

They don't even  
know me!

## Understanding Anti-Gay Harassment and Violence in Schools



A Report On the Five Year Anti-Violence Research Project  
Of the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington State

January, 1999



The Safe Schools Coalition is a public-private partnership of eighty-four agencies and many individuals. Its mission is to help make Washington State schools safe places where every family can belong, where every educator can teach, and where every child can learn, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Permission is granted to photocopy this report.  
The Research Team accepts full responsibility for its contents.

**Note** — some contact information for the Safe Schools Coalition was updated on 11/16/02.

## 84 Organizational Members of the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington

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- ◆ American Friends Service Committee
- ◆ Association For Sexuality Education and Training (ASSET)
- ◆ Bainbridge Island School District's Multicultural Advisory Council
- ◆ Benton/Franklin Council for Children and Youth
- ◆ Bremerton-Kitsap County Health District
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- ◆ League of Women Voters of Washington
- ◆ Lesbian Resource Center
- ◆ NW AIDS Foundation
- ◆ Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity (a merger of the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment and the Coalition for Human Dignity)
- ◆ OASIS
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- ◆ Out Front Labor Coalition
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- ◆ Peace Action of Washington
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- ◆ Spokane Public Schools' Equity Education Office
- ◆ Stonewall Recovery Services
- ◆ Tacoma-Pierce County Department of Public Health
- ◆ Teen Line
- ◆ The Eastside Network (TEN)
- ◆ University of Washington School of Medicine, Adolescent Medicine Program
- ◆ Washington Association of School Social Workers
- ◆ Washington Education Association (WEA)
- ◆ Washington Education Association's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Allies' Caucus
- ◆ Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction
- ◆ Washington State University's Department of Residence Life
- ◆ Western Washington Fellowship of Reconciliation
- ◆ Yakima Education Association
- ◆ Yakima Youth Commission
- ◆ Youth Eastside Services (YES)
- ◆ Youthcare

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**We are indebted to Dr. Robert Bidwell who, as a member of the Seattle Commission on Children and Youth, chaired the landmark 1988 hearings on the needs of GLBT youth and founded the committee that would become the Safe Schools Coalition.**

**We also wish to gratefully acknowledge the courageous people who reported these incidents and the counselors at Seattle Counseling Service who took their calls.**

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**The Safe Schools Coalition has had the great honor of receiving awards from:**

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Gay, Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN), in 1997  
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Equality Washington/Washington Citizens for Fairness, in 1998  
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A current list of our members, contributors and donors is on our website: <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/>  
We apologize if anyone's contributions to the Safe Schools Project or the Coalition have been inadvertently omitted.

## Dedication

With the gracious consent of Bill Clayton's family, this report is dedicated to the memories of Bill and the other young person (whose name was not reported to us) who took their own lives as a result of anti-gay harassment and violence. Bill's parents, Gabi and Alec, asked that this report also honor all the young people who have survived.

### Bill Clayton, 1978-1995

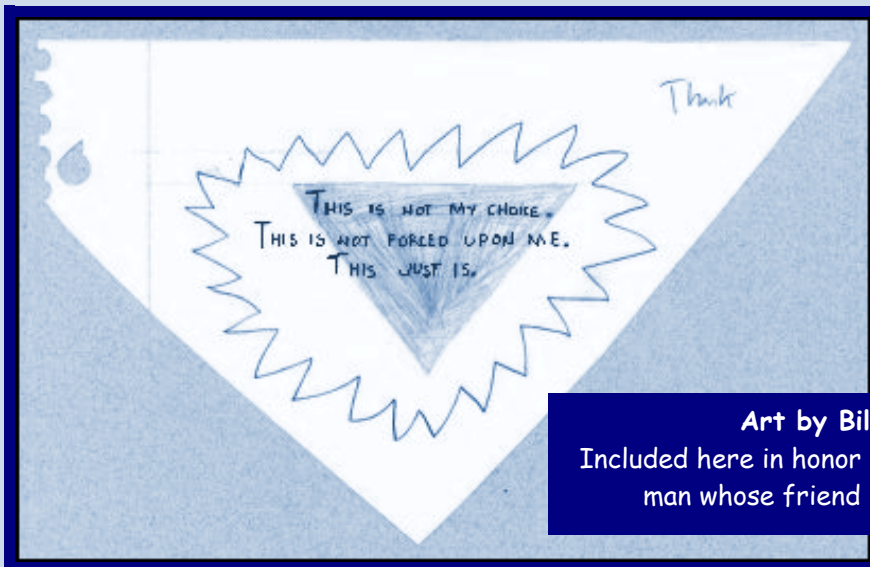


Bill at age 1- $\frac{1}{2}$



Bill at age 14- $\frac{1}{2}$

### and a Nameless Young Man (Incident 98)



Art by Bill Clayton  
Included here in honor of the nameless young man whose friend reported suicide.

*with hope for a safer future*



## Director of Public Health Speaks Out against Anti-gay Violence Lauds Safe Schools Project

January 4, 1999

Dr. Alonzo L. Plough, Director, Seattle-King County Department of Public Health, issued the following statement about this report:

"Harassment and violence perpetrated against anyone are wrong, and prevention of these acts is a crucial public health concern.

The personal stories of anti-gay harassment and violence recounted in this final *Safe Schools Report* are horrifying, and the acts described are outrageous. I am angered and deeply pained by the cruelty and devastation described in the report. We cannot allow these kinds of bias crimes to continue to be perpetrated in our schools or anywhere. These crimes not only affect sexual minority youth, but also diminish the educational experience of all our young people.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered children are precious and vital members of our community. They deserve to be and feel safe -- whether in schools, on the street, or in their homes. We need to do more to protect them from anti-gay harassment and violence in our schools, and we need to do more to support them (and all children that experience prejudice) so that they will grow into healthy, happy, and contributing adults.

I am proud that the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health is a part of the Safe Schools Coalition, and I congratulate the people who collected the data and stories in the 1999 Safe Schools Report. This is a fine report that brings light to a troubling problem. The stories and testimonies collected in the report are devastating, but they serve the crucial purpose of exposing the truth. Harassment and violence that are not recognized cannot be stopped. I pledge the Public Health Department's continuing support for this life-saving work.

Finally, I want to express condolences to both of the families which lost children because of anti-gay prejudice and violence. I also wish to express my sympathy and gratitude to all of the children, families, and educators who shared their stories with the Safe Schools Research Project."

# CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>THE SAFE SCHOOLS ANTI-VIOLENCE RESEARCH PROJECT</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Findings of the Safe Schools Project, 1994-1998	8
What happened in these 111 incidents?	8
When and where did this harassment and violence happen?	9
Who was targeted?	11
Who were the offenders?	11
How did youth witnesses respond?	12
How were targeted individuals affected?	13
How were students who witnessed these incidents affected?	17
Why were some incidents never reported to school authorities?	18
How did families respond, when they knew about the harassment?	18
Educators' Strategies: How did school employees handle the harassment?	19
Respondents' Recommendations: How did respondents wish their principals had handled the incidents?	22
<b>INCIDENTS (one hundred-eleven narratives)</b>	<b>26</b>
No Specific Individuals Targeted [1-11]	26
Elementary School Students Targeted [12-18]	29
Middle School and Junior High Students Targeted [19-30]	32
Freshmen and Sophomores Targeted [31-57]	35
Juniors and Seniors Targeted [58-92]	44
High School Students Targeted (Mixed Grades or Grade Not Reported) [93-102]	58
School Employees, Parents, and Guest Speakers Targeted [103-111]	61
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>65</b>
A: Definitions, Laws, And Policies - by Karen Kane	65
B: Towards An Appropriate Response to the Problem of Anti-Gay* Harassment in Schools - by Carolyn Halley	69
<b>INDEX OF INCIDENTS</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Order and Membership Forms</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Inside Back Cover — QUESTION and ANSWER</b>	
What will the Safe Schools Coalition be doing now that the Safe Schools Anti-Violence Research Project is completed? Lots of things! Contact information	
<b>BACK COVER - Please copy and post prominently.</b>	

\* The term 'anti-gay' is used here as shorthand for acts of harassment or violence based on the offenders' bias against gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender people. Apologies to those who may feel slighted. We felt that a mainstream audience would not understand the terms 'GLBT' or 'queer' or 'sexual minority;' we chose 'gay' as the best understood brief term.







## Understanding Anti-Gay Harassment and Violence in Schools

### A Report of the Five Year Research Project of the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington State

January 1999

## Executive Summary

The **Safe Schools Coalition** is a public-private partnership of seventy-four offices, agencies and organizations as well as many individuals. Its mission is to help make Washington State schools safe places where every family can belong, where every educator can teach, and where every child can learn, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

The **Safe Schools Project** (one activity of the Coalition) was a five-year, statewide qualitative study examining the phenomenon of anti-gay harassment and violence in schools, kindergarten through grade twelve. All the incidents and patterns of harassment described in this report occurred at school or partly on school property, or on the way to or from school, or at a school-sponsored event, such as a field trip or a basketball game. In five school years, **one hundred forty six incidents** have been reported to the Project. **One hundred and eleven** met the Project's criteria as examples of Washington State, school-based anti-gay harassment and violence.<sup>1</sup>

- ◆ The hundred and eleven incidents we analyzed came from:
  - at least **73 schools**, including seven elementary schools, fifteen junior high and middle schools, forty high schools, and eleven other schools (alternative schools, a reservation school, a private school).
  - at least **37 public school districts** (urban, suburban, small town and rural)
  - **13 counties**.
- ◆ The incidents included:
  - eleven in which no specific individual was targeted (e.g., anti-gay slurs, sometimes expressed by teachers).
  - one hundred others, in which a total of 148 individuals were harassed or attacked, including:
    - \* eight incidents in which all of the targeted people were adults.
    - \* ninety-two incidents in which students were harassed or attacked ... in seven cases, by adults. (In eighteen other cases, adults were not the offenders per se, but they did something that actively contributed to a student's feeling harmed. For example, one principal made a young lesbian start changing for PE by herself, away from the locker room, after her classmates began verbally harassing her.)
- ◆ Adults responded in various ways to these ninety-two incidents in which students were targeted:

<sup>1</sup> See Methodology in this report for a list of these criteria and discussion of the remaining thirty-five reports

- In one-third of incidents, **adults did nothing**. In ten of these cases, at least one adult was supportive, but none took protective action. In the other cases, the adults were silent or blaming.
  - In one-third of incidents, **at least one adult stood up for a child** (even if others were not supportive). These adults included parents and guardians; teachers, counselors, school secretaries, principals and vice principals; district-level administrators; staff people from community agencies; school security guards, police officers, a school bus driver and a referee. Some of their stories offer creative strategies as models for others.
  - In one-third of incidents **there were no adult witnesses and the problem was never reported to school employees** or adults' responses are unknown. Some of these were never called to adults' attention because students feared their responses. In some cases previous requests for help had been allegedly denied or disparaged.
- ◆ By category of offense, the one-hundred and eleven incidents counted by the Project have included:
- **Eight gang rape incidents** in which a total of 11 people were raped. Two of those who were raped were sixth graders. This was the only rape incident that a respondent said had been reported to the police. This respondent did not say whether the offenders were charged or convicted.
  - **Twenty-two other physical assaults** on a total of 24 people. They were hit, kicked, punched, and/or injured with weapons. Seven were treated by a doctor or a nurse (four in hospitals and emergency rooms) for cuts, contusions, cracked ribs and/or broken bones.
  - **Seventeen cases of physical harassment and/or sexual assault, short of rape**. These included such things as offenders spitting on someone, throwing something at them, cornering them, pushing them around, pulling their clothes up or off or down, or grabbing or groping them.
  - **Thirty-eight cases of on-going verbal and other harassment**. In these cases, an offender wrote graffiti about a person, for example, or "outed" them (spread rumors about their sexual orientation), threatened to harm or kill them, or publicly humiliated them on an on-going basis.
  - **Twenty-six one-time, climate setting incidents**. These entailed things such as name-calling, offensive jokes, etc. In one incident, a first grader was called "faggot" on the playground. Perplexed and embarrassed, he later asked his father what it meant. The father explained it was a derogatory term for gay people. His child wasn't traumatized by the incident, but the father was troubled enough to call the Safe Schools Project.
- ◆ The ratio of offenders to the people they targeted was at least **2½ against 1**.
- ◆ What made the offenders think the 148 people they targeted in these 111 incidents were gay or lesbian? From reports, we know that:
- 38 people had defended the civil rights of sexual minorities or had GLBT friends.
  - 34 people were openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (GLBT).
  - 31 people were apparently perceived to fit GLBT stereotypes (e.g., girls with short hair, a boy who was soft-spoken and who studied during free time).
  - 23 people were attacked for no apparent reason. Some callers did not say or did not know why the offenders had attacked these particular individuals. Others were not sure the offenders had even believed their targets to be gay; they may have simply been using an anti-gay slur in a teasing or an angry way.
  - 15 people had come out privately (e.g., to a friend or sibling) as a sexual minority and their confidentiality was broken.
  - 5 people were "found out" (e.g., their diary was stolen or their locker broken into).
  - 2 people were attacked as gay because they had HIV.
- ◆ At least seven of those who were targeted were self-identified as heterosexual.
- ◆ Twelve children and youth changed schools (in some cases, multiple times) to try to escape the abuse. **Ten young people eventually dropped out** (including three who had changed schools first).
- ◆ Ten young people attempted suicide. **Two young people committed suicide**. (One suicide was reported by a young man's mother and the other, which followed suicide attempts, was reported by a close friend.)

# The Safe Schools Anti-Violence Research Project

## Introduction

*"Daddy, do you know what a 'faggot' is?"* As the incident with this title illustrates (incident 12), even before they know the meaning of the words, children (in this case a six-year-old) learn what it feels like to be bullied with anti-gay slurs.

Anti-gay bullying and violence are certainly not the only forms of malicious harassment in schools today. On the contrary, more teens report having been harassed because of their race or their gender than because someone thought they were gay or lesbian. But anti-gay harassment has been the least well understood of the common forms of malicious harassment in schools. Until now, it had not been systematically studied from the perspective of students and families and educators. So in 1994, the Safe Schools Coalition began a five-year qualitative study, the Safe Schools Project, to examine anti-gay harassment and violence in Washington State schools, kindergarten through twelfth grade.<sup>2</sup>

The Project conducted in-depth, confidential one-on-one interviews with a total of one hundred seventeen people, regarding one hundred eleven separate anti-gay incidents.<sup>3</sup> The incidents reflect a continuum of abuse, ranging from the telling of anti-gay jokes to the public humiliation of an individual child to physical assaults and gang rapes.

It is important to recognize that the findings of qualitative studies are not framed primarily as numbers and percentages. Instead, the Project can help guide program planning efforts to make schools safer for every child, parent and educator, by answering such questions as:

**What kinds of things happen in these incidents? What is the nature of anti-gay harassment and violence in schools?**

**When and where do these acts of harassment and violence seem to happen?**

**Who may be targeted? Who is vulnerable?**

**Who may be offenders?**

**How do youth witnesses seem to respond?**

**How do targeted individuals say they are affected?**

**How do students who witness these incidents say they are affected?**

**Why do targets, witnesses, friends and family members sometimes choose not to report incidents to school authorities?**

**How do families seem to respond, when they know about the harassment?**

**How do school employees handle the harassment (from the perspective of students and families, as well as educators)?**

**How do respondents wish their principals had handled the incidents, assuming they knew what had happened?**

This report explains what we learned, followed by the narrative versions of all one hundred eleven incidents. Forty-seven of those stories have been published in the previous annual reports. Sixty-four are recounted for the first time in this final report.

<sup>2</sup> This report uses the term "anti-gay" as shorthand to include incidents motivated by bias against Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender people. (Transgender is an umbrella term increasingly preferred by people who are transsexual or intersexual or who are significantly gender role non-conforming.)

<sup>3</sup> This figure excludes 35 reports which failed to meet one or more of the criteria for inclusion (see see page 4) or in which the caller declined to give Safe Schools permission for including his or her story, even anonymously, in the annual report.

# Methodology

The Safe Schools Project was a qualitative study involving individual interviews. The first drafts of the research instrument were adapted from two sources. Some items came directly from "Hostile Hallways," the landmark 1993 national study of sexual harassment in schools conducted by Louis Harris and Associates for the American Association of University Women. Other items were adapted to the school setting from the Incident Report Form of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Anti-Violence Project. Still others were developed to answer specific research questions (e.g., "How do families respond, when they know about the harassment?"). Patricia Fullmer of the Gilmore Research Group and Bill Wassmuth of the Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity (a merger of the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment and the Coalition for Human Dignity) both offered helpful consultation in the crafting of the original interview questions.

Respondents included sixty-five individuals who had been targeted, fifty-eight of whom were children or teens and seven of whom were adults. Other respondents included twenty-one witnesses and thirty-one individuals who learned of an incident after the fact, usually from the person who had been harassed or attacked. Specifically, respondents were as follow:

**Table 1: Respondents' Relationships to the Incidents They Reported**

Youth			Professional			Parent	
target	witness	Friend of targeted student	target	witness	Learned of incident in prof. capacity	witness	Confidant of child target or child witness
58	9	5	7*	9	16	3	10

\*one of

whom

was also an offender. See incident 111.

Initially, while the research instrument was being developed, members of the research team conducted thirteen face-to-face interviews. These initial respondents included the participants of one focus group and members of several existing support groups in three counties. Interviews were conducted in private, not in the presence of other group members. After the initial thirteen interviews, all subsequent interviews were conducted by phone, through a statewide, toll-free number (1-800-5B-PROUD) on the initiative of the respondent.

Respondents were solicited in a number of ways. Over the past five school years, the Safe Schools Coalition has mailed annual reports and posters to every public school nurse, librarian, principal, social worker and counselor in Washington State (though not to each of these groups every year). The Coalition has made presentations about the Project at professional conferences and human rights events. We have held annual press conferences and been interviewed by dozens of television, radio and print journalists. Some respondents said they learned of the Project from these sources (posters, presentations, media coverage). Some learned of the Project from the Safe Schools website (<http://www.safeschools-wa.org>) or the Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender-Questioning Youth Info Line (206-322-7900). Most callers said they learned of the Project in a more direct person-to-person way. They reported that a school employee, a family member, or someone from a community agency encouraged them to report what happened.

The interviews were conducted by trained counselors from the crisis and information line of Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual Minorities, a state-licensed community mental health agency. In addition to their training as counselors, these interviewers received two hours of training specifically regarding the administration of the survey instrument.

The ninety-three item survey instrument required thirty to forty-five minutes to complete. A number of people have expressed concern that so long and emotionally arduous an interview probably discourages many people from reporting. However, it is less crucial in this kind of descriptive research effort to gather large numbers of incident reports, than it is to have complete and valid data. Thus, the full-length interviews were preserved for three reasons:

- ◆ because of the depth of information required,
- ◆ to discourage false reporting and to screen for internal consistency, and
- ◆ to allow time to assess callers' emotional needs periodically throughout the interview.

To qualify for inclusion in the Safe Schools Project, an interview had to meet six criteria:

1. It had to include a detailed account of a specific incident of harassment or violence, *and*
2. There had to be sufficient objective facts to lead to the reasonable conclusion that the offenders' actions were based in whole or in part on their bias against Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgender (GLBT) people. The offenders may have:
  - a. said something to indicate that they believed the person was Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender before or during the incident, *or*
  - b. used defamatory language or gestures regarding GLBT people during the incident, *or*
  - c. defaced something that bore a symbol of support for GLBT civil rights (such as a pink triangle or a Safe Staff List), *and*
3. The entire incident or part of the pattern of incidents had to have occurred since 1990, *and*
4. The entire incident or part of the pattern of incidents had to have occurred:
  - a. on public or private school property (K-12) in Washington State, *or*
  - b. on the way to or from a Washington State school (e.g., at the bus stop), *or*
  - c. at an event sponsored by a Washington State school (e.g., sporting event, field trip, etc.), *and*
5. The interview had to be complete enough that members of the research committee could, independently of one another, screen it for internal consistency (e.g., the date-of-birth and the target's age must agree) and verifiable facts,<sup>4</sup> *and*
6. The interviewer and the research team had to be very confident that the call was legitimate. If either the interviewer or the committee had serious reason to be skeptical about the call's legitimacy, for example if the caller's tone of voice had seemed incongruent with the severity of a recent incident, it was excluded.

## The Thirty-Five Interviews We Couldn't Use

Altogether, one hundred eleven incidents met those criteria and thirty-five did not. Many of these thirty-five were probably legitimate reports. They were excluded for a variety of reasons. Eighteen were too incomplete to be checked for internal consistency or analyzed. Some of these were, nonetheless, every bit as compelling as those which were designated "valid." Most of these callers were too distraught to finish their interviews and counseling took precedence. One was a mom whose son was harassed relentlessly at school (e.g., "faggot," "suck my dick."), but whose principal wouldn't do anything, allegedly because, "It doesn't have anything to do with being gay."

In five interviews, the caller couldn't focus on a single incident to report. Some of these callers apparently felt too overwhelmed by a relentless pattern of harassment to narrow their reports to a single incident. Others were acquaintances of the target, unfamiliar with enough of the details to report any single incident in depth. In one interview, for example, a friend of a young man's grandmother called to report that the family had withdrawn him from school and was home-schooling him, because he had experienced so much anti-gay harassment at school. But she couldn't give the specifics of any of the incidents that led up to the student's being withdrawn from school.

One of the thirty-five reports was omitted because the research committee felt that, strictly speaking, the particular incident on which the respondent focused was an example of orientation-based discrimination, but not of harassment per se:

<sup>4</sup> In an effort to balance the commitment of the Safe Schools Project to protect callers' confidentiality with the need to verify information, the only facts verified by the research team were those that were easily obtainable from public record. For instance, the name of the school, if provided by the caller, must be a real school and not a pseudonym.

*This teacher has been experiencing harassment for years. He reports that his tormentors have included parents and students. Students have called him a "fag" to his face or behind his back as he passed them in the hall. A parent wrote a letter to the superintendent questioning whether a man with a ponytail was an appropriate role model for children. Another parent has been trying to get his certification revoked. One father allegedly threatened to "beat the fuck out of" him. One student the teacher didn't even know asked him, "How are the gerbils?" referring apparently to the urban myth that gay men have sex with the rodents. But now that his district has let him down, after all these years of abuse, the teacher wants people to know about it:*

*This incident begins in 1993, when the targeted teacher collects more signatures from fellow union members on behalf of gay-protective contract language than anyone else collects on any other issue. His union, trying to protect him (and others) from what has become a hostile environment, proceeds to ask for orientation-protective language in the teaching contract and the district's personnel policies.*

*Then comes what feels to the target like a reportable offense: Signatures notwithstanding, the eight-person district negotiating team refuses to consider the protections.*

*When the teacher calls to report it, he says that countless colleagues have expressed their disappointment to him and their anger. Their support has helped. But he still has what he describes as "an overriding draining feeling." It was the ultimate slap in the face.*

The research team debated at length what to do with this report (above). We didn't believe we could legitimately count the district's refusal as an act of "harassment." It was more a matter of failure to protect an employee from harassment than an act of harassment in and of itself. We considered counting one of the earlier incidents as the actual offense, and the district's refusal to protect their gay employees as analogous to a principal's failing to protect a student following a pattern of harassment. We simply did not have enough information about any one of the preceding incidents to do this and felt it would be distorting the respondent's perspective, because he had reported the district's action as the central offense. Thus, it is among the thirty-five reports we have not included in the body of this report, not because there were not serious violations of the teacher's human rights, but because the actual incident on which the caller focused failed to meet the criterion of "an incident of harassment or violence."

