based on race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, language of origin, or physical or mental abilities. When they are safe, teachers can teach and students can learn.