Other interviews were omitted from the final data set because:

- ◆ the incidents (2) turned out not to have been school-based,
- ◆ the incidents (2) occurred outside Washington State,
- ◆ the incident (1) constituted classic sexual harassment, not necessarily based on the offender's anti-gay bias,
- ◆ the committee had concerns about the veracity of the report (2),
- ◆ the respondent (1) had a disability that hampered communication and, although the incident may well have been a legitimate one, the committee found the incident report too confusing to analyze, *and*
- ◆ the respondents (3) declined to grant permission for their use, even anonymously, in this Report.

## **Ethical Considerations in the Study Design**

***Counseling:*** The Safe Schools Coalition's research team felt very strongly that it would be unethical to ask respondents to share their sometimes-brutal stories without offering immediate mental health counseling (not just referral) to those who needed it. Hence, we decided to use the trained counselors at a state-licensed mental health agency to collect the data, rather than ordinary researchers. And indeed many callers went on to talk with the counselor at length after the interview was completed or even terminated the interview because they were too distraught and their counseling needs took precedence over the research. We feel very strongly, especially in retrospect, that other researchers who may want to replicate our study need to keep callers' counseling needs in mind.

***Referral For Counseling, Peer Support Groups, & Communities Of Worship:*** The research team felt that offering referrals was ethically vital in a project of this kind. No comprehensive statewide resource list existed when we began the Project, so we felt it was our responsibility to create one. Hence, the development of the Safe Schools Resource Guide. We are continuing to explore ways of improving its usefulness to students and families and educators. A wonderful model for developing gay-friendly referral information comes from the Interior AIDS Association (IAA) in Fairbanks, Alaska. When the IAA was preparing to launch a counseling and information line for sexual minority youth, they wanted

to assess the gay-friendliness of all kinds of Fairbanks-area community resources to whom they would potentially be referring young callers. They sent a written survey to each agency and organization, and followed it up with phone contact. For more information, contact Bonnie McCorquodale or Carey Cummings at IAA (E-mail: [iaa@polarnet.com](mailto:iaa@polarnet.com)).

**Referral For Legal Assistance:** The Safe Schools Coalition is a partnership that includes among its members various professional associations and unions as well as some offices within school districts. It is certainly not our role to generate suits against districts or individual educators. We did believe, however, from the outset, that it was our ethical responsibility to help link respondents with legal advisors if they should initiate the request. Some have. We would encourage researchers who replicate our efforts to identify attorneys who might be available if callers ever ask for their assistance.

**Intervention/Advocacy:** The research team rejected the suggestion that the Project ought to have been conducted through a single national hot line. A major reason for our insistence on limiting it to a statewide effort was our sense that it would be unethical to ask respondents to share their stories without offering face-to-face assistance in resolving problems at school, if the caller requested it. Accordingly, we have established a system of advocacy whereby callers get various forms of assistance, upon request. For example, we have on occasion:

- ◆ gone with a student or parent or educator to their principal to negotiate for their safe access to school,
- ◆ problem-solved with a caller, so that he or she could negotiate for him or herself,
- ◆ offered technical assistance and staff development to a school district as a consequence of an incident (without specifying the nature of the incident, if the caller felt that doing so might endanger him or her), and
- ◆ provided a support person to sit with a young person while he gave a police report.

**Confidentiality:** There are legal constraints as well as ethical constraints on the degree to which professional counselors and researchers can protect a client's or respondent's confidentiality. There were two occasions, for instance, when the agency conducting the Safe Schools interviews (Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual Minorities) and the research team itself, needed to make a report to Child Protective Services.

But short of that circumstance, the Coalition has gone to great lengths to protect respondents' privacy. On one occasion, in fact, when our records were subpoenaed in the course of a civil suit, we were able to protect a caller's privacy when s/he had not provided specific written consent to disclose his/her identity.

And in spite of our wish to publicize the findings of the Project, we have resisted allowing young people to speak to the press, with very few exceptions, even when they wanted to. It has been the experience of those of us who work closely with youth that, in their passion for justice, they do not always anticipate the costs (sometimes high) of self-disclosure. Without intending to patronize, we consider it the ethical responsibility of researchers like ourselves to pay attention to the fine line between helping young people to make their voices heard and protecting their privacy and well-being.

# Findings

## What happened in these incidents?

Altogether one hundred seventeen people were interviewed by the Project regarding one hundred eleven separate (qualifying) incidents. Those incidents fall into five categories of offenses.

### *Category One: One-Time, Climate Setting Incidents*<sup>5</sup>

Respondents described *twenty-six* events that we have called "one-time, climate setting incidents." These callers described such behaviors as name-calling, offensive jokes and insulting gestures. In some of these twenty-six, the respondent witnessed a single event and was not sure if it was part of an on-going pattern. Some of these incidents may have seemed relatively trivial to onlookers. The respondents, however, found them disturbing. Some expressed concern that these less overtly violent incidents seem to serve as invitations to more intense harassment, especially when adults perpetrate them or fail to intervene.

In one interview, a concerned mom said she attended a pep rally at her child's school in which the "entertainment" included the comedic reenactment of a gay-bashing. Many teachers, along with students, laughed and applauded.

In another incident, a first grader was called "faggot" on the playground. Perplexed and embarrassed, he later asked his father what it meant. The father explained it was a derogatory term for gay people. His child wasn't traumatized by the incident, but the father was troubled enough to call the Safe Schools Project.

In several cases, teachers allegedly made insulting remarks about gay people, apparently not directing their remarks at any particular individual. In several other cases, teachers intervened quickly and firmly when students made insulting remarks to their peers.

### *Category Two: On-Going Verbal And Other Harassment*<sup>6</sup>

Respondents focused on *thirty-eight* incidents that were part of patterns of on-going verbal and other harassment. (When there were long periods of abuse, callers were asked to focus, during the interview, on a single incident within the longer pattern of incidents.) In these cases, someone wrote graffiti about a person, for example, or "outed" them (spread rumors about their sexual orientation), threatened to harm or kill them, or publicly humiliated them on an on-going basis. Nothing physical was done, at least not in the specific incident these respondents chose to focus on, but some of the targeted children and adults were harassed or attacked over a period of months or, in some cases, years.

One young man described receiving malicious phone calls at home, after someone wrote his phone number on a bathroom wall at school. He also received written death threats in his locker at school and had his journal stolen. For him, the most frightening thing was a blackmail note, threatening to make his journal public if he reported the threats and the theft.

Other respondents talked about relentless name-calling. Some targets tried to ignore the bullies; others said ignoring them didn't help. One teacher repeatedly chose to ignore students' calling him (the teacher) a "faggot." One of his students was upset enough to call the Safe Schools Project.

Many respondents described trying to handle on-going bullying themselves; some said they sought help from adults. Sometimes they got the help they needed; sometimes not. One eight-year-old, for instance, was repeatedly harassed on the playground. He told playground teachers twice, but they did nothing to stop the bullying. The third time the bully called him a "faggot," a fight ensued.

<sup>5</sup> Category One narratives are incidents 1-10, 12, 19-20, 31-33, 58-63, 93-94 and 103-104.

<sup>6</sup> Category Two narratives are incidents 11, 13-15, 21-24, 34-41, 64-75, 95-98, and 105-110.



### ***Category Three: Physical Harassment and/or Sexual Assault, Short Of Rape***<sup>7</sup>

Respondents described **seventeen** incidents of physical harassment and/or sexual assault, short of rape. These included such things as people spitting on someone, throwing something at them, cornering them, pushing them around, pulling their clothes up or off or down, or attempting to rape them. (While many of these seventeen incidents would be legally classified as assaults, we reserved the use of that term for category four, in which people were hit, punched, kicked or attacked with weapons.)

One young man, for example, described being pushed around and called names ("Queer," "Sissy," etc.) by a group of seven or eight other high school guys. When asked if he went to the principal about the incident, he said he hadn't, because, he explained, he was embarrassed and scared. He thinks a couple of the offenders are white supremacists. They talk about white power in class and the caller said he has never heard a teacher respond.

### ***Category Four: Physical Assaults***<sup>8</sup>

Respondents told of **twenty-two** physical assaults (not counting the rapes, below). In these assaults, children and teens were hit, kicked, punched, and/or attacked with weapons. There were no adults assaulted in these incidents.

Seven young people were treated by a doctor or a nurse (four in hospitals and emergency rooms) for cuts, contusions, cracked ribs and/or broken bones. Regardless of the extent of their physical injuries, nearly all of these targeted children and teens characterized the emotional toll from the assaults and the harassment that accompanied them as a 4 or a 5 on a 1-5 scale (where 1 is "no hurt" and 5 is "devastated").

### ***Category Five: Gang Rapes***<sup>9</sup>

Respondents told us of **eight** gang rapes in which a total of eleven people were raped. Two of those who were raped were sixth graders. Theirs was the only rape incident that a respondent said had been reported to the police. (The respondent did not say whether the offenders were charged or convicted.) One rape was also reported by the Safe Schools Project to Child Protective Services.

In three cases, besides raping the person, the attackers also urinated on him or her. In two cases, they ejaculated on the targeted individuals. In one, they vomited on the person. In one case, they broke a teen's hand. Two people were forced to watch as others were raped (in one case, a partner; in the other, a friend).

Four of the eleven rape targets were boys and young men, raped in three separate incidents. In two of those incidents, all the offenders were male. In one case, the offenders were a group of three young men and one young woman.

Young women also reported being raped mostly, but not always, by males. Four young women reported being raped by all-male groups of assailants. In one case, a young woman was raped by a mixed group of two young men and a young woman. And in one case four young men allegedly coerced a female teacher to have sex with a female student. The teacher, who reported the incident to the Project, felt she had been raped and we have counted her among the targets, but the research committee also counts her as an offender. Hers was the incident reported to Child Protective Services.

## **When and where did this harassment and violence happen?**

We received reports of incidents that occurred in every month of the school year, however October and January showed definite peaks. Not surprisingly, more respondents described incidents that happened between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. than at other times of day, but six of the eight rapes occurred at 3 or 3:30 p.m., after school (five of those six, on school property).

<sup>7</sup> Category Three narratives are incidents 16, 25, 42-47, and 76-84.

<sup>8</sup> Category Four narratives are incidents 17, 26-30, 48-55, 85-91 and 99.

<sup>9</sup> Category Five narratives are incidents 18, 56-57, 92, 100-102 and 111.

Where did these incidents happen? Incidents were reported from at least **73 schools**,<sup>10</sup> including:

- ◆ seven elementary schools,
- ◆ fifteen junior high and middle schools,
- ◆ forty high schools, and
- ◆ eleven other schools (alternative schools, a reservation school, a private school).

Respondents described events that happened in thirteen counties (Benton, Ferry, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Lewis, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, Whatcom, Whitman, and Yakima) and at least **37 public school districts**:

**Table 2: School Districts Where These Incidents Reportedly Occurred**

Districts of 500 to 3,000 Students	Districts of 4,000 to 15,000 Students	Districts of 16,000 to over 45,000 Students
Chehalis	Arlington	Bellevue
Chimacum	Auburn	Edmunds
Fife	Bellingham	Everett
Port Townsend	Bethel	Federal Way
Pullman	Central Kitsap	Kent
Republic	Lake Stevens	Lake Washington
Riverview	Marysville	Northshore
Sultan	Mercer Island	Puyallup
Vashon Island	Mukilteo	Seattle
	North Thurston	Spokane
	Olympia	Tacoma
	Renton	
	Richland	
	Shoreline	
	Snohomish	
	Toppenish	
	Tumwater	

Where, specifically, did these incidents happen? In parentheses below are the numbers of incidents reported to have occurred in each location:

<b>In classrooms (34),</b>	<b>At an off-campus school-sponsored event (4),</b>
<b>In hallways (16),</b>	<b>In the parking lot (3),</b>
<b>In the locker room or in or near the gym (15),</b>	<b>In the auditorium (2),</b>
<b>In multiple locations (10),</b>	<b>In the library or computer lab (2),</b>
<b>In transit [bus stop, bus or walking home] (7),</b>	<b>In the cafeteria (2),</b>
<b>Elsewhere on campus (6),</b>	<b>In an office (1), and</b>
<b>On the playground (5),</b>	<b>In the bathroom (1)</b>

In three cases, the respondent didn't specify where in their schools the incidents took place, just that they had happened at school. Five incidents actually occurred off-campus, but each of these off-campus, culminating events was preceded by harassment or violence in one of the locations listed above. If one or more of the events leading up to an incident hadn't happened at school or in transit, it would not have qualified for inclusion in this study. Thus, the on-campus location of the pattern of harassment is listed above in those five cases.

<sup>10</sup> And possibly more; eleven callers declined to name their school. Two of these also declined to identify the school district.

## Who was targeted?

What makes a person vulnerable to anti-gay harassment and violence? A number of obvious characteristics can be ruled out, based on these reports. First, *the individual's age* is apparently not the determinant. Altogether 148 individuals were targeted in these 111 incidents. They included a six-year-old, a seven-year-old and an eight-year-old as well as older children, teens and adults.

*The person's race* doesn't seem to matter much, either, with respect to being vulnerable to anti-gay harassment or violence. People with various racial identities have reported being targeted. (e.g., "African-American" or "Black," "Asian-American," "Black/White/Chinese," "Caucasian" or "White" or "European-American," "Irish/Finnish/Italian," "Hispanic," "Hispanic/Creole," "Hispanic/White," "Korean/White," "Lakota," "Native American," "Native-American/Caucasian," "Indian/African-American," and "Multiracial") Altogether, 72% of targeted respondents who indicated a racial identity could be described as White and 28%, as People of Color. Statewide, 75% of public school students are White and 25%, People of Color.

*Where a person lives* doesn't seem to matter much either, in terms of whether he or she will be harassed or attacked over sexual orientation. Living in ostensibly more progressive metropolitan areas doesn't protect a child. Neither does living in seemingly less violent non-urban areas. Incidents have been reported, as indicated above, from large urban districts, suburbs and smaller towns, and rural areas, as well as a tribal school and a Christian school.

*Gender* seems to be a factor, with boys being at apparently much higher risk, but even gender doesn't fully explain who is targeted. In about half the incidents, the targets were male. But in about a quarter of incidents they were female, and in the other cases, there were targets of both genders or no specific person was harassed.

*Even a person's actual sexual orientation is apparently not the primary determinant of whether they are targeted.* More often than not, these offenders had no direct knowledge of the targeted people's orientations and some targets (at least seven) were heterosexual.

So, what is the salient factor that makes a person vulnerable to anti-gay harassment and violence? It seems to be simply *the offender's perception* of the targeted person's orientation. It is instructive to piece together from these reports what may have led the offenders to conclude that the people they targeted were Gay or Lesbian:

- ◆ 38 people had defended the civil rights of sexual minorities or had GLBT friends.
- ◆ 34 people were openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (GLBT).
- ◆ 31 people were apparently perceived to fit GLBT stereotypes (e.g., girls with short hair, a boy who was soft-spoken and who studied during free time).
- ◆ 23 people were attacked for no apparent reason. Some callers did not say or did not know why the offenders had attacked these particular individuals. Others were not sure the offenders had even believed their targets to be gay; they may have simply been using an anti-gay slur in a teasing or an angry way.
- ◆ 15 people had come out privately (e.g., to a friend or sibling) as a sexual minority and their confidentiality was broken.
- ◆ 5 people were "found out" (e.g., their diary was stolen or their locker broken into).
- ◆ 2 people were attacked as gay because they had HIV

## Who were the offenders?

The offenders, like their targets, *were of all ages* (elementary to adult). In fact, four of the thirty alleged rapists (in the eight rape incidents) were sixth graders. Accompanied by two high-school-aged counselors, they assaulted two other sixth graders at an elementary-school sponsored camp (incident 18).

*Adults were perceived by respondents to have been offenders in fifteen cases*, including:

- ◆ *nine category one incidents* (one-time, climate setting events):  
One teacher, for instance, allegedly said, "All gays should be placed on an island somewhere." Another is reported to have said, "Gay people ... should all be shot."

- ◆ **five category two incidents** (on-going verbal and other harassment):  
One administrator is alleged to have threatened a student. Two teachers reportedly spread rumors about people's sexual orientations (a student's in one case and a teacher's in another). In other incidents, adults mounted a campaign to discredit fellow employees and lobbied successfully to have a teacher transferred for being openly lesbian.
- ◆ **one category three incident** (physical harassment):  
A principal is alleged to have physically restrained a young man and threatened not to protect him if he was ever harmed. He said the teen's being gay would make an assault his own fault.

**Offenders were reportedly of various ethnicities.** About four in five were perceived by respondents to have been white (when they gave offenders' races at all); one in five, people of color. As among targeted individuals, these proportions are similar to the demographics of the statewide school-age population.

**There were more male than female offenders.** Almost two-thirds of all incidents reported to the Project (72 of 111) involved male offenders. Still, about one quarter of all incidents (27 of 111) had all-female or mixed groups of assailants (see Table 3, below).

**Table 3: One Hundred Eleven Incidents by Gender of Offender and Target**

gender of target(s)	gender of offender(s)				sum of incidents by gender of targets
	male(s)	female(s)	both	gender not reported	
male(s)	46	1	7	7	61
female(s)	19	8	8	3	36
both	0	1	2	0	3
No specific individual	7	0	2	2	11
sum of incidents by gender of offenders	72	10	17	12	111

The eight gang rapes - not separated out in the figure above -- involved five all-male groups of offenders and three mixed gender groups (in each case, groups of boys with one female accomplice).

The offenders' relationships with targeted individuals *ranged from "never seen before" to "know fairly well,"* with none described as a "close friend" of the target. This distinguishes these examples of anti-gay sexual harassment and violence from what other researchers have found about other forms of sexual harassment and violence, where offenders are more frequently dating partners or close friends of the people they target.

In the 94 incidents where respondents reported the specific numbers of both targets and offenders, a total of 141 individuals<sup>11</sup> were targeted by at least 342 offenders.<sup>12</sup> Thus, *an average of two and a half perpetrators offended against each targeted person.*

## How did youth witnesses respond?

About three-quarters of the incidents reported to the Project (82 incidents) had student witnesses. These young people were perceived to have responded in a variety of ways. **About half the time, respondents said that some or all of the students who watched, did so in silence.**

*"[They] ignored it; did their everyday thing."*

<sup>11</sup> Another 7 people were targeted by an unclear number of offenders, for a total of 148 targeted individuals.

<sup>12</sup> With groups of offenders coded conservatively at the bottom of a range. So, when a respondent said there were "3 or 4" offenders, we counted it as "3." Groups of more than ten offenders were counted as "10" on the assumption that numbers larger than that were rough guesses on the respondent's part.

About a quarter of the time, respondents felt that some or all of the student witnesses had encouraged the offenders or joined them.

*"They all laughed, joined in on it."*

*"They laughed ... supported the person who did it."*

Respondents also reported that, in over one quarter of cases, some peers had spoken up on behalf of targeted classmates ...

*"Don't mess with him. Lay off!"*

*"Why the hell did you say that?!"*

or tried to support and/or get help for them afterwards.

*"[My friends] said, 'Well, that isn't right.'"*

*"[My friends] thought it was mean."*

*"[My friends] were supportive and just listened to me."*

*"[My friends] were pretty pissed."*

*"A couple of [the target's] friends went to talk to a counselor."*

*"...the [target's teammates] were upset and talked to one of the officials."*

## How were targeted individuals affected?

Counting events reported by all respondents (witnesses, friends, professionals, and family members, as well as the targeted individuals themselves) the Project has documented that:

- ◆ **twelve children and youth changed schools** (in some cases, multiple times) to try to escape the abuse,
- ◆ **ten young people eventually dropped out** (including three who had tried changing schools first),
- ◆ **ten young people attempted suicide, and**
- ◆ **two young people committed suicide.** (One suicide was reported by a young man's mother and the other, which followed attempts, was reported by a close friend.)

Youth targets described to our interviewers a range of responses, when they were asked how the incident or incidents made them feel. Many were **shocked, embarrassed, hurt, or scared.**

*"[I felt] surprised and humiliated and then indifferent."*

*"I was really nervous. My stomach wasn't doing too good."*

*"I was scared. I was feeling very helpless. And very guilty [about the other target's being raped.]"*

*"I was really embarrassed."*

*"It made me cry."*

*"It hurts me inside. It makes me feel like I'm back in the sixth grade."*

*"I'm really hurting."*

*"I'm scared of straight males sometimes."*

*"It makes me fear going to high school every day."*

*"[I have] spiritual wounds. It makes me feel that I'm less human than everybody else and makes me wonder if I am a freak or not, and if I die will I go to hell? So many fears running through my head it's pitiful."*

Often, **numbness, loneliness and depression** followed:

*"I felt like I was nothing, worthless I guess. I felt like they violated me."*

*"I feel very unsafe. Almost like losing all my friends. I dread going to school."*

*"[It's] still pretty hard; almost part of my daily routine."*

*"I feel very unsafe. I feel alone."*

*"I'm depressed about it."*

*"There's been a lot of depression."*

*"It made it difficult to continue going to school."*

*"I'm not sleeping."*

*"I still have nightmares [three years after being raped]."*

*"I went through chronic depression for a couple of years."*

*"Well, I used to feel I was ... Well, I was involved in everything. A cheerleader, student council. I used to feel I was part of everything. Now I don't feel part of anything. No, I don't want to be part of anything. I mean, these guys weren't gang members, they're basketball players, two of them are on student council."*

Some young people reported **self-endangering** thoughts and behaviors:

*"I went through so much that I watched TV 11 hours a day and slept the rest. Because of that, I got TV mentality, low ambition/motivation. I wasn't working. I quit school. I was the smartest kid in the school and then I left."*

*"I thought that I was wrong. I became homeless; now I am struggling."*

*"... I wish I could take my backpack and run away."*

*"I felt ... suicidal, homicidal."*

*"I think about suicide."*

*"I would rather die than ... relive it."*

Not all the news from targeted youth was negative, however. Some youth reported feeling **well-supported and cared about**:

*"It showed me there's a lot of love and support in my school."*

*"[My] dad was very supportive ... it helped my self-esteem. He said, 'It's their ignorance.'"*

*"My father and I are very close. He was not happy."*

*"My mom talked to the teacher and that helped a lot."*

Some responded (if not initially, eventually) with **anger, strength and defiance**:

*"I don't feel as scared as I did. I'm a whole lot angrier now."*

*"Much stronger. Very sure of who I am."*

*"... and mad afterwards. I didn't get around to mad until afterwards."*

*"I felt kind of angry and sad at the same time."*

*"Pissed off... [at] the ignorance in school and society ... They don't know anything about me!"*

*"[I was] mad ... that people are so thoughtless."*

*"It's made me stronger, but it's not changed me about being gay."*

*"[It made me] really mad ... because I wanted to do well in that class."*

*"I never really hated anybody before. It's the first time [since my girlfriend and I were raped] that I've ever really hated anybody."*

Some young people reported **self-protective** and empowering behaviors:

*"It has made me a lot more active, made me push harder to try to fix what's wrong at my school."*

*"Since she wasn't going to move him, I decided to move on my own to a [seat] across the room."*

*"I'm careful [selective] about my friends."*

*"It's made me more cautious about where I am and suspicious of some people."*

*"I made an appointment to talk to the principal."*

*"[I] go to Oasis [a support group] quite often. I'm doing pretty well right now."*

*"I dropped out last semester; I'll go back in September and take high school and college credits [through] Running Start."*

*"I stood up [after they knocked me down] and decided I couldn't take it anymore and went to a friend and we both went to a counselor."*

*"I don't know, doing this report really helped. I needed to talk about it and got to do that."*

*"I joined a club at school to combat racism, sexism and homophobia. Hopefully that will help."*

*"[I go to] meetings of STARS - Student & Teachers Against Racism and Sexism"*

*"I'm helping myself by being a peer educator with Planned Parenthood."*

*"I feel bad because I changed schools as if I ran away from the problem, but at least now I can go to school."*

*"I think I'm doing better. I'm at least doing something about it [by calling Safe Schools]."*

*"[It will help] to see that this gets into the Safe Schools Report."*

*"I need to find me another school."*

*"I haven't been in school since this incident. [I] transferred schools."*

*"[My] new school is perfect. I almost started to cry walking down the hall realizing I wasn't being called names."*

... including **humor**. After a grueling forty-minute interview, when asked, "What might be helpful to you at this point," one young man, replied,

*"A chocolate shake ..."*

The seven adult targets who were interviewed for the Project described responses to the incidents that were not very different than young people's except in severity. None reported self-destructive behavior, but the feelings they reported sounded similar to those of young people:

*"I felt alone, lonely. I felt like one little, small voice."*

*"[I feel] very uncomfortable and unsafe."*

*"[I] considered changing schools."*

*"It has altered my behavior [I changed where I park] and I don't like ... having someone else control my behavior. It's a violation."*

*"[I felt] devastated, humiliated, demoralized and angry."*

*"Coming out of rage, getting to sadness."*

*"[It] made my pride rise."*

Besides being asked, in an open-ended way, to describe their experiences, many of the fifty-eight targeted young people were asked about the specific behaviors and feelings listed below. Each of them agreed that the harassment had somehow affected them. The reader should keep in mind that the percentages reported below<sup>13</sup> reflect the answers of only fifty-eight people. Moreover, these respondents were self-selected (not a "representative sample") and their collective experience may not be generalizable to all young people who are harassed or attacked for being perceived to be gay.

<sup>13</sup> Some did not complete their entire interviews for various reasons (e.g., when their counseling needs took precedence over the research). And some items were added to the interview protocol during the course of the project as commonalities in the respondents' narratives emerged. Thus, numbers of respondents responding to each item vary. So for simplicity, percents are reported here rather than number of responses.

**Educational Costs:** The harassment and violence "made me ...  
*avoid parts of the building or grounds." 70%*  
*have a harder time paying attention in class." 64%*  
*not talk as much in class." 59%*  
*cut one or more classes." 36%*  
*receive worse grades or evaluations." 34%*  
*skip whole days of school." 27%*  
*get sick more often." 25%*  
*change how I get to and from school." 23%*  
*doubt whether I have what it takes to graduate from high school." 21%*  
*drop a class." 16%*  
*drop out of school." 16%*  
*change schools." 14%*  
*give up a sport or other activity." 6%*

**Emotional Harm:** The harassment and violence "made me ...  
*feel unsafe." 89%*  
*scared or afraid." 73%*  
*feel more self-conscious." 73%*  
*more isolated and lonely." 66%*  
*feel embarrassed." 64%*  
*less confident." 61%*  
*confused about who I am." 25%*

**Self-Endangerment:** The harassment and violence "made me ...  
*begin or increase using alcohol or other drugs." 14%*  
*attempt suicide." 13%*

**Empowerment:** The harassment and violence "made me...  
*feel angry." 92%*  
*proud of how I handled the situation." 62%*  
*speak up more for others." 54%*  
*speak up more for myself." 50%*  
*feel stronger." 31%*  
*feel more confident." 31%*  
*feel brave." 27%*

**Relationships:** The harassment and violence "made me...  
*feel supported by my friends." 57% over all...  
65% of those who said that peers had witnessed the incident and/  
or that they had sought support afterwards from friends*  
*lose people I thought were friends." 50%*  
*feel supported by my teachers or other adults [at school]." 50% overall...  
60% of those who said that adults had witnessed the incident and/  
or that they had sought support afterwards from an adult at school*  
*feel supported by my family." 42% over all...  
89% of those who sought support from parents or guardians<sup>14</sup>*  
*doubt whether I can have a healthy romantic relationship." 39% over all...  
100% of those who were raped in the course of the incident*

<sup>14</sup> Only half of all youth targets said they sought support from parents or guardians, but of those who did feel safe approaching their families for support, 89% said they felt they got it.



## How were students who *witnessed* these incidents affected?

Nine respondents were youth who had witnessed an event. They expressed varying degrees of distress. One described herself as *"very upset."* She said she hadn't been on the receiving end of harassment yet, but that she had come out recently and was scared she *would* be harassed ... having seen friends mistreated at school. A middle-school student who saw a classmate bullied by a group of other students said she was *"very mad."* She added,

*"I hate it when people call other people 'fags.' One particular person in my group makes me mad. She picks out stupid stuff to decide you are gay ... your glasses, your walk."*

Others spoke about their own varied feelings:

*"I got really frustrated."*

*"I was feeling very upset. My school counselor is only there on Fridays & Tuesdays. So I talked to him Tuesday and I feel better."*

*"I was so angry and I always thought it was stupid she'd dated these guys [who ended up harassing her] ... I was just really angry at them."*

*"[I was] just sort of irritated that this still happens and people can't be more tolerant of people. Everyone's different."*

*"[I was] feeling insecure when he [the teacher] was making comments about gay people. I felt shaken."*

*"I was frightened that my friendships would change. I was angry that they could be so stupid, so mean."*

*"[I'm] very mad."*

*"[It] feels good to report this."*

One or more young witness reported having experienced *all the same* emotional and behavioral effects that targeted youth said they had experienced, except for the most dramatic. (i.e., no witnesses indicated that seeing an incident caused them to skip whole days of school, drop a class, give up a sport, change how they got to or from school, change schools, use drugs, drop out, or attempt suicide.) They *did* report:

- ◆ participating less in class,
- ◆ finding it hard to concentrate in class,
- ◆ cutting classes,
- ◆ losing people they thought were friends, and
- ◆ feeling self-conscious, unsafe, isolated and afraid.

Some students who witnessed an incident and later called the Project, said they spoke up during the incident; others said they hadn't. One who spoke up was a high school-aged peer educator working with a group of middle schoolers. When a student called a visiting panelist with HIV a *"fag,"* the peer educator intervened and said that put-downs wouldn't be tolerated. Witnesses of other incidents told us,

*"When I saw kids kicking the backpack, I went to see whose it was. The kid wasn't there. I was watching when they wrote on the backpack. I told the teacher later that the kid whose backpack it was didn't do anything. I defended him."*

*"Usually I am shy and quiet in class, but this time I had to say something."*

Perhaps more typical, however, were the young witnesses who described feeling guilty for not having spoken up or somehow intervened during an incident. One, for example, was upset at feeling she could not speak up:

*"I didn't make any comments because I was scared for myself ...I got really frustrated and I tried to think how I could approach the situation."*

## Why were some incidents never reported to school authorities?

Almost one third of incidents in which youth were targeted were neither witnessed by nor reported to any teacher, administrator or other employee of the schools. We asked callers why. Their answers included: their own **shame and self-blame** for what happened,

*"I was embarrassed."*

the **fear that they wouldn't be believed** or taken seriously,

*"Because I feel that I've told them about this so many times that why do it? Nothing will happen."*

*"You can't use foul language at this school, but if someone says "queer" or "fag" they ignore it. I've mentioned it to the teachers that it was wrong, but they don't think anything of it."*

or that **they would be blamed** or disciplined for what happened,

*"[I don't] want to make any trouble ... [I'm afraid the principal] might bring it up later in the year [in letters of recommendation I'll need when I graduate]."*

*"The counselor would call both sets of parents in and [I'm not] supported by my parents."*

the assumption that, since these incidents are so commonplace and accepted, **nothing would be done**,

*"... the rationale would be only 'boys will be boys'."*

*"It's terrible for me to be saying this but it's so routine to hear that stuff when I go out as a guest speaker that it didn't occur to me to follow up on it beyond confronting it."*

**fear of retribution** from the offenders and other peers,

*"I wasn't out yet. Everyone at that school suspected and I could not push it or else I would have been really unsafe. And that could be anywhere from complete isolation [to] ... violence."*

*"I didn't want to die and basically thought if I got them into trouble they'd be even more mad and I'd be dead."*

**fear for someone else's well being** or respect for someone else's wishes,

*"My friend [who was raped] made me promise not to [report it]."*

and the simple fact that they just felt **hopeless** or it never dawned on them that they could report it or that **they didn't know who to go to**.

*"I didn't think there was anything they could do - it's gone on for so long."*

*"I hadn't thought of calling his school. I will check with mom to see if she wants to call."*

*"I wasn't comfortable then with my sexuality and I didn't know who to talk to or how to talk to them."*

## How did families respond, when they knew about the harassment?

About forty children and teens, almost half of those who were targeted in these incidents, confided what was happening to at least one parent or guardian. Some also looked to siblings (and in a few cases aunts, uncles, cousins and/or grandparents) for support.

**The vast majority of those who sought help from their families reported feeling supported.** They said these kinds of things about their families' responses to their disclosing what happened:

*"[They were] just really supportive."*

*"They [said] it wasn't right."*

*"[They were] very upset."*

*"[Telling my parents] was a huge change for me. My parents reacted so well to this. The depression lifted ... [It was such a] relief!"*

*"They wanted to solve the problem."*

**There were, however, a few families who blamed or rejected their children.** In one case, an offender told a young man's parents that their son was gay. When confronted by his father, the young man confirmed that he thought he was gay and revealed that he was being harassed at school because of it. His father allegedly kicked him out of the house, "until you figure it out." The son committed suicide within a few days of being kicked out. A few of other young people reported less extreme, but still not totally supportive or helpful, responses from their families:

*"[They told me] to ignore it."*

*"[My mother] thought it happened because of the way I looked. She is worried."*

*"[They said], 'Just deal with it, it's your problem.'"*

In contrast, a number of **other parents encouraged their children** to report incidents to the Safe Schools Project. Thirteen parents called Safe Schools themselves, about incidents they had witnessed or learned about from their children. They described their own emotional responses mostly in terms of anger:

*"[I was] hurt, angry, frustrated."*

*"I was crying and upset and angry."*

In some families, a parent or guardian went beyond expressing support to their child, to actually **speak up** on the child's behalf. One young man described proudly that his group home parent had left work in order to come to school to talk with the principal about the problem. Some other parents and guardians called their child's school or school district, in some cases multiple times, to try to negotiate for their child's safety:

*"I went to counselors and principals all the time [during the five years I was harassed]. So did my parents."*

#### **Others took protective action:**

*"It got to the point my mom would walk me to class."*

Perhaps the generally positive reactions of these young people's families are a testament to the young people's knowing which of their families were safe harbors and which weren't. Some young people explained that they just didn't feel they could tell their families about the abuse they'd suffered. One young woman *"stayed in the park, like a bum"* until she healed from a brutal physical assault, just so her parents wouldn't have to know. She told them she was at her grandmother's house. Another targeted teen said he didn't turn to his family during the three years he was harassed because,

*"[My family] would have [had] a terrible time with it."*

As for **offenders' families** ... in the first two years of the Project, we asked whether the offenders' families knew about the incidents. Invariably, when the respondent answered at all, the answer was "no." We ended up dropping the question from the survey instrument when it became clear that, except perhaps in the six cases in which we know the police were involved, offenders' families were not made aware of the problem.

## **Educators' Strategies ... How did school employees handle the harassment**

**Almost one-third of the incidents in which young people were targeted had no adult witnesses** (29 of 92, see Table 4). Many of the incidents with no adult witnesses were preceded, however, by weeks or months of abuse that was seen by adults. Adult witnesses included teachers, bus drivers, referees, guest speakers, playground supervisors, and even a parent. Respondents felt that, like the student witnesses, these adults' responses were varied.

**Some adults who were not perceived as offenders per se, did add to a young person's distress.** Respondents described these adults as witnesses or as people they went to for help after-the-fact, not as offenders, but some said they were as upset by an adult's response to an incident as by the actions of the offenders themselves. For example, one high school freshman who was verbally harassed, spit on, and kicked out of the locker room by his classmates, reported

that his P.E. teacher responded to the attack by saying,

*"Maybe you should do more pushups. What's the matter; don't you like girls?"*

**Table 4: School Employees' Involvement**

<b>Total Incidents</b>	<b>111</b>
no specific target	11
only adult targets	8
youth target(s)	92
<b>Of Those With Youth Targets</b>	
<b>observed by adult(s)</b>	<b>29</b>
at least one adult intervened and/or took positive action(s)	20
no adult(s) intervened	7
unknown	2
<b>not witnessed by adults, but reported to adult(s) at school</b>	<b>35</b>
at least 1 adult supportive (including parents; sometimes only parent[s])	10
at least 1 adult took some positive action (including parents)	13
no positive action believed/known	12
<b>neither observed nor reported, or unknown</b>	<b>28</b>

*In almost one quarter of cases* (7 of the 29 with adult witnesses), *no adult said or did anything*. Some, of course, may have been physically present, but unaware of what was happening. Some may have witnessed one incident in a months-long pattern and thought it was minor. Others clearly knew there was a problem and were at a loss about what to do. One teacher who called the Project, for instance, watched in troubled silence as a group of spectators called a basketball player a "faggot." It was only in hindsight that he realized what he might have done to intervene.

These cases of apparent neglect by adults were very troubling to respondents. They spoke about months of verbal violence and public humiliation by peers that preceded a young person's resorting to fists or dropping out of school or, in one instance, committing suicide. In each instance, adults had multiple opportunities to put a stop to the very public abuse of a child or teen and failed to do so.

*Two thirds of the time* (20 of 29 incidents), however, *at least one adult DID intervene or took some sort of action perceived by a respondent to be helpful*. Some simply told bullies to "sit down" or to "keep it down" or to "turn around and work." We have counted these sorts of statements as interventions, but callers felt they were not adequate and only stopped the bullies temporarily. When one student threatened to take another out to the parking lot and beat her up, the teacher allegedly told the offender to "calm down." Another respondent recalled:

*"During class the teacher would tell them to be quiet and that would be it."*

*Some* of the 20 adults who intervened, however, were very clear about what they would not tolerate and why. They *intervened and educated at the same time*, talking with offenders and bystanders about their building's or district's harassment policies. Others discussed the reasons behind those policies, for example:

- ◆ the fact that you usually don't know who, in any class or group of people, is gay or has a gay friend or family member;
- ◆ the value that it is wrong to slander someone by spreading rumors about them, especially with malicious intent;
- ◆ the value that, no matter what your beliefs about gay people, everyone deserves a safe place to learn;
- ◆ the feelings (hurt, offense) that they personally have when they hear sexual, racial or religious slurs;

- ◆ the stereotypes and other misunderstandings about gay people that lead some students to harass those they think are gay.

***Some*** adults who observed harassment or violence ***not only intervened and educated, but also supported the targeted child***. One teacher sent a targeted second-grader to the school counselor for support, while she talked with the rest of the class about the concept of slander and had them write letters of apology. (incident 96-11)

***A few adults removed the offender(s) from the situation***. One basketball official, for example, told a heckling spectator twice to stop making anti-gay slurs to a visiting player ("*dyke, butch*") and when the harassment continued, the official got the principal to evict the offender and his companions. (incident # 98-7) One teacher, who had intervened when a child was harassed in a computer lab, became alarmed when the offenders proceeded to pull up pictures on the internet of rapid-fire guns and to "joke" about using them to scare gay people. She made them leave the computer lab. (incident 98-8)

***In the majority of cases, in other words, adults:***

- ◆ insisted that the slurs or violence stop, or
- ◆ intervened and educated, or
- ◆ expressed support for targeted students, or
- ◆ took protective action.

***At least eight administrators and two other educators actually disciplined the offenders***. Some of these adults were witnesses and some had learned of an incident after-the-fact:

- ◆ *A playground supervisor made a child "write sentences" for pulling down the pants of a student who was rumored to be gay and for yelling racial slurs at him.*
- ◆ *A second grade teacher made her class write letters of apology to the classmate they had been harassing for months for being "gay." Even those who didn't participate, but who stood by while others harassed the boy, were made to think about their role in it.*
- ◆ *The principal who evicted a group of spectators from a high school basketball game (see above) also made the primary offender write a letter of apology to the visiting team.*
- ◆ *A principal suspended a teen from PE for one day for continuing, even after a reprimand, to verbally harass a peer and for encouraging his friends to do the same.*
- ◆ *A vice-principal suspended a high school student for one week for writing a note on a paper airplane, "Fag Express ... Die Fag," and sailing it onto the desk of a peer he believed was gay.*
- ◆ *A principal suspended a high school student for verbally harassing a gay classmate in front of witnesses. The incident occurred just one week after the same perpetrator had physically assaulted the gay student, but was not disciplined for lack of witnesses.*
- ◆ *A vice-principal suspended a high school student from school and, for five days, from the school bus, for verbally harassing two girls on the bus.*
- ◆ *A principal suspended six students for physically assaulting a classmate they perceived to be gay. (Five of the six were subsequently convicted for the assault.)*
- ◆ *A principal expelled two students for physically assaulting a classmate they thought was gay. He also suspended a third student for verbally attacking the same young man.*
- ◆ *A principal put a teacher on two weeks' probation for repeated sarcasm and slurs directed at two gay students. (The teacher took early retirement, instead.)*

In some of these cases, the disciplinary action was one outcome of an administrator's meeting with the upset parents or guardians of a targeted student. In other cases, the teacher or administrator needed no urging to enforce an anti-harassment or anti-violence policy. Some respondents felt these disciplinary actions were inadequate or inappropriate or too late. Others expressed relief and gratitude that educators took action at all.

## Respondents' Recommendations

### ... How did respondents wish their principals had handled the incidents?

We asked respondents what they would have liked their principals to do, had they known about the incident. Their recommendations (sometimes, from their perspective, pipe dreams) were perhaps the most important findings of the Safe Schools Project.

First, some respondents acknowledged the complexity of the issue. They said, for example:

*"That's really hard. I don't know what anyone could do because everyone's entitled to their beliefs. I do believe there's a need for more education - nothing was ever taught [at my school] about homosexuality."*

*"I have no idea - can't think of anything. Make them leave me alone. I don't know."*

*"I guess I would have liked him to be suspended right away, but it happened outside of school hours and partly off campus, so I don't know."*

*"I don't know. Punishing the perpetrators or having a school assembly about this issue would just make it worse for me."*

***In many cases, however, respondents provided all sorts of creative advice for educators.***

***Re: investigating incidents***, they would have liked their principals to ...

*"hold a conference among all involved parties."*

*"go around and asked people about it ...get the exact person who did it, or kids, and suspend him."*

*"attempt to locate and punish the attackers."*

***Re: educating the offenders***, they would have liked their principals ...

*"talk to friends who spread rumors."*

*"talk to the guy and tell them homophobic remarks wouldn't be accepted. If he can't follow it, suspend him for two days."*

*"talk to them about rights; what it means to be gay and they have rights too."*

*"talk to [the] guys and tell them it's not right."*

*"sit down with the girl and explain what she's doing when she messes with gay students. Then role-play her getting straight-bashed and see how she likes it."*

*"[help the offending] teacher ... see what it's like in my shoes."*

*"talk with the teacher and say, 'Whatever your opinions are keep them to yourself.'"*

*"[have the offender listen to] a gay/lesbian panel"*

*"talk to this person about why this [anti-gay harassment] is not a good thing ... It's a touchy subject so schools don't talk about it, but they need to ... 'cause kids call each other fags."*

*"[speak with the offender] about how I felt."*

*"let this guy know that what he did wasn't okay and if it happened again, there [would] be consequences."*

*"not kick [the offender] out of school. I would want him to spend the day with a gay person."*

***Re: punishing the offenders***, they would have liked their principals to ...

*"kick him out of class for a day and give him extra homework."*

*"consider it bad language like they do everything else and maybe use detention."*

*"consider it as harassing, like they would to any other harassment. And they should be punished like any other sexual harassment."*

*"[not let them] get away with it. I see people kissing all the time and no one hurts them."*

*"have the person come into the office and ... talk to both of us together ... Then I'd want him to take appropriate action - like a suspension."*

*"[apply] bigger consequences for disrespecting someone."*

*"suspend the second time harasser ... for a whole day."*

*"[require] an in-school suspension for the first incident, followed by longer in-school suspension, followed by expulsion."*

*"[record] something like this ... on the permanent file of the offenders."*

*"[give the offending teacher a] two week suspension without pay."*

*"expel them all ... [send them to] military school."*

*"[order] immediate dismissal of at least one month to show them this is serious, to show teachers are supposed to be role models and can't [metaphorically] say 'fuck you' to a student and get away with it."*

**Re: supporting the targets (in emotional and practical ways),** they would have liked their principals to ...

*"get [the offenders] to shut up. I don't want them punished or anything, just have them stop."*

*"[have] some personal contact, some support that jazz choir isn't an unmanly thing."*

*"encourage discussion of homophobia and [support my son] in addition to telling him to learn to deal with his anger."*

*"get together with school counselors and see about starting up a support group - may not help this kid, but could help others."*

*"[say,] 'We'll have a slush fund to pay for [the damage to your property].'"*

*"not ... suspend me [for fighting back]."*

*"demand that the district implement the ... policy."*

*"not ... put victim off ... acknowledge [his] concern, humiliation."*

**Re: ensuring the targets' (and everyone's) safety,** they would have liked their principals to ...

*"protect me."*

*"[establish a] school policy that says you can't discriminate."*

*"start out next year with a very clear no tolerance policy."*

*"hire more security guards for protection of students and make the staff aware of homophobia."*

*"stand by the student section, after the first warning, or join the students sitting there and make his presence known."*

*"[provide me] an alternative spot to change [for PE]."*

*"[say,] 'We'll put a security guard in to walk you to the parking lot.'"*

*"immediately [support] my request to change schools."*

*"let me get half days [to avoid the class where I was being tormented] or home school."*

*"call the police. I would like for them [the offenders] to be arrested and sent to prison."*

*"make sure that no one could go to camp [where I was raped] and to help me with the lawsuit."*

*"send [the district's equity office] a real memo [acknowledging] this being a hate crime."*

*"allow [the secretary to] post the Safe Schools flyer."*

**Re: parent involvement,** they would have liked their principals to ...

*"educate the parents."*

*"have a talk with the name callers ... send a note to the name callers' parents ... inform the parents of the targeted child."<sup>15</sup>*

*"talk to [the offender] and his parents. That would have done it. I also would have wanted him to make/have the person apologize to me."*

*"involve me [as the targeted child's parent] and other kids' [offenders'] parents. More severe consequences."*

*"explain to [any concerned] parents that this was appropriate to the subject being taught."*

**Re: educating the staff (to prevent future incidents),** they would have liked their principals to ...

*"talk to the teacher because his [the teacher's] information is wrong."*

*"talk to staff and make sure they're supportive to students because a lot of staff make comments."*

*"educate staff and supervise locker room."*

*"do ... workshops ... for teachers, students and administrators."*

*"not allow teachers to make religious accusations to students and guests. To not allow students to be rude. To offer training on sexual diversity."*

*"put information in [the] teachers' bulletin."*

*"mention it at a staff meeting - that this is going on - and remind the staff that school needs to be safe for all kids."*

*"bring it up to faculty and allow me to address them."*

**Re: educating the student body (to prevent future incidents),** they would have liked their principals to ...

*"come and talk to the class and especially the ring leader that this kind of talk isn't tolerated. Give fair warning to them and say that further talk would be punished."*

*"have assembly or something to discuss issues of diversity."*

*"[have an assembly] talking about harassment, not just sexual orientation."*

*"teach everybody what they would do about someone saying something about someone who's black. Teach people that it's bad and wrong [to put people down]."*

*"make some kind of public statement to the whole student body that anti-gay slurs wouldn't be tolerated just like racial slurs or others."*

*"make a public statement that these kinds of things are wrong. We all have a responsibility to combat this kind of bigotry against anyone for any reason."*

*"have an all school assembly to address this head on, but also in general regarding racism, sexism."*

*"[make] some kind of public announcement over the speaker or in the daily bulletin [about] enforcing the harassment policy."*

*"explain, in small groups of students, that this [discrimination] should not have happened."*

*"have a whole school assembly about harassment, what it is, what it is not."*

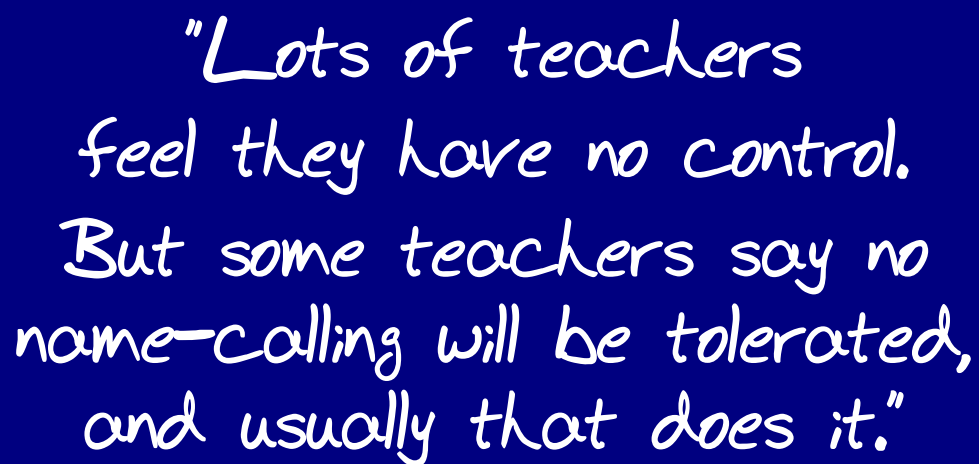
*"hold an assembly and say, 'There are millions of us who are different and this school district will not stand for harassment of any individual and if it happens again there will be heavy consequences.'"*

<sup>15</sup> Note that, although this caller, as a parent, would have liked to have been informed, other callers said the reason they had not reported an incident to school authorities was for fear that their parents would be called. In other words, the decision is a difficult one and must be tailored to the individual situation.



Finally, although we framed the question above in terms of what respondents would have liked from principals specifically, we recognize that all adults contribute to the climate in a school. Respondents talked to us about the roles of teachers, coaches, parents, counselors, social workers, secretaries, bus drivers, nurses, security guards, and librarians, as well as principals. They wanted every adult to hear that anti-gay harassment and violence are problems in their schools. And they wanted to thank the friends, family, teachers and other staff people who have stood up for them and with them.

We close with the very simple, profound observation of one fourteen-year-old respondent:



"Lots of teachers  
feel they have no control.  
But some teachers say no  
name-calling will be tolerated,  
and usually that does it."

# The Incidents

Note: Certain language in the narratives that follow may offend some readers. It is language heard daily in our schools. The stories have been described here without censorship or softening of the sometimes-brutal experiences as they were reported. However, discretion is advised when using these stories (as written) as case studies for classroom discussion. Details have, in a few instances, been omitted or changed to protect the confidentiality of the parties involved. The essence of each story is true to what was reported.

## No Particular Individuals Intentionally Targeted

### Category 1: One-Time, Climate Setting Incidents

#### Incident 1: People-With-AIDS Panel

A middle school holds a health fair. Workshop presenters are all from the community, with teachers present to welcome the guest speakers, to observe, and to handle classroom management. One workshop is a panel presentation by people living with AIDS. Afterwards, back in his own class, the teacher who observed that session tells his class, "All gays and lesbians will die of AIDS." One student's eyes fill with tears. She goes to a counselor after class who encourages her to call Safe Schools. She explains to the Safe Schools interviewer that she isn't sure of her orientation yet, but she felt that the teacher was looking right at her when he said this. The school counselor, she says, is planning a school-wide assembly about harassment and she feels very supported by this adult, at least. But she comes to school late as often as possible to avoid the offending teacher's class.

#### Incident 2: "Everyone Is Entitled To Their Beliefs."

A high school Martin Luther King assembly includes speakers with a variety of minority perspectives, one of whom is gay. Back in the classroom, one teacher holds a discussion about the assembly. Students (mostly boys) make a lot of very heated remarks about the gay speaker. They compare him to Satan. They say he should not have been part of this assembly, that he's not a rightful minority, that he shouldn't have the same rights others have.

One of their classmates, a sixteen year-old girl, is pretty intimidated and upset. When she reports the incident to the Safe Schools Project, almost a year later, she says she still is not sure if she is lesbian, but she thinks her classmates may have believed she was. There had been assumptions and rumors prior to the assembly. She doesn't know what the teacher could have done because, she says, "Everyone is entitled to their beliefs." But she does believe there's a need for education. "Nothing was ever taught about homosexuality."

#### Incident 3: You Decide ... Is it An Epithet Without a Target or is it No Big Deal?

It's an eighth grade health class. The lesson is about "Sexual Decision-Making." The guest speaker asks the class why someone might decide to abstain from sexual intercourse. A student blurts out, loudly and for effect, "Because they're a 'homo!'" No one in particular has been attacked, but over twenty students hear the epithet. Firmly, but without anger, the guest speaker tells the student that his "put-down" language is not OK. The student responds, "But people say that." "Well people might say that I was a 'bitch'," she tells him quietly, "but I would see they got detention for a month." The student laughs and says, "OK" and it's over.

#### **Incident 4: You Decide ... Is it *A Thoughtless Skit* or is it *Blatant Gay-Bashing*?**

The mother of a high school student attends a homecoming rally and is worried and confused by what she sees. Part of the rally includes a skit -- she thinks it was written by teachers -- called "The Dating Game." In the skit, a young man is seated with fifteen potential dates behind him. Two of the fifteen are male students dressed as women. Eventually, the field is narrowed down to a "winner," who turns out to be one of the cross-dressed boys. The male contestant acts happy and excited until suddenly another boy walks on stage. He is dressed to look like a more masculine gay man (black jeans, white shirt and a hat with a pink triangle on it). The young man proceeds to "beat up" the boy dressed as a girl, throwing "her" down on the stage, and then walks off with the "date."

Amid the subsequent applause and laughter, the mother notices two young women in the bleachers. One of them, whom she is pretty sure is lesbian, looks sad and confused. Both girls get up and walk out of the rally. The mother later tells a Safe Schools interviewer that she wondered, "What is so funny? Is it the beating up of a "woman"? The violence against a man for dressing as a woman? Two men walking away arm-in-arm? What?" She says she is frustrated by the lack of compassion on the part of the adults in the gym. She states, "I was very angry and disappointed in the school system to let this happen. And the teacher who put this on ... was he or she ignorant to life? It's so sad that alumni were there and condoned this."

#### **Incident 5: You Decide ... Is it *Guys Bragging* or is it *A Recipe For a Hostile Environment*?**

Two students start bragging about their weekend exploits. They talk about having been to Seattle. They brag that they went to a park known as a gathering place for gay men. They say they searched for and beat up men who they believed were gay. A teacher's aide expresses disapproval of gay-bashing, but allows the bragging to continue.

The substitute teacher feels scared and sick to her stomach. Her greatest concern is the possible intimidating effect of the bragging on two of the braggarts' classmates who have told her they are lesbian. She's worried, too, about her job, but she approaches the principal anyway. The principal is concerned and asks the "sub" what she would like done about it. She says she would like to have a school site team talk to the three boys. She would like the school to notify their parents and file a police report. Later, she tells an interviewer that she thinks at least the conversation with a school site team will take place. She says she wishes counseling were also made available to the lesbian students. And, in an ideal world, she says, there would be education for all staff and students about gay and lesbian issues to reduce the peer approval for bragging about such horrific behavior in the first place.

#### **Incident 6: You Decide ... Is it *Freedom of Speech* or is it *"Pretty Extreme"*?**

"Is it true that condoms have microscopic holes and aren't safe?" The junior high school student who asks this question at a family planning clinic explains that her teacher told the class this. But she says she didn't know whether to believe him because, she says, "he was pretty extreme." The clinic staff person explains the facts (that latex condoms greatly reduce -- but don't eliminate -- the risk of pregnancy and infection). Then the staff person asks the patient what she means when she says this teacher is "pretty extreme."

The teen recalls that her teacher said, for instance, "Condoms don't work," and "Lesbians and gays are sinners." He told her class that people who have AIDS deserve to burn in hell. The teen describes how upset one of her classmates was about this last statement. This classmate's father is gay. He also has AIDS and was ill at the time. The patient says that she comforted her fellow student after class.

The clinic staff person calls the Safe Schools Project. She protects the patient's confidentiality, but she describes their conversation. She says that, although no single individual was targeted, the teacher's statements seem to have "set a tone for what would be tolerated and what would not."

### Incident 7: Teacher Speaks Up

A high school student is looking through a magazine in an art class. He points at a picture and declares, "This guy looks like such a fag!" Two or three students hear the comment, but nobody reacts. The art teacher isn't within earshot, but a special ed teacher who is there to assist another student hears the comment. Then the same young man uses a similar slur again, "Some fag threw a bottle out of [our school] bus and hit a truck." Again, nobody responds.

The special ed teacher mulls the situation over and decides he has to say something. First, as a courtesy, he tells the art teacher what happened. The special ed teacher says that he's going to talk with the student. His colleague rolls her eyes, "Don't bother. It isn't that big of a deal." He explains that he doesn't want his silence to give the young man permission to do it again.

The special ed teacher kneels next to the student and quietly recaps what he heard. He tells him that what he did could hurt someone and that it could be considered a violation of the school's anti-harassment policy, even though he didn't target a specific individual. He says that he wants the student to be more aware of what he says, explaining that you don't know the secrets of the people around you and you can't tell who you might be hurting. The student is apologetic. No scene is made; no discipline is needed. Case closed.

### Incident 8: Teacher Makes "Joke"

The teacher has been making anti-gay remarks since September or October. He's used the word "fag." He once called Capitol Hill in Seattle, which is widely known as a gay neighborhood, "the place where freaks hang out." Another time, he was talking about a different culture when a student asked him what people in that culture wear. The teacher responded, "What would queers wear?"

This time, the teacher begins class by reading the daily bulletin. One announcement is about a Navy representative who will be at school the next day. When he gets to the part about "careers in the Navy," he reads it as "queers in the Navy." Of perhaps thirty students in the class, about twenty-five laugh aloud at the "joke." The other students and two student teachers remain silent. The teacher snickers and continues reading the bulletin.

The caller says that he looked at the faces of the student teachers and they seemed to be in shock. He later spoke with a school employee who was very supportive. The employee called his supervisor, apparently for advice, and then suggested that the student could talk with the teacher about it. But the caller says that that would feel like he was coming out to the teacher about being gay and, understandably, he doesn't want to do that. He describes the class as an ordeal and says it's hard to pay attention there.

**Editor's note:** *The young man asked the Safe Schools Coalition for help contacting the district. When we did, we discovered that someone - presumably the school employee or the student teachers -- had already contacted the school district administration. At the youth's request, they had notified the principal and vice principal of the situation, without identifying the student. We do not know at this point whether any disciplinary action was taken against the teacher.*

### Incident 9: Teacher Proposes Quarantine

A high school student is sitting in class when the teacher comments that he wishes all gays would be placed on an island somewhere. Distressed, the student tells another teacher what happened. That teacher tells another, who is shocked and calls Safe Schools about it. He doesn't know whether the teacher who allegedly uttered the remark has been disciplined for it, but he does know what he would consider appropriate: a two-week suspension without pay. The teacher to whom the distressed student went has said he would have liked the alleged offender to be fired.

"It's demoralizing," the caller says, "to work in a profession that's perpetuating stereotypes instead of working to welcome gay and lesbian youths ..."

### Incident 10: Current Events

It all starts when the teacher, discussing current events, raises the issue of a man who was fired because he was gay. About half the class says nothing and the other half supports the firing ... except for one young woman. (She later explains that she was afraid her friendships would change if she stood up for her beliefs against the crowd [and in fact they did change - she lost some friends], but she was also angry that her peers "could be so ... mean.") So she defends the man who was fired. Instead of supporting the student with the minority opinion or directing the conversation so that all could be heard respectfully, the teacher jumps into the controversy herself, expressing the personal belief that "all gays and lesbians are sick" and the value that "being gay is wrong." She calls it a "sin" to be gay. The argument takes an entire class period. Nobody is targeted per se, but the ordinarily shy young woman who argues against her peers and teacher that day, later tells an interviewer that "nobody else should ever have to go through this."

The young woman is so upset by the experience, in fact, that she doesn't want to go to school for a week afterwards. With her parents' support and encouragement, she finally does go back, but the experience is still quite vivid three years later, when she calls the Safe Schools Project to report it. She wishes that principals would tell their teachers, whatever their opinions, to keep them to themselves.

## Category 2: On-Going Verbal And Other Harassment

### Incident 11: Vanishing Posters

The nurse and another staff person hang three posters and ten flyers announcing the formation of a gay/lesbian support group. Someone removes every single poster and flyer within two days. They hang new ones. Again, they are removed. The caller is disturbed about the vandalism. "I think of it as denying [these sexual minority students] visibility. We have posters up announcing other things," she says, "and they haven't been taken down."

The caller tells her supervisor, who is upset and supportive. She also calls the school district administration. But as far as she knows, no action has been taken to identify or discipline those responsible. No bulletin announcements have been made condemning this kind of behavior and no training has been organized to keep it from continuing to happen. She is upset.

*Editor's note: This is the first Safe Schools report classified as Category Two without an identifiable person targeted. But, as the caller explains, the young people in the support group (or who might have joined it, had they known about it and felt safe doing so) were really the ones who paid a price. The caller is concerned about the environment at school, especially for them.*

## Elementary School Students Targeted

### Category 1: One-Time, Climate Setting Incidents

#### Incident 12: "Daddy, Do You Know What A 'Faggot' Is?"

A first grade student is riding home in the family car after school. "Do you know what a 'faggot' is?" he asks his dad. "Why do you ask?" "[My friend] called me one at recess."

His dad explains that "faggot" is a derogatory term for a gay person and asks him how he is feeling about being called that. The first grader seems to have felt embarrassed, but he says it doesn't bother him now.

It bothers his dad, however ... enough that he decides two years later to share the story with the Safe Schools Project. He's still angry and he says he and his wife are "disappointed that children that age have that mindset." He wishes that, when adults at school are aware of these incidents (which they may not have been in this instance) they would have a talk with the name-callers, send a note to the name-callers' parents and inform the parents of the targeted child. Even if the children are all 6 or 7 years old.

## Category 2: On-Going Verbal And Other Harassment

### Incident 13: When A Grown-Up Doesn't Back You Up

The child is eight years old and in the third grade. A classmate about the same age calls him a 'faggot' on the playground. He tells the playground teacher. Nothing is done about it and a week later it happens again. Once again, he tells the playground teacher. Again, the teacher doesn't do anything about it. The third time his classmate calls him a 'faggot,' a fight ensues. According to the targeted child, the offender throws a basketball, "really hard at [his] face, but it hits [his] arm." Punches are exchanged.

The child, reporting the incident, says, "It was just like violence ... [so] then I told the principal and I got all my recesses taken away but he got only two taken away. Next time I'm supposed to tell a teacher, but I already did." The young person says he felt embarrassed by the whole series of incidents and that he lost people he had thought were friends (some students watched it all in silence). He says that, finally, he told his mother what had happened. She spoke with the teacher and the third-grader says, "That helped a lot." She apparently spoke with the principal as well, who said that once the child told a teacher, it should have been taken care of.

### Incident 14: How Young It Starts

"Get away, Gay Boy!" "Don't let Gay Boy touch you!" For three or four months, this second grader hears these taunts from his peers. He's not sure why they say this about him or what he's done "wrong." Nobody will play with him at recess. He is becoming less excited about school and often prefers to stay home. While in the classroom, he is more reserved, less interactive, and less confident and is afraid of some of the bigger kids.

Finally, when it happens *every day* for several weeks in a row, he tells his mother. She is saddened and angry. She immediately approaches the teacher. The teacher is very supportive. She explains the concept of "slander" to the class, tells them name-calling will not be tolerated, and asks them to write letters of apology, which they willingly do. One little girl expresses her sorrow that she didn't tell the bullies to stop.

When the mother calls the Safe Schools Project to report the incident, she says that her son is feeling supported, but that he is still reserved among his peers and feels he has lost friends. She expresses satisfaction at how the school is handling it, and says she called just because she wanted it documented. The mom says, "[It's made me] more aware that [the teasing] starts younger than I thought it would. These are second grade kids. I don't know *how* aware they are of sexual orientation at that age."

### Incident 15: "Blowing It Out Of Proportion"

Since February, at least three times a week, the caller's son has been enduring taunts of "faggot" and "gay boy." Students, mostly fifth graders, have threatened to beat the third-grader up. They have cornered him and pushed him around on the playground, slapped him, hit him, and head-butted him in the stomach.

Then in May, he is leaving school one day with his mom when a student calls him "joto" (Spanish for "queer"). Mom hears the slur and is upset, but she is in the middle of a conversation so she says nothing. Her son goes on ahead to put his belongings in the car. When she arrives at the car, she finds him surrounded and about to be assaulted. She intervenes. Her son is in tears.

Outraged, the mom goes to the principal. The principal is out, but a counselor on loan from a Public Health agency tells the mom, "[Your son's] being called 'gay' or 'queer' is no different than when you [the mom] were called a 'spic' in school." When the mom subsequently calls Safe Schools, she says this comment felt like one more attack. She says that when the principal returned, he felt her report was "hearsay." According to the mom, the principal said of her son, "He'll have to live with it." She says that the principal told her she was overreacting, blowing the harassment out of proportion because, "kids of this age don't even know what this means." She says the principal insisted that contacting the parents of the name-caller (one of whom, she later learns, works at this school) would be "totally inappropriate and unnecessary" and that a meeting with both students and both sets of parents "wouldn't resolve anything." District administrators have never returned her calls.

The mom says that other school employees (besides the principal and administration) have been helpful. One made the name-caller apologize; one reprimanded the class about slander; and a third told the targeted child to come to her if the harassment continues.

Still, he's afraid to go to the playground any more and his mom has stopped dropping him off at school early out of fear. When the harassment has not abated by the end of the school year, she withdraws him, and enrolls him in a different school for the fall.

## Category 3: Physical Harassment And/Or Sexual Assault, Short Of Rape

### Incident 16: He Was Just Playing Kickball

An 11-year old fifth grade boy is targeted on an on-going basis. According to the friend who reports this particular incident, there have been rumors around school that the 11-year old is gay. He is playing kickball during recess one day when another fifth grader comes up behind him and pulls his pants down. The offender makes a racial slur and runs away yelling, "You stay away from me or I'll kick your butt!"

The classmate who calls the Project says he went to the principal for help. He says the principal seemed to doubt that the incident had really happened and acted as if he was busy. When asked whether the perpetrator was disciplined, this friend tells the interviewer, "I think so, but not enough. He had to write sentences." When asked how he'd have liked the principal to handle it, he says, "I would have liked him to do more about it ... to go around and ask people about it. [I would have liked him to have gotten] the ... person who did it and suspend him."

## Category 4: Physical Assaults

### Incident 17: Attack By the Whole Sixth Grade Class

It begins on December 1, 1990, when he is eleven and in the sixth grade. Someone steals not only his money and his watch, but also his diary ... in which he is struggling with feeling as if he is a girl on the inside. It's not that he doesn't like and feel attracted to girls. He says in his diary that maybe he is actually a lesbian. Classmates sell his diary for \$10.00 a page. Then a large group ("the whole class") physically attacks him in the classroom, when the teacher is not around. Someone hits him or punches him. They pull some of his clothes off and try to get him to wear the girls' clothes.

He tells nobody. He feels confused and afraid and lonely. He starts to get sick more often. When he is in class, he participates less and has trouble paying attention.

There have been a dozen more incidents over four years for this 16-year old transgender youth, by the time he calls the Safe Schools Project to talk about how it all started.

## Category 5: Gang Rapes

### Incident 18: Elementary School Camp

It is the spring of his sixth grade year. This twelve-year old is one of two students who are sexually assaulted at an elementary school-sponsored camp. He is attacked three nights in a row by four other sixth graders and two high school-aged counselors. They swear at him in language he later refuses to repeat. He is beaten up and tied down with belts. They throw one another on top of him. They anally gang rape him with objects. One of his attackers vomits on him. They threaten to kill him if he tells anyone of the assaults.

When he finally finds an adult who will listen, he gets support. His parents, his teacher and the police all become involved. He describes his mother as "upset and crying and wanting to take [him] to the hospital." (She does; he is treated in the emergency room and released.) He says his stepfather "wanted to go down to the school and beat up all the teachers." He says his teacher "was real upset and wanted to sue the school." Despite all this support and the fact that he changed schools one month later and never went back, he says he still has nightmares, three and a half years later.

## Middle School and Junior High Students Targeted

### Category 1: One-Time, Climate Setting Incidents

#### Incident 19: Horsing Around

Class hasn't started yet. People are milling. Some are horsing around. One seventh grader is probably just teasing another. He may not really assume that his friend is gay, but he does call him gay in a derogatory tone. A guest speaker objects to the slur. The targeted student says, defensively, "No, no. I'm not [gay.]" The adult explains that even if he isn't gay, probably other people in the room are, and that it's really not OK to use that particular issue as a put-down.

#### Incident 20: Virtual Guns

A seventh grade boy is sitting in the computer lab, quietly studying, when three other boys walk in. One of them asks the others, "Is that a new haircut or is that a fag?!" A teacher intervenes, "There are better ways to greet [someone]." One of the three boys seems embarrassed. He apologizes. His friends just seem hostile. The three then proceed to sit down together at a computer. They begin looking up guns on the Internet. They pull up pictures of a rapid-fire gun and talk, loudly enough that others can hear, about using guns to "scare away fags."

Feeling "angry and inadequate," the teacher asks the three offenders to leave the lab. She immediately talks with the librarian about their behavior and, later, with the principal. The principal asks the teacher and the librarian to keep a close eye on the offenders.

When a Safe Schools interviewer asks the teacher what she thinks may have led the offenders to assume the targeted child was gay, she says, "I don't know. [Maybe it is that] the boy is very neat, clean cut and soft spoken ... and that he was doing schoolwork during free time."

### Category 2: On-Going Verbal And Other Harassment

#### Incident 21: "We Don't Want You Here."

The insults fly from the back of the school bus: "Dyke," "Queer," "Faggot." The offenders are two guys and a girl. They've been harassing two particular middle school girls every day for two months now. Today, one tells the girls, "We don't want you here."

One of the targeted young women tells a Safe Schools interviewer that she doesn't do anything after school any more. She says she's lonely, but she just "doesn't want to be around people from here."

#### Incident 22: "Flute Boy"

Ever since the start of school this year, a seventh grader has been the target of daily bullying in the hallways. Among other taunts, the kids call him "flute boy" because he plays with the symphony. One student walks right up to him and asks, "How come you look so gay? Are you gay?" He says, "No" and keeps on walking as if it doesn't bother him. But it does.

His family sees the devastation. He cries every day when he gets home from school. He gets very sad and dreads going to school. It's been going on for months when he admits to his family what is happening and says he doesn't understand why they are picking on him. His mom, very upset and supportive of the 12-year-old, calls an elementary school counselor, whom she happens to trust. The counselor promptly calls the Safe Schools Project.

The counselor says it hadn't occurred to her to call the middle school until the interviewer asked about it ... but she isn't sure it would be wise, anyway. She says, "I don't want him to get embroiled in this, for his own safety. I don't want more harassment." She agrees to check with the mom about it. In the meantime, she reports feeling agonized at what this child goes through every day.



### Incident 23: "More Than Anti-Gay?"

He has showered several times after gym class, not wearing shorts as the other guys do. One day in June, in a locker room full of their peers, a couple of them confront him, "What are you? Some kind of faggot!?" Some kids tell the name-callers to shut up. Others say nothing, perhaps afraid that they would become the next targets if they spoke up.

Maybe it is "more than anti-gay." The eighth grader in question is Jehovah's Witness and East Indian. The Math teacher reporting this incident says that the young man told *her* he thought his classmates may have been motivated, too, by religious bigotry or racism. And maybe it's because he's kind of quiet. But the words they used were anti-gay. And he says their tone of voice was "scary."

### Incident 24: You Decide ...Is it Time To "Keep It Down" or is it Don't Dare Defend Gay People?

The young woman who called the Project about this incident has been observing anti-gay remarks at school -- not directed at her, just in general -- since the third grade. She says that her classmates "constantly pick at someone who they believe [is gay or lesbian] or [who they] just want to destroy, even when they know the person isn't gay."

But now, in eighth grade, she is learning what it feels like to be personally attacked. The sequence of events actually starts at a high school. The principal *there* asks a guest speaker with HIV to leave after the speaker mentions that he's gay. Schools all over the state hear about the incident, including students at the caller's middle school.

They start talking, in class, about what happened. The teacher decides to allow the discussion. Students take sides in support of and against gay people. The most vocal of those who oppose gay people says they should all be shot. He laughs at the half dozen classmates who support gay rights and says that they must be gay themselves. The teacher's involvement is just to ask the class to "keep it down."

After class, the "ring leader" continues to say "really offensive things" to the caller and the others in the class who defended gay people. The caller says, "At first [we] pretended not to care, but ... after [rumors about our sexuality began to spread], it got to [us]."

She says she was proud of how she handled the situation, but since it happened, she's been feeling sick more often. In fact, she says that she dropped the class and that she still feels self-conscious and unsafe at school. She wishes that the principal had come to the class when things started to get mean and had told the students, especially the "ring leader," that personal attacks wouldn't be tolerated. She wishes they'd been warned that further talk of that kind would be punished.

## **Category 3: Physical Harassment And/Or Sexual Assault, Short Of Rape**

### Incident 25: Outnumbered On the School Bus

Two ninth grade girls are riding the school bus one day in May, when they find themselves the targets of a group of five middle-school boys. They call the girls "queers," "faggots," "dykes" and publicly embarrass them. At some point, it gets physical. The boys corner them, brushing up against them in a sexual way. The boys threaten them, "You better watch out. We will get you." The bus driver is present throughout the incident, but does not intervene.

One of the girls calls the Safe Schools Project to report what happened. An interviewer asks her what she thinks might have led the attackers to assume she was a sexual minority. She says, "I speak up when they make [anti-gay] jokes, so they think we are lesbians." She tells the interviewer that, since the incident, her grades have suffered, she has increased her use of alcohol, and she has thought about suicide.

## Category 4: Physical Assaults

### Incident 26: Two Years of Attacks

Through all of seventh and eighth grades, this fifteen-year-old young woman has been the target of frequent harassment. She's been threatened and had rumors spread about her. She's been publicly humiliated on a daily basis. There have been graffiti in the bathrooms linking her romantically with two friends. One friend says it made her uncomfortable to even go into the bathrooms. On this particular day, the primary target is walking down the hall with those same two friends. It's lunchtime. Five seventh grade girls start to follow them and call them names. Then one blocks their path and hits the young woman.

The friend who calls in the report says she didn't intervene because the offender "was big, tall and mean." She was afraid. She says, "There was a teacher in the hall and she was like just standing there." She says, "That's how it is at my school."

### Incident 27: More Than An Arm is Broken

This seventh grade boy is taunted daily: "pervert," "faggot," "queers burn in hell," "fags are scum," "your parents are faggots." Someone scribbles "\_\_\_\_ loves boys" on his notebook. He finds hateful notes in his locker. His mother appeals to the principal to do something. The principal assures her the staff will get "sensitivity training" and the harassment will stop. She is angry that the *students* won't receive any "training." It's been students harassing her son, not adults. The harassment continues.

Then one day, following a game of "smear the queer," the boy is involved in an altercation. Apparently, it is another student's unsolicited advice about how not to look so gay (sic) that triggers the altercation. He ends up fighting alone, against at least two other kids. By the time it's over, he has cuts, bruises, a lump on his neck from being struck with a coke bottle, a swollen hand from being shoved into a locker, a sprained ankle from trying to get away, and a broken arm. He goes to the school nurse, who puts an icepack on his arm. Then he is reprimanded and suspended for the rest of the day.

It is not clear from the mother's report -- months later -- who threw the first punch, but it may well be her son. And probably no one would argue that, whomever it was, physical violence must be met with consequences. Still, she's frustrated that it is still happening daily and angry that school personnel seem insensitive to the enormity of the provocation. And they seem unwilling to educate *or* discipline the provocateurs as long as her son meets their verbal and physical harassment with fists. It seems to the mother so unfair to put all the blame on the child who defends his dignity with violence and none on the people who publicly humiliate him on an agonizingly constant basis.

### Incident 28: Pushed and Poked Too Far

It is April 1996. For the past six months, this middle schooler has been physically harassed and called names like "fag" and "fairy" multiple times every day. The kids look at him and say, "I can't believe they let a gay person in this school" and "Gays are not normal." Soon he is coming home two or three times a week, with bruises and small puncture wounds from being jabbed with pencils and wires. A teacher starts walking the boy and his mother to and from class.

One day he is sitting at his desk when one of the harassers asks him, "Do you have a staring problem?" Then someone else pokes him from behind. When he accuses someone of doing it, a student says, "He must have eyes on his butt to see who's poking him." Frustrated and embarrassed, he pulls the chair out from under the classmate who made the comment. That boy gets up, swings at the student and a fight is on. Teachers separate the two boys. A few classmates speak up for the one being teased, but he is still escorted out of the class to calm down.

That afternoon, he and his mother call the Safe Schools Project. He tells the interviewer that both combatants were taken to the office, but that only he was suspended for a day. He says he's feeling angry, afraid, and lonely. He isn't sure he can handle five more years of this in order to graduate.

### Incident 29: "No One Else's Business"

A group of students at this middle school call a lot of people gay or lesbian. They told one student her brother was a "fag" because he wore glasses. They "freak out when they think someone is gay or lesbian" and they say it is "sick" and "wrong." They tell ugly anti-gay jokes.

Now, they have decided that one eighth grader in particular is gay. One of them grabs his backpack and starts kicking it around. They tear it. They write, "I'm a fag" on the back of the backpack. When he tries to mark it out, they accuse him of trying to highlight it. They laugh and throw things at him. And then two of them physically attack him, shoving and punching him "really hard" on his shoulders and arms and head. He doesn't fight back. Besides the group of about a dozen offenders, another seven or so students witness the whole thing. A teacher finally happens upon the scene and stops the assault.

One of the students who saw it all, later defends the targeted young man to the teacher, explaining that he "didn't do anything." She describes the teacher as somewhat supportive. She says she thinks the offenders were told, in private, that their behavior was "inappropriate," but she wishes they had been disciplined in some way, too. She says, "If the kid is gay, it is no one else's business unless he wants it to be."

### Incident 30: The Fistfight

For a whole semester, one middle schooler has been harassing a particular classmate, calling him a "faggot." Others may have contributed to the bullying, too, but the secretary says there's been one primary offender and that adults in the school have known about it. Finally, in mid-January, it comes to a head during class one day. The offender calls him a "faggot" one time too many and the targeted student hits him. A struggle ensues.

The teacher intervenes, but refuses to acknowledge the provocation that preceded the fistfight. The targeted student is suspended. According to the school secretary, the child's permanent record states simply, "suspended for fighting." The school secretary characterizes the child's emotional hurt as a five on a one to five scale ... and she is upset for him. His tormentor is apparently not disciplined at all.

## Freshmen and Sophomores Targeted

### Category 1: One-Time, Climate Setting Incidents

#### Incident 31: You Decide ... Is it *An Epithet With a Target* or is it *Boys Will Be Boys?*

A ninth grade student takes another's hat. The owner of the hat screams, "Gimme my hat back, 'faggot!! I'll kick your butt!" He chases the student with the hat around the classroom and tries to hit him. Students and the teacher witness the whole event. Some students stand by in silence; some side with each of the two antagonists. The teacher breaks it up. He doesn't specifically address the slur.

### **Incident 32: Principal Asks for List**

The principal instructs an openly lesbian student to compile for her a list of all the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students in the school. The lesbian young woman, believing she's been called to the office for disciplinary reasons, does her best to create such a list and gives it to the principal. It has at least ten names on it. (The dad who calls the Project is not sure exactly how many names were on the list. ... 10? 30? He only knows his child's was one of them.) Only three of the young people whose names are on the list are actually open at school about being sexual minorities.

One of the students whose name is on the list finds out about it. Fearing for his safety, he asks the principal to give the list back. She refuses.

Another young man calls his dad. The dad, furious that his child's confidentiality has been compromised, calls the school. The principal will neither confirm nor deny to him that she has such a list. The dad calls the district. The administrator with whom he speaks does acknowledge that such a list was created. The district-level administrator offers no resolution.

By the time the dad calls the Safe Schools Project, he is livid. His son, he says, and many of the other students whose names are on the list, are extremely upset. A school employee, who calls Safe Schools independently of the dad, is also distressed about the list and the safety of the young people on it. The employee says, "evidence [of anti-gay harassment] has disappeared with the principal" in the past.

### **Incident 33: "Why The Hell Did You Say That?!"**

A young woman and her friend are walking to first period when a group of three guys walk by in the other direction. One says, as he is passing the girls, "Fucking dyke." It happens so fast and so seemingly out of nowhere that at first it doesn't even click in the young woman's mind that the bully was saying this to her.

One of the guy's friends, however, realizes exactly what was said and to whom. He asks his friend, "Why the hell did you say that!?" The bully responds, "Because they are." The girls just keep walking.

The one who was the primary target would really like to talk with the school nurse about the incident. When she calls the Safe Schools Project later that day, she tells an interviewer that the nurse has been "really cool" (i.e., great) in the past. But when she tried to see her today, the nurse wasn't in. She will try again tomorrow. In the meantime, she's just "really bothered" by this incident and the rumors that apparently led to it. She says she really isn't sure what her sexual orientation is. But she adds, "I'm angry that just because I shave my head and dress alternately, it's automatically assumed I'm gay."

## **Category 2: On-Going Verbal And Other Harassment**

### **Incident 34: Sit Down**

A particular ninth grade boy gets harassed by peers "a lot." They spread rumors about his sexual orientation and call him names. Then one day in March in History class, he says something with which some classmates disagree. It doesn't have anything to do with homosexuality. Half a dozen guys start saying that he has sex with guys, apparently not because they really think he's gay, but because it's the ultimate insult in their world. The targeted youth tells them to leave him alone. One boy then corners him and threatens to "kick [his] ass" if he doesn't shut up. The teacher sees what's going on. She ignores what the offenders are saying but does tell the one who is doing the threatening to sit down. A young woman is watching all this, feeling too scared to intervene on her classmate's behalf. But she is still upset enough about the situation to call Safe Schools two months later.

### **Incident 35: "I'm Still The Same Person."**

This fifteen-year-old has been out to herself since she was seven. And she has told close friends she was gay, but she's never made any public statements about it. This winter, however, she was "outed" in a manner that is probably every youth's worst fear: the mother of a "friend" told the friend the girl was gay. How did she know? The mother works at the same agency where the girl attends a support group for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth.

Fast forward to P.E. class. When the word gets out at school that she is gay, three girls in her P.E. class verbally attack her. One says, "We don't want your kind, lesbian. Leave." Then, a group, (perhaps the same three girls -- it isn't clear) draft a petition, signed by all the other students in the class and give it to the teacher and the principal. It asks that she be made to change clothes somewhere besides the girls' locker room. The principal agrees; she is told to change clothes elsewhere. If she wasn't feeling lonely and isolated before, she certainly is now. She says she dreads going to school, feels like she's lost all her friends, and she wishes "they could get the point [that] I'm still the same person [they've always known]."

### **Incident 36: Advice To "Just Ignore It" Doesn't Help**

She is a high school freshman and he is the class bully. They sit next to each other in typing class. All semester he picks on her, throwing things at her ("paper, pencils, whatever [is] around"), calling her names ("lesbo," "stupid," "dyke," "faggot"), spreading rumors about her, asking her where her girlfriend is. Other kids laugh. At first, she tries just not responding. It makes her mad but she holds her tongue. But it is really hard to concentrate on learning to type. So she tries speaking up for herself. That only makes it worse.

Eventually, she talks with her teacher and her parents about the bully. All they suggest is that she "just ignore him." The teacher does tell the bully, at least once, to turn around and work, but according to the young woman he "hardly hears it." Finally, if the teacher won't move the bully, the freshman decides that she will try moving her own seat. From across the room she continues to see him bothering those around him, but at least she seems to be off the hook.

When she finally calls the Safe Schools Project, she says this bully had no reason to think she was gay; it's just an easy way to embarrass a person in front of her classmates. She says, "He would put me into a situation that he thought was funny." There was nothing funny about the continued threats to beat her up.

She tells a Safe Schools interviewer that, "Lots of teachers feel they have no control. But *some* teachers say 'no name calling will be tolerated' and *usually* that does it."

### **Incident 37: A Mother's Concern For Her Son**

In middle school, kids would call him "faggot" in the hallways. He changed schools. It began to happen again. Now he's in high school and it isn't any better. The name-calling continues and he gets pushed around in the halls at least a couple of times a month. It's not that he is "out." In fact, his mother, who reports the incident doesn't say whether he is even gay. But apparently, there have been rumors around school about his sexual orientation and he has sometimes expressed support for gay civil rights.

The Mom reports one recent incident that happened in class, in front of 15 or 20 other students and 3 adults. The teacher started to read a student's essay aloud. The student objected, so her son tried to defend his classmate. The author of the essay -- apparently needing to distance himself from the alleged homosexual -- said "Shut up, faggot! I don't want to hear from you!" He responded, "Fuck off!" At which point four or five other students began attacking him with sarcasm ("Oh, look at \_\_; he's upset." and so on).

The Mom reports that two of the teachers took both boys to the principal's office. The principal dealt with the issue primarily as an anger-management problem, according to the targeted teen's mother. She tells the interviewer that she doesn't feel that the underlying homophobia was adequately addressed. Lately, her son has been getting sick a lot more often. He has cut classes. He avoids certain parts of the campus that feel unsafe and he has changed how he gets to and from school. She thinks he's begun or increased his use of alcohol or other drugs and he has expressed doubts to her about whether he has what it takes to graduate. She is, to say the least, very, very concerned about her son.

### **Incident 38: It's Not the Honest Disapproval; It's the Attacks**

After a year of abuse at the hands of her peers, she calls the Safe Schools Project. Over this year, her classmates have barked at her and told her she has AIDS; they have given her embarrassing or sexual notes; they have cornered her, threatened her, shoved her and thrown things at her.

One incident in the middle of her sophomore year, however, isn't physical. It's just scary. At about 1:00 p.m., one young man comes up to her in the hall, with five or six other guys. He accuses her of "looking at" his girlfriend. He tells her, "It's sick to be a lesbian" and threatens to "kick [her] ass." He invokes the Bible, telling her that she is going to Hell. He calls her a "dyke" and a "queer." Most of the witnesses laugh, but one of the young woman's friends defends her.

Does she wish the offender would get disciplined? No. She wants him educated. She says, "I wouldn't want him kicked out. I would want him to spend the day with a gay person."

Since this incident, she has changed schools. She says, "I feel bad because [it's as if] I ran away from the problem, but at least now I can go to school." And after a couple of months at her new school, she says "I have only had one person say she didn't like me because I'm a lesbian [at this school]. But that was OK; she was honest." So it isn't the honest disapproval that has worn her down, as much as the attacks and threats. Because of the threats, she started avoiding parts of the school building and grounds. She changed the way she got to and from school. She says that it affected her grades and made her doubt whether she has what it takes to graduate. And she says the whole experience led her to attempt suicide.

Fortunately, she's doing better now that she's in a safer environment. She attends a support group and she says she's doing "fine."

### **Incident 39: The Unauthorized Newsletter**

He's a high school sophomore. He's been experiencing harassment at school for years, but for the last twelve months, it's been a daily phenomenon. Sometimes, it's even physical. Students have followed him, cornered him, shoved him, spit at him and hit him. One science teacher has, on "numerous" occasions, imitated a stereotypical gay man.

Finally, the daily harassment by one particular student becomes unbearable: words like "queer" and "buttfucker" are punctuated with offensive hand gestures and jokes. The targeted sophomore goes to the building administration for help. They bring in the offender and "tell him to stop."

In apparent retribution for getting him in trouble, the perpetrator "gets a group of [three] friends together to call [their classmate] names in gym class." About thirty students witness the name-calling. Their reactions vary. Some people laugh. Some "stare at him as a freak." The targeted youth, feeling very embarrassed and angry, goes to the principal again. He reports that the problem is escalating. The principal responds by suspending the offender from P.E. class for one day, but doesn't put the incident on the offender's school record. The student describes to a sympathetic teacher having felt as if the principal *really* said, "I don't want to hear about it. Go away."

A female friend of the targeted youth, enraged by the principal's response, decides to publish an unauthorized newsletter. In it, she urges fellow students not to harass their gay peers and she charges that the school doesn't protect its gay students. She begins handing the newsletter out around campus and is promptly suspended ... not from a single class, as the offender was, but from school.

One teacher calls to report the whole sequence of events. He thinks the administration has conveyed a simple, cruel message: *You will get a "harder slap on the hand if [you] print material discouraging harassment" than for harassment itself.*

### **Incident 40: The Bus**

Two sisters, a ninth grader and a seventh grader, are on the bus on the way home from school when a guy blurts out at them, "Are you dykes?" Several of their peers laugh and mock the girls' denial. When everybody gets off the bus, the girls tell the driver what happened. The driver talks with their principals. The high school vice principal takes decisive action, suspending the bully from school and, for five days, from the bus.

Two weeks pass before the older girl calls Safe Schools. She says that, since the offender has been back in school, he's been following her. He walks up and asks her how she's doing. He gets behind her in line and loudly tells other people that she got him suspended. He threatens to tear a gay-supportive sticker off the young woman's backpack. He says he ought to get a sticker for his backpack that says, "Kill all gays because it's sick and wrong."

Her parents are upset. School employees have told her "not to take garbage from [the offender]." But she wishes the principal would talk with him about why his behavior is wrong. She says, "It's a touchy subject, so schools don't talk about it. But they need to, [because] kids call each other fags."

*Editor's note: This young woman asked for advice from Safe Schools, because she is continuing to be harassed, but fears retribution if the administrator calls perpetrator in again. We problem solved. She decided to ask the administrator to interview all the youth witnesses so it's not just her "snitching" on the offender. She agreed to call back if things don't improve.*

### **Incident 41: Pep Rally**

Since the first week of the school year, this fifteen year-old has been experiencing anti-gay harassment on a regular basis. Maybe it's partly just that he is a freshman. He is not "out" about being gay, except to close friends, but there have been rumors. People have called him names and threatened to kill him and his family. Someone wrote his phone number on a school bathroom wall and there have been malicious phone calls to his home.

It comes to a head in a very public humiliation at a homecoming pep rally. When the ninth grader gets up on stage to sing, the show is already running long, so the students in charge of the event just give him a prize and tell him to sit back down. As he's returning to his seat, a huge group of, he guesses, sixty students, stand up and yell at him: "faggot," "queer," "queer bait!" The faculty tell them to sit down. He doesn't acknowledge the taunts, but he is scared, hurt and totally devastated.

Two young people, the youth himself and a friend, both call Safe Schools to report the incident afterwards. Neither seems to know the other is calling. They both say they talked to a school counselor about what happened. The youth says he had talked with the counselor about previous incidents and that she had blamed him for them. The friend says the counselor denies having asked the young man what he did to provoke the offenders.

In any case, this time, he just wants to transfer out of the school. The counselor is upset and tells the targeted youth that he is giving up. But his family is very supportive of him. A month of unrelenting abuse is enough and he does change schools despite the counselor's disapproval. Neither the young man nor his friend is aware of any discipline whatsoever of the offenders. In fact, they say, the situation at his old school has gotten worse for their friends. There's more name-calling in the halls and similar acts of harassment.

## **Category 3: Physical Harassment And/Or Sexual Assault, Short Of Rape**

### **Incident 42: It Only Takes One Leader**

It starts in September. This 15-year old high school freshman says that most of her harassers are boys, but that one girl in particular is engaging in "more than daily" abuse. This girl calls her a "lesbian" and a "whore." She spreads rumors about her and tells this freshman not to look at her because, according to the freshman, "She thinks I want her body."

Finally, a group of twenty or so people, mostly boys, but led by this particular girl, follow her, corner her and pull her clothes down. They threaten to "kick [her] butt" because, they say, she's lesbian. She is scared and humiliated. She also feels very much alone. She tells only one friend about what happened, no parents or school authorities. She doesn't think they would believe her and, besides, she's afraid of "telling on" the primary perpetrator. At some point, she feels depressed enough that she attempts suicide.

### **Incident 43: Is "Conflict Mediation" Appropriate?**

"Oh look, there's four lesbians sitting over there together!" The taunt is heard throughout the cafeteria. Today, like every day for the past three weeks, the same group of four friends experience sexual slurs, threats, and food being thrown at them. This particular incident occurs when the friends come in from lunch. As a group of half a dozen other students, some male and some female, walk down the hall, one yells, "You fucking lesbians." Another challenges, "Oh what, you can't look us in the face!? Is it because we're telling the truth? Do you have a problem with this? If you do we can kick your ass right now!" One of the girls at whom all this is directed asks the attackers why they're doing this. Her friends keep walking.

When another of the girls, a 15 year-old, calls the Project to report what's been happening, she explains why *she didn't* respond to the confrontation: "I didn't want them to know it was bugging me." But it was. Since this started, she says, she's been depressed. "I just sit in my room and think about what I should do. I wish I could take my backpack and run away." She does identify as lesbian, but she says, "People I don't [even] *know* have heard or assumed that I'm gay. I don't know why they care."

Although she says she did confide in her counselor, she reports that the counselor didn't seem to quite know how to respond. "She encouraged me to get conflict mediation. [I want them to] consider it as harassing. They should be punished like any other sexual harassment."

### **Incident 44: "I Can Turn You Around"**

They are best friends. One young woman gives the other a kiss on the cheek at the prom and their dates "decide [they] are gay." The rumor is spread and the harassment begins. People tell them, "Silly faggots; dicks are for chicks." People "call [them] 'dykes' all the time."

Today, the two friends are hanging out near the cafeteria when two guys start calling them "stupid dykes." They push the girls and brush against them in a sexual way. Other guys, perhaps ten altogether, join in. "I can turn you around." "Why don't you get a real man?"

When one of the girls calls Safe Schools, she says her reaction was surprise and humiliation. She says that, with a school counselor's help, she went to the principal. The principal, she says, "denied it ever happened."

"How would he know?!" she asks. "He wasn't even there!"

### **Incident 45: The Dance**

For about a year, since October of ninth grade, he's been harassed at school on a daily basis. People have written graffiti about him on desks and scratched it onto his locker with a key. A particular group of guys, most of them athletes, have been calling him "faggot" and "queer," blocking his path, shoving him and punching him. They even told his friends they would "slit his throat."

Then, in October of his sophomore year, the young man takes his boyfriend to a school dance. One of the bullies sees him and yells, "Why are you here, faggot?!" Six or eight of the bully's friends join in the verbal attack ... until their dates get them to shut up.

After a while, since their body language is still thoroughly menacing, the targeted youth asks a security guard for help. She tells the bullies to back off. They do, but not for long. Soon he is dancing with a girl, when one of the bullies rams into him on the dance floor. The caller's boyfriend is so angry at that point that they call the dad, to come get the boyfriend. The caller tries to tough it out, but he only lasts another half-hour before giving up and going home. The dance was ruined for him, but beyond that, his grades have suffered since this all started and he has to watch his back on campus all the time. He's begun to wonder if he has what it takes to stick it out until graduation.



### **Incident 46: The Cafeteria**

A high school freshman discovers a note in his backpack: "Faggots must die." In the course of the investigation, the Principal even considers that the boy himself could have authored the note. The Principal asks him to take a polygraph test, which the young man takes and passes, apparently with his parents' consent. He is telling the truth. The investigation into the death threat continues.

Another few days pass and one third period, two boys announce that they are going to "kick the fucking faggot's ass." His friends tell the targeted youth to walk away. According to his mother, who later calls Safe Schools, he does walk away.

Fast forward to lunch. The targeted youth walks into the cafeteria. There, one of the same two students kneels in front of him and the other rushes him from behind, in order to knock him over the kneeling accomplice. Somehow, he keeps his balance. The two offenders begin shoving and threatening him. A teacher notices what's going on and begins to break it up. A third student then starts verbally threatening the targeted youth. The three attackers are still calling him "faggot" and "queer" as all four young men are being escorted to the office.

The principal investigates what happened, expels the two who physically assaulted their classmate and suspends the third offender. He also immediately calls one of the parents of the targeted youth. The mom who calls Safe Schools the next day says that the family and the principal are now problem-solving together and bringing in outside support. It is too soon to say what will happen next. Her son says he's feeling suicidal. All the adults are concerned.

### **Incident 47: "Are You Gay?!"**

It starts around 11:00 a.m., during a field trip. A classmate comes up to a high school sophomore and asks him point blank, "Are you gay?" When he says "yes," the offender says, "I should kick your ass." The offender then proceeds to go around to other students on the field trip, telling them the target's gay. A second student approaches the targeted youth and the first offender tells him, "He's the one." The two offenders now begin blocking the target's way and shoving him.

By the end of the day, most of the other students on the field trip have begun to join in the verbal harassment, pointing, laughing and generally ostracizing the primary target and the one friend who stands by him.

In the week since the field trip, the attacks have not let up. Someone left him an embarrassing note and people keep saying things to him and about him. He has talked with friends - including an adult outside of school -- about the situation and describes them as angry and supportive. But he has chosen not to go to any school employees about the harassment.

## **Category 4: Physical Assaults**

### **Incident 48: Locker Room Assault**

A bisexual, transgender ninth grader has been experiencing harassment "off and on" (when pressed he says "three times a week") for months. People talk about him, brush up against him in a sexually menacing way, and generally try to embarrass him. Then one December day a guy confronts him in the boy's locker room after P.E. "Are you wearing cover-up?" Cornered by the blunt question, he says, "Yes." The first bully and his friend proceed to grab their target, holding him down and wiping his face with a wet paper towel. Other students just watch. The assault ends when the bell rings.

### **Incident 49: Seventeen Broken Bones**

It's autumn and school has just let out for the day. An openly gay tenth-grader is walking down the hall. A group of students, led by one youth who is apparently not a student, start making anti-gay remarks and threatening the tenth-grader. He keeps walking. Other student bystanders tell the offenders not to "mess with" the young man and to "lay off." It doesn't work.

The ringleader allegedly attacks the tenth-grader, breaking his nose and seventeen bones. Staff people show up and stop the assault. They get the targeted young man to the emergency room, where doctors insert a metal rod in his nose.

The respondent, a student who witnessed the attack, says she thinks that criminal charges were filed as well. But two years later, she says she knows of no action by the school.

### **Incident 50: Attack at the Bus Stop**

A tenth grade girl is waiting for her school bus one winter day. Two guys, juniors, show up at the bus stop and begin calling her a 'dyke'. She tries to walk away and they follow her. She runs and they chase her. They block her path, brush up against her in a sexual way and tell her, "We know you're a dyke! We can change you!" They shove her, hit her and tear up her backpack. There are no witnesses.

She tells her friends about it and, although it scares them, they rally around her. She tells her parents and she feels good about their response. She does worry that they'll be too protective of her in the future. She also tells a counselor at school. The counselor describes to a colleague feeling powerless.

### **Incident 51: Attack of the Basketball Team**

A student athlete, 15-years old and a freshman, breaks up with her girlfriend. The ex-girlfriend comes to a basketball game and tells a friend about the break-up. Word spreads among both teams. One player tells their coach that they do not want to play any more if she is on the court.

After the game, half a dozen of her own teammates follow her. They catch up with her outside the gym, on school grounds. They surround her and attack her verbally: "pussy-eater," "bull-dyke," "half-man-half-woman," "freak," "fag" and "bitch." They spit on her. Someone says, "If you don't get off this basketball team, I'll make you regret it on and off the court." Someone else threatens, "If I ever catch you looking at me ... you know that pocket knife I carry." Then they pull her clothes off, grab her private parts, and "beat the hell out of [her]."

She later tells the interviewer that she didn't want her parents to know. She says she "stayed in the park, like a bum, 'til [she] healed" and told them she was at her Grandma's.

Since the incident, there have been graffiti written about her on chalkboards and in school bathrooms. She has been almost totally ostracized. She says no one speaks to her except her relatives. She doesn't go to dances. She has given up all school sports. She says the worst wounds were not so much physical as spiritual. She says that she was made to feel "less human than everybody else" and left to wonder if she is a "freak."

### **Incident 52: "Why? Are You Some Kind of Fag?!"**

Two high school students are eating lunch. One tells the other that he is joining jazz choir. His friend blurts out, "Why? Are you some kind of fag?!" Other students who are sitting nearby laugh. The verbal assault becomes a physical altercation.

The targeted youth later confides the episode to a trusted teacher, who in turn calls the Safe Schools Project. The teacher reports that the offender allegedly slapped his so-called "friend" and punched him in the shoulder. Apparently, this is the latest in a series of incidents, spanning several months. She describes the targeted teen as "devastated." She says it has caused him to cut classes and she reports that he seems to have a harder time paying attention when he *is* in class. She suspects that his grades may be suffering because of the on-going harassment.

Perhaps most troubling: she sees a change in his attitude. He acts "hostile" now. He's not getting along with his parents. He's resistant to counselors. And she describes him as "homophobic where he once was tolerant." She wishes he could have the support of the principal for the notion that "jazz choir isn't an unmanly thing."

She also comments on the whole environment at her school. She says that two openly lesbian students have "suffered abuse" there and that gay teachers are terrified about being "outed." She sees the "boys [as feeling] extremely nervous and fearsome." And she says the bottom line is simply that "the environment is [one where] it's OK to hate gays."

### **Incident 53: Halloween**

For Halloween, a tenth grade boy goes to school dressed in "drag" (as a woman). At school a student threatens, "Better watch out walking home tonight." For the boy in costume this type of threat is nothing new. For years, he has been verbally and physically harassed at school for being gay.

At about 8:40 p.m. the same day he is walking home with a couple of friends when he sees a silver car he recognizes. The car parks nearby and four people get out. The boy and his friends continue toward his house. Suddenly he hears "homophobic remarks" and is pelted with eggs. His two friends flee and he is attacked by four to seven males all hiding behind masks. They punch him in the face and jaw, split his lip, and give him a black eye. The attackers flee and the boy heads home.

When he arrives at school the next day he finds that many people already know about the incident and who the attackers are. A lot of people show him support. The teachers and administrators hold a staff meeting to discuss the incident. Some teachers and counselors express to the youth their anger at the offenders and their worry for his safety. The principal is very supportive. He tells the targeted youth that he would like to expel the assailants, but he can't ... even though the *threat* was issued on campus, the assault happened elsewhere.

Despite this show of support, the boy is still afraid and angry. The secretary offers him the phone to call police; he declines. When asked why, he says, "I'm afraid to call the police because other kids might attack me. [It's hard] not knowing where I can go to be safe." Then he adds that he does plan to press charges if it happens again.

### **Incident 54: The Bus Stop Before School**

It is 6:30 a.m., on May 23, 1996. A sixteen-year-old high school student is waiting at a bus stop on his way to school. A complete stranger approaches and asks him if he's a "fag" or a "homo." The young man -- who really does consider himself *heterosexual* -- answers, "No," but he adds, "I don't see how that is your business." The stranger, not hearing or not believing the "no," begins to push and shove him, stating, "I'm a fucking Christian and I think that's disgusting." The young man states that he doesn't want to fight (especially because the antagonist is bigger than he and he is aware of two other strangers behind him). He tries to walk away, but the attacker pulls him back and shoves him against a car yelling, "Bitch!" "Queer!" "Pervert!" etc. He pushes the student to the ground, and proceeds to beat him with his fists and kick him. The student remains curled up until the beating stops. The assailant and the two other strangers walk away, never to be seen again.

Nursing a black eye, three facial cuts and bruises on his right forearm, he climbs on the bus. Once at school (a private, Christian school), he reports the incident to his teachers and principal, his friends and family, and the police. He finds them all very supportive. He says their reactions "showed me that there is a lot of love and support in my school, on the part of all the people." He adds that, "at our school we all have a responsibility to combat this kind of bigotry against anyone for any reason."

### **Incident 55: Principal's Dilemma: No Other Options?**

Six weeks before school is out, this high school sophomore "comes out" during a class discussion about cultural diversity. Within two days, the whole school knows he is gay and the verbal harassment starts ("Fudgepacker," "Fag Boy," "Queer Ass"). People threaten to hurt him. For about a week he tries to live with it. He can't. He becomes physically ill, won't eat, loses twenty pounds. Finally, he tells his mother he's gay and explains what's been happening. She decides to keep him out of school.

She goes to the principal. The principal tells her that the school has a "zero tolerance policy" concerning malicious harassment. But when her son can't (or won't) identify the offenders, the principal says that there is nothing he can do. The mom asks if she can bring her son's schoolwork home so that he can finish the year and not lose all the credits he's earned. The principal says he won't ask the teachers to do that much extra work. Two teachers say that they'll fail him if he doesn't come to school to take final exams. He is terrified to do so.

He finally does go in to school, however, despite his fears, to obtain a transcript so he can transfer to a high school completion program at a community college. This is when, as he is walking through the hall, he is physically assaulted.

Again, the principal insists there's nothing he can do, unless the gay youth identifies the assailants. Again he can't or won't. When his mother calls the Safe Schools Project, she says her son was mortified by the attack, that he can't sleep, that he's seeing a counselor. She asks the Safe Schools Project for help.

## Category 5: Gang Rapes

### Incident 56: A Show of Kindness

When he starts high school in September, this ninth-grader is mistaken for a girl by other students. Two boys act as if they want him for their girlfriend; one asks him out. When his gender becomes clear, they are livid and so begins a year of daily abuse. They call him names ("cocksucker," "homo-boy," "hamslammer," "fucking faggot") and leave him threatening notes ("I'll tear you another asshole." "We'll make you suck cock."). They spit on him and kick him out of the boys' locker room. His P.E. teacher says, "Maybe you should do more pushups. What's the matter; don't you like girls?" After that, emboldened, one of his pursuers begins throwing things at him and bumping into him (shoving him) in the halls. They feign punches to make him flinch or duck. They vandalize his locker with K-Y jelly and deface it with graffiti ("\_\_\_\_\_ takes it up the ass" and "faggot"). No other guys will talk with him because, he says, they are afraid they'll be called a "faggot," too.

He starts changing how he gets to and from school, avoiding parts of the building, and, getting sick more often. He begins to skip whole days of school to avoid his harassers.

These in-school experiences culminate in an off-campus sexual assault by two male classmates. One manipulates him with a pretense of a change of heart (a show of kindness) into meeting him after school. Then, two of them attack him. They strip him, orally and anally rape him and urinate on him. They threaten him with a knife, saying that, "if I told anybody, they'd make me a girl."

### Incident 57: Under the Bleachers

This ninth grader is open at school about being a lesbian. For six weeks, she is the target of harassment, including pictures left in her locker. The harassment reaches a crisis point when she and her girlfriend attend a high school sporting event. There, the two girls, aged thirteen and fourteen, are attacked by four male students. The attackers follow, chase and haul the girls under the bleachers. They call the girls "queers," "dykes," and "bitches." They force them to "have sex" with one another while the attackers watch. The fourteen-year-old is told that, if she thinks her girlfriend is pretty, she had better make her respond or the attackers will "make sure she doesn't look pretty" any more. They force the younger girl to say things by hurting her hand. She's in a lot of pain, so she says the things they want her to say. They break her hand anyway and beat both girls up. Then they hold the fourteen-year-old down and make her watch as they strip and rape her girlfriend.

When she calls to report what happened, she says she was very frightened that her girlfriend would hate her for what happened. She says, "I'm a cheerleader and I'm supposed to be going out with guys. They just hurt her to hurt me. The whole time they hardly talked to her; they talked to me." She also tells the interviewer, "I never hated anybody before. It's the first time I've ever really hated anybody."

## Juniors and Seniors Targeted

## Category 1: One-Time, Climate Setting Incidents

### Incident 58: Hindsight

It's a high school basketball game. A visiting player misses a shot. A teacher in the stands hears a group of rowdy spectators calling out, "Nice shot, faggot!" Feeling pretty new at the school, the teacher says nothing. But when he calls the Safe Schools Project later, he says that, "in hindsight" he wishes he had "searched out some [other] staff person" to intervene.

### **Incident 59: You Decide ... Is it Reasonable Expression of Religious Belief or is it A Personal Attack?**

As part of its AIDS and sexuality education efforts, a high school has an assembly about sexual harassment and sexual orientation. During this all-school event, ten or fifteen students and staff express angry disapproval of homosexuality and quote the Bible. A heated discussion erupts. Another ten or fifteen adults and students speak up in defense of the assembly. Two students "come out" in the course of the argument. Several people "puff up aggressively" and tell them, "We can love you and hate the sin." Two people report the incident to the Safe Schools Project, independently of one another. One, a student, says that "the principal always tries to be supportive of students, but ... he didn't speak out one way or the other." One reports that, since the incident, he finds himself talking less in class, having a harder time paying attention, feeling less confident, more self-conscious and lonely.

### **Incident 60: "It's Been A Real Uphill Battle"**

It's the fall of her junior year of high school. A year and a half ago, she "came out" to a friend, who apparently broke her confidentiality. Since then, she has been experiencing harassment "more than once a day." Today, a guy in her math class comments to his friend that she is, "a 'fucking dyke' [like] Martina Navratilova" and that "[her] kind make him sick ... make him want to barf." The interviewer asks her why she thinks he said those things. She honestly is not sure whether he did it for the purpose of humiliating her. However, she says, "It was a public display; the whole class knew I was embarrassed." She describes the last year and a half to an interviewer as "a real uphill battle."

### **Incident 61: Request for Advocate Denied**

A student opens up his "point chart" and discovers a note that says "Fag." Shocked, he shows a few other people the note and then takes it to the principal. She tells him she is at lunch and cannot meet with him for forty minutes. The student asks if he can bring along a trusted teacher, when they do meet, in forty minutes. The principal says "no" and assures him she will find some other adult third party to be present when they talk. The student is very disturbed and unable to function, but he waits. Eventually, they do meet. A teacher of the principal's choice is present; this teacher is described by one respondent as "homophobic."

Two people (a friend of the target and a school employee) subsequently call Safe Schools about the incident, independently of one another. Neither caller mentions any investigation into who authored the note and who slipped it into the student's chart. Both would have liked the principal to have acknowledged the young person's feelings in a more timely way and to have comforted him. Both say the principal promised to hold an assembly about sexual harassment. One caller, however, seems more satisfied than the other that students and staff really will receive meaningful, timely education to prevent this kind of incident in the future.

### **Incident 62: "We're Both Queer!"**

A bisexual young woman and her gay male friend ask for passes to go to the library. An adult volunteer tells them they may go to the library, but warns them not to flirt or make eye contact with one another. The student feels angry at the presumption she would behave inappropriately. She blurts out, in her annoyance, "We're both queer!" The adult proceeds to tell her that she shouldn't say that in public because she'll have a hard time getting a job. Both young people are left with the impression that this adult thinks not only that they should avoid that sort of heated declaration, but also that they should hide their sexual orientations altogether.

The student later tells a Safe Schools interviewer that she felt the volunteer intended to hurt her. She feels she was inappropriate herself, in the way she expressed her annoyance to the volunteer, but she felt doubly mistreated, because a teacher was "standing right there" and said nothing. The librarian did help her write a complaint about the incident. She doesn't know of any response to that complaint. She wishes that the principal would talk with the volunteer about the students' feelings and assign the volunteer to some other class for a while.

### **Incident 63: "Out Of My Way ... Faggot!"**

The target's friend is walking behind him, when a guy blocks the path of the targeted student and barks a slur in his face: "Get out of my way, you faggot!" The target of the insult doesn't even know what to say. He says nothing. He's so stunned that, as soon as the confrontation is over, he turns to his friend and asks her if he'd heard right. Looking wide-eyed, she confirms it. They laugh out of shock.

But the more he thinks about it, and he thinks about it a lot, the worse he feels. He talks with a teacher about it and finds the teacher "very surprised" and worried. But the teacher takes no action.

It's not that the young man in question isn't "out." He is. He actually wrote an article for the school paper that alluded to his being gay. He's just never experienced this kind of in-your-face hostility before and he is pretty shaken by it.

## **Category 2: On-Going Verbal And Other Harassment**

### **Incident 64: "They Should All Be Shot."**

It isn't the first time this teacher has disrespected these two gay students. He told the other science teachers that at least one of the two youths was gay. When classmates have asked questions about gay issues or AIDS, he has turned sarcastically to these two young men, saying, "Why don't we ask them? They seem to be the experts."

This time, the class is on a chapter about the brain. The teacher mentions recent research that indicates the hypothalamus may be smaller in gay men than in heterosexual men. He turns it into a "joke" at the gay teens' expense, "Gay people are dumb; they should all be shot." Most of the class laughs.

The young men go to the principal, with support from one set of parents. (The other parents say, "It's your problem. Deal with it.") The supportive parents threaten to sue the school. The principal puts the teacher on two weeks' probation. The teacher chooses early retirement.

One of the two young men subsequently calls the Safe Schools Project. He says that by the time the teacher left, the damage had already been done. His classmates' reaction to the teacher's behavior was, essentially, "If teachers can snuff them, we can snuff them even more." These days he has to watch his back. He's had to get verbally violent to stick up for himself. But he says the whole experience has also made him stronger. He says, "I don't care what people say [at this point]; I know what's true and what's untrue."

### **Incident 65: "For A Good Time Call ..."**

It's scrawled on the back of a drama set ("For a good time call \_\_\_") along with some explicitly gay slurs he will later refuse to repeat. The young man in question is pretty shaken up. What may be the most devastating to him, though, is the silence of the other students and adults who see the graffiti.

Even though a few friends do express support later in private, he's so upset at being "outed" in that way, that he tries to commit suicide.

He later tells a Safe Schools interviewer that, after he was outed, the harassment and threats became intolerable. ("People like you should be beat up ... taught a lesson.") Eventually, he dropped out of school to get away from the abuse.

### **Incident 66: The Smoking Area**

Since October of his senior year, five or six months ago, he's been out to his family about being gay. The school newspaper interviewed him at that time. As soon as the article was published, he started experiencing harassment on a daily basis. People asked him if it was true that he was gay. He was honest and said, "Yes." People started calling him names and, in November, in the hall in school, someone even said they wished they "had a baseball bat for the queers at school." He's talked with friends and a couple of teachers. They've been supportive, he says, but no one knows what to do.

Then today there was a gay man on a diversity panel. After the assembly, the gay teen walked outside to have a cigarette. A group of ten or so other students started shouting at him, "Fag," "Faggot!" He tells a Safe Schools interviewer that he was "pretty scared" because the smoking area is off-campus.

He's kind of at his wits' end. He says his mom would go to school with him if he asked her, but he's afraid that might lead to physical violence. And counselors told him that if he could identify the offenders, they would talk to them. But he's not sure it would be wise to name names. He says he's sick of fighting, that it's "physically and emotionally draining." And he just wishes it would end.

### **Incident 67: The Boys' Bathroom**

This eighteen-year-old has been harassed at school a "zillion" times before. So it isn't his first experience of abuse; it's just typical. He walks into the bathroom at school and four guys follow him in. They block the exit and get in his face. They ask him why he brought a male to the prom last year. They call him a "fag."

It's over almost as fast as it starts. But it's not over for him. He talks with a teacher about it and the teacher advises him not to tell the principal. (The caller doesn't say why.) But otherwise he talks to nobody about the incident until he calls Safe Schools. He is less confident and more lonely since this kind of thing started happening at school and he says he watches his back when he ought to be watching his studies. He has stopped using the bathroom at school and says that, out of defiance, he's become more flamboyant.

### **Incident 68: Retribution for Speaking Up**

This high school student has been experiencing harassment for over a year about her sexuality. Today's incident is another in this steady barrage. She tells the interviewer, "[Today] I was in class and this guy was talking to his friend when I heard the word 'faggot' really loud. I asked him not to use that word. He said, 'What word?' and I wouldn't [repeat it]. Finally I said, 'faggot' and he said, 'Man, you fags and dykes take everything so seriously.' [I told him that] homosexuals take things like that seriously because it hurts them, just like if you were to call a Black person a 'nigger'. [His response was] 'Now I understand why everyone hates you guys!!'"

She tells the interviewer that she feels disappointed and sad, because the student with whom she had this exchange was an "old friend." She also reports feeling scared and even more self-conscious since the incident and admits that she cut some classes today because of it. She says she tried going to the school administration last year, when she received hate letters and was beaten up. She says, "They didn't do anything." This time, she doesn't try.

### **Incident 69: Power Differential**

This high school student decides to be honest about being gay, in an effort to speak out about anti-gay prejudice. He comes out. Four months later he is walking down the hall. The vice-principal comes up to him and asks to see the student in his office. According to the young man, once in the office, the administrator "states that I [am] potentially too political and [that] this might negatively affect my schoolwork." He goes on, the young man says, "to explain, 'I'm straight, but you don't see me telling everyone about it.'"

### **Incident 70: Death Threat ... And Grown-Ups Who Back You Up**

It is fall of his senior year, when this student is sitting in math class, doing his work and minding his own business. A paper airplane sails through the air and lands by his desk. On it is a message: "Fag Express ... Kill Fag." He goes to see the vice-principal, to show him the death threat. According to the young man, the vice-principal is "not happy." He -- the Vice-Principal -- questions the other students in the class individually and in private. They all name the three offenders. (It turns out that one of them knows the young man's sister. She told them a year ago that her brother is gay. Since then, he has been enduring "more than daily" abuse.) The Vice-Principal suspends the primary perpetrator for a week and tells the targeted student to come to him if he experiences any more harassment. The student shares the situation with his dad and describes his dad as very supportive. He tells the interviewer that his dad's response really helped his self-esteem.

As supportive as these adults' responses were, the harassment has continued for six more months by the time the student calls the Safe Schools Project to report the incident. Now it's mostly verbal and hard to prove. As a result, the young man has tried avoiding certain parts of the school and changing how he gets to and from school. He found himself cutting certain classes and skipping whole days and he has finally dropped out of school.

### **Incident 71: "Nothing Is Being Done"**

This high school student witnesses one or two incidents a month of sexual slurs and put-downs. She finally calls the Project to talk about an episode that happened after drama class. She and a friend (who is openly gay) were standing by the front door of the school. Some guys called her friend a "faggot," while a handful of other students looked on and laughed. The incident left them both upset. She says that her friend "doesn't feel comfortable in [drama] class and wants to drop it." She says, "He doesn't feel safe."

So far, the caller hasn't been harassed personally, but she says she, too, came out this year and she reports feeling unsafe at school.

After the episode, the caller told her brother about it. She says he was "very upset" and "wanted to kick their butts." She hasn't told any school staff yet, but she wants to. In fact, she asks the Safe Schools Project for help in talking with her principal because she's tired of the principal "not doing anything about it." She says, "I just want something done about it; nothing is being done."

### **Incident 72: "They Don't Know Anything About Me!"**

This 16 year-old high school junior hoped that, by coming out, he could "sort of educate people." That was two months ago, at the start of the school year. Since then, he has been verbally harassed "a couple of times a week." He tells a Safe Schools interviewer that kids direct jokes at him about oral sex. He says, "I've heard 'faggot' from people I don't even know." He explains that one recent incident happened around noontime. Five young men hung out the windows of their Chevy Blazer and yelled "faggot" and "queer boy" at him, as he was getting ready to pull out of the student parking lot. He is angry -- "They don't *know* anything about me!" he insists -- and he feels unsafe. He has an appointment to talk with the principal. He wants school officials to be more aware of the sexual harassment at his school, even though he doesn't think any action can be taken about this particular episode.



### Incident 73: Assumptions

She is seventeen, has short hair and some friends who are gay. She gets labeled "lesbian," even though she later tells a Safe Schools interviewer she is actually heterosexual. The hateful name-calling is a daily event. People threaten her and avoid her in the hallways.

A student in her drama class is one of those who have been verbally assaulting her for being "lesbian." One day in that class, she is leading an exercise. He starts "making rude comments and refusing to participate in the exercise, because [she is] leading it." When she tells him to "just do the exercise," he starts screaming, "I hate you" and threatens to take her out in the parking lot and beat her up. The teacher tells the young man to calm down and the young woman to "stop provoking" him.

The young woman, feeling sad and angry, calls the Safe Schools Project. When an interviewer asks her if she has told any administrators what happened, she says she hasn't. She doesn't think anything would be done. She relates several reasons for making that assumption: First, in her previous high school, when a "concerned parent" complained to the principal about the student's supposed sexual orientation, the principal questioned the student and made her declare her heterosexuality in writing. Second, in her present school, there's "no education ... to teach kids about sexuality." And finally, she reports a rumor that, before she attended this school, another young woman was harassed severely for being believed to have AIDS. That student allegedly got no administrative support and eventually dropped out.

Since the incident, the caller says, she hasn't returned to school. She hopes to transfer to another school where sexuality education is provided and where the administration is not, from her perspective, "looking the other way."

### Incident 74: What Does Censorship Have To Do With Safety?

A couple of months ago, this 17-year-old young woman told a few friends that she had figured out she was lesbian. Apparently, somebody told somebody else and now several times each school day, people say demeaning things to her in the hallways ("Lesbians are disgusting." "Why would you hit on a girl?"). This same small group of attackers have thrown things at her, spit at her, and threatened to "kick [her] butt." It makes it really difficult to keep her mind on learning.

Today, she is just walking down the hall with her girlfriend, "Monica," when one of these bullies walks right up to them and says, "Look! It's 'Monica's' bitch!" One other student laughs, but most of the people in the hallway don't seem to pay any attention. The girl who said the slur keeps walking.

That same evening, the targeted young woman calls the Safe Schools Project. She says she *wishes* "someone would sit down with the girl and explain what she's doing when she messes with gay students." She suggests they could "role play her getting 'straight bashed'" to help her develop some empathy. But she hasn't said anything to any adults at school. When the interviewer asks her *why* she hasn't, she says "The way the school is - they'd just listen and say 'uh-huh' and wouldn't do anything except tell the girl to cut it out." What makes her think that's all that would happen? She relates an incident indicative to her of the administration's attitude. She says that when her friend wrote an article for the school paper about having gay parents, the principal censored it -- wouldn't allow it to be published. So now that she's being harassed, she doesn't even look for adult support. On a 1 to 5 scale (where "5" means devastating and "1" means no hurt at all) she says her emotional hurt is a 4 ... but she can handle it without adults if she needs to.

### Incident 75: Blackmail

It all started five years or so ago, in about eighth grade. His peers would call him "faggot" and "queer." Someone said, "Get away from me; you have AIDS!" Over the years, his peers have told anti-gay jokes and inserted his name. There was once graffiti written in the hall at school, saying, "\_\_\_ is a fag." People have thrown things at him, shoved him, and punched him. His car was "keyed" (scratched with a key). Adults haven't helped. In Human Sexuality class, for example, the teacher just skipped over sexual orientation, apparently because she was uncomfortable with it.

The most recent sequence of events begins with a note posted on his locker threatening, "Faggot, if you show up at the football game Friday, we'll lynch you." He makes copies of the note, because he figures it's time to "keep a paper trail" and leaves them, with the original note as well as his journal, in his book bag. The offenders (he doesn't know how many) steal the bag, tear into it and take everything. He will later tell a Safe Schools interviewer, "I don't have anything. I keep a happy face and pretend it doesn't matter [and] write it in my journal. But they got all of it."

He tells teachers and the principal what happened, leaving out the existence of a journal, because he doesn't want anyone - including adults -- to see it. The principal searches the lockers of a couple of students the young man suspects, in hopes of finding the threatening note. He finds nothing. Apparently, no further action is taken.

That Friday, the young man finds another note, this time in his locker: "If you keep your mouth shut, no one will see your journal." He doesn't report this latest note to the teachers or the principal, because, he says, "I just like basically will do anything they say, so they don't release the journal." Anything.

**Editor's note:** *When the young man reported this situation to Safe Schools, a few days after receiving the second note, he asked for help. An advocate tried repeatedly to get back to him discreetly by telephone. When that didn't work, a letter was sent inviting him to call the advocate directly. He didn't respond. So, at this point it isn't known whether he made it through his senior year.*

## Category 3: Physical Harassment And/Or Sexual Assault, Short Of Rape

### Incident 76: White Supremacists?

This high school student has given up extracurricular activities and he's started drinking and drugging more since he moved to Washington and the harassment began. He says he's afraid of straight guys sometimes, because of all the torment he's experienced since moving here. This time, it's seven or eight guys who follow him and his female friend in the hall. "Queer," "Faggot," "Sissy," "Makeup Boy." They push him around and he's pretty shaken up. But he later tells a Safe Schools interviewer that he is too embarrassed about it to go to the principal and besides, he's scared. He thinks a couple of the offenders are white supremacists. He says they talk about white power in class discussions (he's never heard a teacher respond) and they shave their heads. So for now, he's just trying to get support for himself. He has to travel pretty far to attend a support group, but it's worth it.

### Incident 77: Spit

He's seventeen and a junior in high school. He's standing near the gym one day, when someone spits at him. What makes him think that it's related to his being gay? The group of guys from which the spit flew have called him "faggot" and other anti-gay slurs in the past. The only reason nobody said actual words on this occasion, he is sure, is that this time he was surrounded by friends. He feels degraded, but not threatened, so he doesn't bother to go to the administration about it. But he wants people to know this kind of thing happens. Even in little rural schools. Maybe especially in little rural schools. The two sympathetic teachers to whom he mentions the incident are "appalled" he says. They wish they could change things, "but after all, this is [a small town.]"

### **Incident 78: More Retribution For Speaking Up**

He doesn't "come out" at the assembly that day, but this high school junior does speak out against homophobia. Later that day, he's walking down a stairwell on the campus, when six or seven guys he doesn't know begin harassing him. One starts it with, "Look at him. That gay guy!" One throws an apple at him and misses. Way outnumbered, he smiles and keeps walking. At the time, it makes him mostly angry. But over the next few days, he's harassed twice more. By the time he calls the Safe Schools Project, several days after the incident on the stairwell, he says he has started feeling self-conscious and scared. On and off, he has been depressed. He's avoiding certain parts of the campus now.

He tells an interviewer that he attends a support group for sexual minority youth where his friends and the counselor have been "really great." In fact, his friends thought he should have "made a bigger deal out of it than [he] did." His parents have also been there for him. He says, "They've always been supportive; I wasn't surprised."

### **Incident 79: Second Period Torment**

Within days of the start of his junior year, second period becomes a difficult place to be. Every day, kids insult his personal appearance. They talk with lisps and mimic his voice. They take one of his diaries. Someone writes "fag" on his notebook. People start calling him names: "fairy," "queen," "queer," "spermicide," "faggot." His second period teacher witnesses the harassment, but remains silent. Someone threatens, "We're gonna kill you. Die." In mid-September, three cars full of people from his second period class show up outside his home. They sit there and shout, "Come out; we know you're in there." The student tells the principal what happened. The harassment at school continues. It gets physical. People follow him, chase him and brush up against him. They spit on him or at him.

He cuts the class. He is disciplined for cutting class. He can't pay attention there anyway, so he asks his counselor and the principal to allow him to drop the class. He is told that letting him drop the class would violate school rules ... that it can't be done. He is told that if he doesn't go to his second period class, he will be withdrawn from school. Sometimes he skips whole days of school, to avoid second period. Three weeks into the school year, he is withdrawn (expelled).

By the time he calls the Safe Schools Project to report the sequence of events, it has been over a year. A difficult year. A year in which he became so confused, lonely and depressed (watching television eleven hours a day and sleeping the rest of the time) that he attempted suicide. He was afraid to leave the house to find work, but he felt he couldn't tell his parents about the harassment. Now he is homeless. He says, "[Those three weeks] ruined my life. I was the smartest kid in the school and then I left."

### **Incident 80: Humiliating Hallways**

It starts at the beginning of the school year. People spread rumors about this high school student's sexual orientation. They say things to her and about her, as she moves through the halls at school. Things she won't repeat, when she later reports the situation to the Safe Schools Project. Things intended to publicly humiliate her. People say they don't want her at their school. They threaten that she "could have all kinds of accidents." The same group of people talks about "teaching her to like certain things," presumably sexual things.

The pattern of harassment comes to a head in an incident that starts on campus and ends in a private home. An older girl, a senior, starts "talking to her" ... apparently initiating at least a friendship. They "talk a lot." The senior invites her to a party at her home. She goes. The older girl manipulates her into going into the bedroom. She asks her to dance. She gets her to take off first her dress, then the rest of her clothes. The older girl leaves the room for a moment and the younger one lies down on the bed. The senior returns, bringing all the party guests to see her nakedness.

### **Incident 81: "If You Ever Get Hurt, I'm Not Going to Help You ..."**

For two school years this 16 year-old has been the target of daily abuse by a group of his fellow students. They have called him a "faggot," spread rumors about him, tied a condom to his locker and poured milk in it, thrown things at him, pushed him around, punched him, kicked him and threatened him with a gun. It's always the same perpetrators and he's sure that adults at school are aware. He believes that his PE teacher lowered his grade specifically because he is openly gay.

One day, in the spring of his junior year, this young man has an argument with another student as the other student is leaving the school grounds. The acting principal observes the argument. After the other student leaves, the acting principal follows the first young man -- the one who's openly gay -- and blocks his path. According to the young man, who later calls the Safe Schools Project, this adult physically restrains him so that he cannot leave and says, "Homosexuality is wrong because the Bible says so. If you ever get hurt, I'm not going to help you because it's your fault."

With his parents' support, the student seeks help from a teacher at his school. The teacher is supportive and gives him a school district number to call. It works. The district administration apparently reprimands the offending employee. It is a private reprimand, but it seems to be effective. When he calls the Project, the student reports feeling that the school climate has changed for the better, not just for him, but for others, too. He says he's proud of how he handled the incident.

### **Incident 82: He Doesn't Want Them "Punished or Anything" ... He Just Wants It To Stop**

It starts second semester of his junior year. He isn't "out" about being gay, but apparently, there are rumors. Kids point at him and call out "faggot." Somebody vandalizes his car, removing the grill and wrecking the engine. It continues into his senior year. Then, during the photo shoot of a class picture for the yearbook, four guys start calling him "faggot" and "freak." They brush up against him in a threatening way, "just to let [him] know they are there."

When he calls the Safe Schools Project, he says he's proud of how he's been handling the abuse, "shrugging it off" and telling himself, "It's stupid." But he also says he has a harder time paying attention in class since it started happening and that he now avoids parts of the school grounds. He says he's talked to other gay and lesbian students who say they've had trouble with the same offenders. He feels angry and upset. "I don't know these people," he reports, "but they seem to know where I work and live."

He tells the interviewer that he thinks the adults at the school know this is happening ... but that *he* hasn't told them. When the interviewer asks him why, he says, "I wasn't comfortable then [with my sexuality] and I didn't know who to talk to or how to talk to them." He says he doesn't want the offenders "punished or anything," but he *would* like the principal to, "get them to shut up ... [to] just have them stop."

### **Incident 83: The Cost of A Kiss**

Some of their peers started harassing them last year, when they were a sophomore and a junior. It continued this fall. Finally, just wanting to be together, the two decide to go to a dance. Some fellow students make offensive comments to them at that dance, because both are young women. But others show their support. The next Monday, however, when the couple shares a kiss, the harassment escalates. People call them slurs. One student comes right up to them in the hallway and says, "This is wrong, what you are doing ... a girl with a girl." Three or four students follow them and block their path. Twenty or more others watch as someone shoves the young women and spits at them. The girls are scared; they run. And they leave school early that day.

A couple of those who witnessed the attack go to a school counselor about it. But the damage has already been done: the girls are not only enraged, they are overwhelmed. One of them tries to commit suicide the next day. Her family, sad and concerned, helps her get hospitalized for mental health observation.

Back at school, the staff respond. At first, some blame the victims, asserting that "they shouldn't have been kissing." Others, however, respond "quickly and efficiently," according to the district-level administrator who later calls the Safe Schools Project.

She says that staff investigated the incident. The perpetrators were privately reprimanded. Administrators were alerted by e-mail to what had occurred so they could be on alert for future incidents.

Still, the administrator who calls Safe Schools expressed a wish: that this sort of incident be handled in the future with an all-school assembly "to address this issue head-on and to provide a safer, more friendly environment for *all* students to be in."

#### **Incident 84: Attempted Rape**

A young woman stays after school for band practice. She's walking down the hall afterwards when two or three boys start following her. They start saying they know she's "queer" and all she needs is a good man. They threaten to "teach her what it's like to be straight," presumably by raping her. They block her path. One of them grabs her. She knees him in the groin and escapes.

She finds a sympathetic adult by writing a paper about the incident for class. Her teacher, appalled and angry, talks with her in private. She seems to the teacher, who later calls Safe Schools, to be "terrified, angry and demoralized." With her permission, her teacher talks with the principal, who responds with "great sadness." Four years later, when the teacher calls Safe Schools to describe the assault, she can't say for sure whether the offenders were ever disciplined.

But she does know that, since the incident, her staff has been making clear in many ways that all forms of harassment are wrong. The dean of students, she says, is "particularly strong" regarding harassment, even in the face of some students' calling him gay for supporting gay people. The school tries to prevent this sort of thing from reoccurring by educating students and training staff. They come down hard on hate speech, as when a student came to school wearing a "Straight is great; Gay doesn't pay" tee-shirt. The teacher thinks that, as a result of these kinds of staff efforts, things may have gotten a little better in the last few years.

But she called the Safe Schools Project because she never wants to forget - and she wants others to know -- about the student who was almost raped because someone thought she was a lesbian.

### **Category 4: Physical Assaults**

#### **Incident 85: "I Would Rather Die Than ... Relive It."**

He has never been out at school, but rumors have been rampant all through high school. There have been graffiti ("\_\_\_ is a faggot") and constant verbal harassment ("Faggot!" "Do you want to suck my dick?"). And the silence of the adults who have seen it happening has been painful. Then, in his senior year a group of people, mostly guys, corner the high school senior and beat him so severely he ends up in the emergency room.

When he reports the incident to the Safe Schools Project two years later, the young man says he felt he couldn't report the assault to adults at school. He was afraid they would tell him "boys will be boys" and send him for treatment to "cure" him of his sexual orientation. And he didn't tell his family because, he says, "They would have [had] a terrible time with it." He would have changed schools if he could have, but he lived in a small town and changing schools wasn't an option. Instead he cut classes and skipped whole days of school. He avoided the halls and the school cafeteria and he developed a "total fear and hatred of the whole school and the people within it." He eventually attempted suicide. He says now, "I would rather die than have to relive it ..."

He's doing better now that he's out of school and he has built a support system. He says it would be nice, though, if someone would start a support group specifically for students from small community schools.

#### **Incident 86: Afraid They Would Kill Her**

Three or four boys are making her life at school intolerable. This high school junior is not openly lesbian at school, but she will later describe herself as "butch."

Her tormenters follow her in the halls and in the gym. They make anti-gay jokes to her and about her and do everything they can to embarrass her. They tell her God hates her and that she's going to Hell. At first, she doesn't tell anyone. She figures that if they find out she got them in trouble, they'll be even madder. She's afraid they would kill her.

Then it starts to get physical: they chase her, corner her, hit her. Finally, an adult sees what's going on and breaks it up. But nothing more is done and the situation doesn't improve. Eventually, her mom starts walking the young woman to her classes. Finally, she gives up and drops out of school.

### **Incident 87: On May 8, 1995, Her Son Took His Own Life**

Three friends, two guys and a girl, are walking home from a video store on April 6, 1995, at about 3:00 p.m. School is closed for spring break. A car passes them. One of the passengers recognizes them from high school. He points at them and shouts "Those guys are gay!" (The truth is, one of the guys is open at school about being bisexual. His two friends are actually heterosexual.)

The three friends ignore the carful of youths and keep walking. They cut through school property to get away. The people from the car, four young men, follow them onto the campus. When they catch up, one proclaims, "We don't tolerate 'fags' here." He challenges them to fight. The four guys from the car jump the young men and beat them both up. They stomp on the chest of the bisexual youth and kick him in the groin. He blacks out. When he comes to, the three friends find a school janitor who lets them call "911." The police come. One young man's mother takes everyone to the Emergency Room. The guys are treated and released, but not before one of their attackers shows up at the hospital and is arrested. In the meantime, the second young man calls his mother at work to tell her what happened. His parents come to his side. The Vice-Principal is called.

According to the mother who later calls the Safe Schools Project, the Vice-Principal was "shocked, horrified, and really angry." She gratefully describes how teachers and many other community members held a rally on April 14th to express their support for the three friends and their abhorrence of what happened. She tells how her son stood up at that rally and declared his hope that his two friends would never again have to experience such a thing ... that he said, "They probably won't, because they're straight, but I probably will, because I'm bisexual."

Community and family support were not enough. His mother says that, on April 19, he entered inpatient mental health care for depression. He came home April 28th. On May 8, 1995, her son took his own life.

### **Incident 88: Field Trip**

It's an out-of-state field trip. Three of the Washington State high school students, all girls, are "just hanging on each other," holding hands. They get into town and a group of local teens glare at them. A car passes and someone yells, "You guys go back where you came from!" Scared, they keep walking with the rest of the class. Then a group of a dozen or so younger boys, perhaps 12 years old, begin calling the three friends names. One shouts, "Are you going to have a group orgy?" Another hollers, "Do you use your fingers or food?" The whole class watches (some defending the girls verbally, some saying nothing, and others encouraging the attack) as one of the local kids spits at the girls and others start throwing rocks at them. The rocks miss their targets.

When one of the girls -- a heterosexual high school junior -- reports the incident several months later, to the Project, she says she doesn't think any of the adults from her school saw what was happening. There *were* about five other adults, who seemed to be the parents of the local boys, watching the whole thing and doing nothing to stop it. She admits that she and her friends did answer the boys' "jokes" and says that, at first, they egged the younger kids on. But when it got violent, she got scared and she says that her "stomach wasn't doing too good."

When the interviewer asks if the incident had any other effects on her, she says it taught her a lesson: "It made me realize how bad harassment can be and not to harass others [based] on what you assume."

### Incident 89: The Teacher Didn't Know What To Do, But "Did A Good Job" Anyway

He was fifteen years old when he started at this school in September. From day one, he was open about being gay and would speak up about gay civil rights. From day one, his fellow students harassed him. They would do or say something embarrassing or threatening perhaps four times a week on average (write graffiti about him, throw food at him, push him around, spit on him).

Then one day in December, he's alone in the locker room changing into his pep squad uniform before a basketball game. A fellow student walks in, sees him, and declares that the locker room is for men and that the gay young man is not a man. When the targeted youth verbally defends himself ("I'm just as much a woman or man as you are"), the other student attacks him physically, cornering him and shoving him hard against a locker.

As soon as the assailant leaves, the youth goes to find a teacher. Shaking and crying, physically bruised and emotionally "devastated," he relates what happened. (Later, he will tell an interviewer that this particular teacher didn't know how to respond, but "did a good job" anyway.) The teacher believes him, helps him calm down, and is just very supportive. Once he gathers himself together, the student goes to the Principal for help. With no witnesses, it's one student's word against another's and the Principal doesn't seem to believe the student was really assaulted.

It isn't until a week later, when a teacher witnesses the same student verbally assaulting him, that he is able, with the teacher and a guardian as allies, to convince the Principal to suspend the assailant.

Even then, he says he would have liked a little education and counseling along with the discipline. He wishes the assailant had been required to "sit in on a gay/lesbian panel" and to undergo therapy, just as he needed therapy after the assault. But he says that his openness about what happened may have made school a little safer for "new young students" (one, he says, in particular). That, at least, is a source of pride for him.

### Incident 90: "Why Can't I Be Normal?"

She was in the eighth grade when the "almost daily" harassment started. But it certainly wasn't just a middle school phenomenon. In January of her senior year, it's still happening. In fact, this time it's particularly brutal.

It is 9:00 p.m. She has just served on the color guard at a basketball game. After the game, as she's leaving the gym, two girls she doesn't even know attack her in the parking lot, apparently for how she looks. They yell "God Damn dyke bitch" and they beat her up, leaving her with a swollen lip and various bruises.

Three days after the incident, she confides in a teacher, who in turn helps her to call the Safe Schools Project. When the interviewer asks her, through the teacher, to describe how she felt at the time of the assault, she says she was in pain, physically, and that she had a "why-can't-I-be-normal" feeling. The years of abuse at the hands of her peers have made her self-conscious and lonely and scared. And although she does feel supported by her friends and this one teacher, and somewhat supported by her family, she has attempted suicide at least once over the years because of the abuse. She has not reported any of the incidents to the Principal. And she has asked the teacher in whom she confided about this incident not to go to the Principal either. She "doesn't want to make trouble." And she's afraid that "he might bring it up" in the letters of recommendation she is going to need as she gets ready to graduate. The interviewer asks how is she doing now. She says simply, "I don't want to say" ... which says it all.

**Editor's Note:** *Incident 91, below, provides us with a fascinating study of differing perspectives. Three people called in regarding the same event. When multiple individuals have reported other incidents, their reports have been combined into a single narrative in this Report. This time, however, the accounts are different enough that the research team wanted the reader to see them side-by-side.*

### **Incident 91: Version One - The School Employee's Account of What Happened**

This adult was not surprised by what happened; she had "seen it coming for a while." She hasn't been aware of any previous *physical* assaults at her school, but she does know that gay students have been harassed (told, for instance that it is "lame" to be gay) and threatened. She estimates that it's been happening to someone about once a week and she knows that this particular youth was threatened last year. In defense of her school, she says that lesbians aren't treated badly there, only boys who are perceived to be gay. She says that people at her school "aren't malicious." They "try to get along." But some have what she calls a "cowboy mentality" and think that "different equals bad and scary."

She says it began when a student, whom she describes as gay, gave some flowers to another young man at school. The girlfriend of the young man who *received* the flowers confronted the student who *gave* the flowers. She says the giver of the flowers punched the young woman. They were "broken up." Then, according to the school employee, the two students went into a room and talked about the incident.

Next, she says the giver of the flowers told a group of male students that he was gay and they "reacted by beating him up." She doesn't think his injuries were serious enough to require first aid, but she thinks the beating caused "a lot" of emotional hurt. She says that thirty or so students and three teachers witnessed the beating. And she says that the adults were upset and appalled and that they intervened to defend and support the targeted youth. She also says that the adult witnesses tried to get help for the targeted student afterwards.

Her perception is that there was "'inappropriate behavior' on both sides." She says the Principal handled the whole thing well, suspending the targeted youth for assaulting the young woman and also suspending the group of students who assaulted *him*. She says that, the next day, the Principal arranged "sensitivity training" for staff and students in what she describes as a "multiple year strategy." She is "proud" of how the incident was handled.

### **Incident 91: Version Two - The Mom's Account of What Happened**

The Mom mostly agrees that this incident was handled well ... but she is upset and angry about the years of unchecked abuse that led up to it. Her son hasn't ever been "out" about being gay, according to the mom, but rumors started five or six years ago, in junior high. That's when the "verbal and physical harassment started." Someone there even poked him with a hypodermic needle. Since he's been in high school, he has switched schools twice to escape the abuse and has been on medication for depression because of it. Even teachers have contributed to the problem. One told her son, "Come on ... I don't need another girl in my class." Students have told him, "We don't want any fags at our school," and, "You're dead, fag." He even got a harassing letter in the mail. By his senior year, he was experiencing "almost daily" harassment.

This particular incident, she says, started when a group of boys went looking for him in "supposed retaliation" for an incident the day before when a girl said he hit her. He says he didn't. Anyway, this group of angry peers went looking for her son and spread the word that there would be a beating ("The Fag's going to get it."). They found him in a classroom working on the computer. They opened the blinds so other students could watch from the hallway and then a group of seven or eight, male and female, proceeded to beat and kick him. Of the twenty or thirty students who witnessed the incident, only two said or did anything to defend him. The mom says that one staff person finally came into the room after the beating had started and began to pull students off of her son.

She says that counselors and teachers were upset about what had happened, but that the school did not call the parents. Her son called 911 himself, and when police didn't arrive, he called his mother. His dad picked him up at school. His parents took him to the doctor for his sore ribs, bruises and abrasions.

Nonetheless, the mom characterizes the Principal as "very supportive" since the incident. He made a public statement afterwards about not tolerating such offenses and he suspended six of the assailants. She says that he is the only administrator in all these years, who has ever done anything to protect her son, however ... and no matter how this *one* incident was handled, she is upset and angry.



## Incident 91: Version Three - The Targeted Youth's Own Account of What Happened

It started back in seventh grade, about five years ago. The youth says, "They just started calling me faggot and queer because I 'didn't walk like a man.'" He says, "There was never a day that went by that I wasn't harassed in some way." Somebody left him love letters to guys, on which they'd forged his signature. Someone pulled a knife on him at school and threatened to kill him. Someone stabbed him with a hypodermic needle. Teachers even joined in the harassment. One teacher, perceiving him to be gay, challenged him for donating blood. Still another "outed" him in front of a whole class, referring to him as gay. And another teacher actually called him a "sissy" in front of his classmates and told him he was not a real man. Students have told him he's going to hell. They've cornered him and brushed up against him in a sexual way, thrown cans of pop and oranges at him. He says, "I went to counselors and principals all the time; so did my parents."

By his senior he was experiencing harassment "way more than once a day." This particular day, he says, he doesn't know why the attackers came after him. He says, "I guess it was just building up." He was in the photography classroom at school, when eight kids confronted him. For over an hour they threatened him, explaining that other students were waiting in the hall and that he should go out there and fight them. He says he stayed in the classroom for protection, but that the teacher who heard the threat left for lunch anyway.

Then this group of eight offenders beat and kicked him, while thirty student onlookers watched. He guesses that twenty or so cheered and encouraged the attack. He says there were no adult witnesses.

The assault left him, he says, with abrasions, cracked ribs, bruises, and cuts from the kicks, and with headaches and weeks of blurry eyesight. Afterward, he says, he called his Mom. The Vice-Principal, however, wanted him to get off the phone. He said if the young man didn't get off the phone, he wouldn't help him. A couple of days after the assault, this same VP called the student into his office. It seems that other students had told the VP that the targeted young man was gay. He isn't out at school, however, although he does describe himself to a Safe Schools interviewer as bisexual. It was strictly other students' conjecture. So when the VP asked him if it was true that he was gay, he said, "I don't know." Frankly, he didn't think it was any of the adult's business. In the days that followed, most of the other adults in his life were supportive. He says he has found the Principal and some of the teachers supportive. He says the school security guards have "helped him and felt bad." The school counselor has "been on [his] side." His parents and the police have been supportive, too. He says there is "a little less harassment" at school since the beating, but he wishes the principal could assure him that what's happened to him "would never happen to anyone ever again."

*Editor's Note: Six of the assailants in Incident 91 were suspended and five were subsequently convicted.*

## Category 5: Gang Rapes

### Incident 92: "If You Were Normal, You'd Want To Have Sex With Us"

A sixteen-year-old high school junior is dating another girl. Two boys from school discover this one Saturday night. One day the following week, they are waiting for her when she gets out of band. They corner her in a hallway and push her into a bathroom behind the band room. They say "really ugly things" about her and her friend and tell her that, if she were "normal," she would want to have sex with them. They pull her clothes off and force her to have oral sex with them. They threaten, "if you don't want everyone to know about you and your friend, you'd better start getting it right." Then they urinate on her.

She doesn't know if there were any witnesses. She tells nobody until she calls the Safe Schools Project because, she says, she's afraid of the perpetrators and she's worried that her girlfriend would get in trouble.

# High school Students Targeted, Mixed Grades or Grade Not Reported

## Category 1: One-Time, Climate Setting Incidents

### Incident 93: You Decide ... Is it *A Politically Necessary Decision* or is it *Permission to Harass?*

A high school student is researching the topic of lesbian parents. Her teacher tells her that she may invite a guest speaker to co-present her oral report. When the guest arrives with handouts, the teacher takes them to the Vice-Principal for approval. He decides that parents must sign permission slips before the guest may speak to the class, with or without handouts. The teacher is "protective and apologetic," but asks the guest to leave. The teacher has the student explain to the class why the guest is not there and go ahead with her oral report. Other students behave "rudely" to their classmate and "mock the entire topic and her research." Afterwards, the student meets with the principal but finds him "unresponsive."

### Incident 94: Hecklers Evicted

It's a high school ball game. A student spectator begins heckling a member of the visiting team, insulting her hair, calling her a "dyke" and describing her loudly as "butch." An official warns the spectator to knock it off. The comments continue, primarily from this one ringleader, but perhaps from his followers, too. The referee warns the hecklers a second time. At some point, the visiting players, upset at their teammate's being harassed, talk to the official. It is unclear whether their complaint precedes the ref's actions or happens after one or two warnings. In any case, when the slurs continue, the ref tells the principal that the offenders need to be evicted. The principal evicts them.

A parent watching the whole string of events approaches the athletic director afterwards to find out what disciplinary action was taken. His understanding, he says, is that the primary offender will have to write a letter of apology to the visiting team. When the concerned parent calls the Safe Schools Project, she says she wishes that after the first warning the principal had stood by the student section or joined the students sitting there to "make his presence known." She says she was embarrassed about the behavior of the home school's spectators and worried about what their behavior means about the climate at school.

## Category 2: On-Going Verbal And Other Harassment

### Incident 95: Enforcing The "Right Way" To Look

The harassment has been going on for seven months, by the time this young woman's friend calls the Safe Schools Project to report it. Mostly, according to the caller, her friend is a target of verbal harassment. But a couple of times a month it is "something really, really major" ... someone will follow her and block her path; they'll brush up against her in a sexual way; they might push or shove her; they might leave a nasty note in her locker. What kinds of things do they say? They comment on the fact that she doesn't shave her legs. They say "how she [has] a nice cunt and what a waste [it is that she's a lesbian]." They have asked her "if lesbians have bigger cunts." They have called her a "dyke."

This morning, the targeted young woman came to school with a new haircut. People told her she looked "queer" and asked her if she was. The caller says that the truth is her friend *is* a lesbian, and has been "even when we were in eighth grade, [before] she even knew she was." But today, when she was confronted about it, she said, "No." Then, her boyfriend and his friends came up and said "they'd heard things in the past about her being gay." They said they wanted to know if it was true, because, "now that she had the haircut she sure looked queer."

The caller says her friend made fun of the guys for asking and declared that she felt sorry for them. But then, in private, she "was so angry, she cried." And, even though the caller wasn't personally targeted, she says *she's* feeling self-conscious and unsafe. In fact, she's too upset to finish the interview, and counseling takes precedence.

### **Incident 96: A Drop In An Ocean of Hate**

For two years, the students who attend the gay/lesbian support group have told their facilitators about being harassed at school on a regular basis. They've described being the targets at school of anti-gay graffiti, embarrassing notes, and rumors. Today is the first time one of the adult facilitators actually witnesses harassment. Two students are minding their own business, walking to their car after group. "Faggots!" The slur is repeated several times.

The adult calls Safe Schools and describes the emotional damage of this one incident as "minor." But he says it was still upsetting to the students at whom it was directed. He says it left them feeling angry. Once again.

### **Incident 97: She Doesn't "Fit Gay Stereotypes"**

It is sixth period. There is a particular group of five students (characterized by the respondent as four male "jocks" and a "preppy" young woman) who frequently engage in anti-gay harassment. It's not the first time they have targeted a particular 16 year-old young woman. Today, they call her a "dyke" and a "lesbo." Her shocked, angry reaction is, "What the hell?" Two of her classmates come up to her afterwards to express their anger at the offenders and to voice their support. One is astonished by the incident and troubled that the teacher may not have even noticed. This "ally" seeks out a second teacher for help.

Both teachers and a school counselor talk with the targeted student. It is not reported why they didn't transfer the offenders out of the class. But they do help the *targeted* young woman to transfer to a different, more supportive, class and they put her in contact with a social worker.

The second teacher, who later calls the Project about the incident, says that he doesn't know how the assailants even picked their target out. She is lesbian, but she's not "out" about it. And, he adds, she "does not fit gay stereotypes." He says the whole incident has made him more vigilant "for any kind of harassment, especially in [his] classroom." And he says it has heightened his own "awareness of homophobia."

### **Incident 98: Outing and Suicide**

The worst incident in a month and a half of daily abuse didn't happen at school, but many of the attacks that led up to it did. It wasn't even physical, but many of the attacks that led up to it were.

It all started at the beginning of the school year. The target's friend who calls about it doesn't know how word of his friend's sexual orientation got out, but it did. His friend had just figured out himself that he was gay and didn't see anything wrong with it. Other students did. People would say cruel things to him. They would threaten to beat him up. They would follow him as he walked home from school. They would shove him and hit him. He went to school counselors for help. His friend alleges that they just said they'd "watch out for it."

The rumors and the constant barrage of verbal and sometimes physical harassment continued. Finally, less than two months into the school year, one of the offenders got to the young man's home after school before the young man himself got home. They knocked at the door and, when a parent answered, said something about "your faggot son." The parent said, "What!?" and the offender repeated, "Yeah, he's gay."

The friend says the dad asked his son if it was true. "Yeah," he told his dad, "I think so." Then he told his dad about the harassment at school. He thought his dad would be supportive. Instead, his dad screamed at him and kicked him out of the house.

He fled to a girlfriend's house. He was distraught. He wouldn't talk much with either friend (the female friend in whose home he was staying, nor his male friend -- the respondent). Finally, a few days after he was outed to his family, at the home of his friend, the young man killed himself.

That ended his pain, but not his friends'. The caller says that he every time he closed his eyes, he would see his friend. He started smoking nonstop at that point. He cut himself to try to deal with the pain of losing his friend. Then he tried taking sleeping pills, but that just made him throw up. A friend of his finally talked to a counselor on his behalf who was very supportive and sent him books to read and information about support groups. Then he talked to the counselor himself. Things are getting better for him in the months since his friend's suicide. With good support, he's managing his grief. He says he feels lucky that he's getting the support he needs. He only wishes his friend had gotten support, too.

## Category 4: Physical Assaults

### Incident 99: Who Should Find Another School?

It isn't the first time he's been targeted since moving to a new high school this fall. People have made jokes in front of him about gay people. They "call [him] names all the time ... queer, faggot, cocksucker." They have stuck pictures of women in his face to publicly embarrass him. They have flattened the tires on his car.

Then, in November, it finally escalates into assault. He is walking down the corridor at school when a group of people jump him and start to beat him up ... kicking him, punching him, etc. When a teacher happens into the hallway, the assailants flee. The teacher takes the targeted youth to the nurse's office. After checking him over to make sure he doesn't need first aid, the nurse takes him to the principal.

When the teen calls the Safe Schools Project, he quotes his principal as having said, "Maybe you should find a better school." He says that, then, the principal just sat down and was silent. The student finally left his office. He says that he *is* going to find another school. But in the meantime, he has just stopped going.

## Category 5: Gang Rapes

### Incident 100: Yes, A Girl Can Rape A Boy

A high school student speaks in one of his classes about being gay. A few classmates start harassing him. After school one day in November, they corner him and force him into an empty classroom. They beat him up and strip him. They tell him he can "choose between fucking a girl and having [his] cock cut off." The boys hold him down while a girl forcibly kisses and rapes him.

When he calls the Safe Schools Project to report the incident, he is too distraught to finish the interview. His need for counseling takes priority over the research.

### Incident 101: The Power to Mortify

Her high school locker has some private things in it ... some books and pictures. Some of the pictures are of a certain girl at school. Some fellow students find out about them and word gets around.

The girl in the pictures approaches the owner of the locker after school one day, accompanied by two male friends. They force her into a locker room, hit her, spit on her, strip her, and call her a "dyke" and a "slut." They force her to kiss and have oral sex with the girl, while the boys watch. They threaten to hurt her if she doesn't do as they say or doesn't "satisfy" the girl, or if she tells anyone what happened. Then they ejaculate on her and all three attackers leave.

### Incident 102: "To Teach Us Both a Lesson"

"I have a friend at school [who's] a year behind me. She's been really 'out' for a long time as lesbian. She's pretty isolated at school; she gets harassed all the time. We got to be friends this last year. A few weeks ago we had a prom. Without me knowing, someone got a picture of her kissing me. (I was there with someone else.) And it got distributed around school. The principal and vice principal knew she was being harassed and that our picture was being circulated around school."

Then last week after school, "the guy I went to the prom with picked me up and said he wanted to show me something. He brought me behind the school, to this storage building [by] the gym. Four other guys had her there. Her lip was cut, her clothes were torn and it was obvious they had hurt her. The one who's supposed to be my boyfriend held me. At first, I tried to get loose, to stop them, but I couldn't and when I saw how violent they were, I was scared. They told her they were going to teach her to stay away from 'their' girls. They made me watch while they raped her and peed on her."

"She couldn't dress herself after they left. She was bleeding 'down there' because she was a virgin. There were a lot of bruises. It took me a long time to get her dressed and ... take her home."

"[My friend is] such a wonderful person and they don't know her. I think they did it because if it was her, no one would care." Afterwards, she "told me not to" report it to the school. "[My mom] was very upset. She wanted me to report it. I used to feel I was ... involved in everything. A cheerleader, student council. I used to feel I was *part* of everything. Now I don't feel part of anything. No. I don't want to be part of anything. These guys weren't gang members; they are basketball players. Two are on student council."

# School Employees, Parents, and Guest Speakers Targeted

## Category 1: One-Time, Climate Setting Incidents

### Incident 103: You Decide ... Is it *Understandable Curiosity* or is it *A Hostile Confrontation*?

A high school senior, a peer educator, is teaching an eighth grade class about HIV/AIDS. The peer educator invites a few guest speakers to class, to speak about living with HIV. One of these guests is talking when a student interrupts and asks, "Are you a 'fag'?" Three other students point and make jokes. A few classmates giggle. Many seem uncomfortable. The peer educator challenges the use of the derogatory term, "fag," and makes clear that it will not be tolerated. The classroom teacher lets the peer educator handle it.

### Incident 104: You Decide ... Is it *What Do You Expect?* or is it *A Lesson in Peaceful Intervention*?

A panel of gay, lesbian and bisexual young people is invited to speak to a small alternative high school class. Their moderator is a community health educator who provides weekly sexuality education at this school. She begins by establishing ground rules, essentially asking that people behave respectfully toward one another. Then she introduces the panelists and invites the class to introduce themselves. The first student, instead of introducing himself, looks one 19-year-old panelist in the eye and asks, "Do you mind if I call you a faggot?" Before the moderator can intercede, the panelist responds with a simple, dignified, "Yes." Then, one of his fellow panelists de-escalates the confrontation by adding, "But, you know, it's actually OK with me. So you see we're all different." Finally able to get a word in, the moderator lends the weight of her authority to protecting the visiting youth. She tells the offending young man, "What you said was disrespectful and if you want to stay it has to change." The session continues, but the moderator is left wondering what has been learned.

That is, until the next week. She returns for next week's class to find the students wanting to talk about the week before. She later describes them as markedly more understanding and tolerant than in the past. She is particularly impressed with the attitude of one teen whose intolerance used to be exceeded only by that of the offender. She reaches two conclusions that she asks the Safe Schools Project to pass along: (1) Accurate information, personalized by a panel of other teens, is a potent teaching tool. (2) Even when hurtful words are spoken, they don't necessarily reinforce onlookers' antagonism ... as long as the injured party or an ally speaks up.

## Category 2: On-Going Verbal And Other Harassment

### Incident 105: The Underground Letter

It begins when a panel of sexual minority youth makes a presentation to a high school staff meeting. Some staff are offended. One of them, a counselor, allegedly writes a letter in which she says she doesn't want to be supportive of gay and lesbian youth. Apparently, it accuses those among the staff who invited the panel of trying to "recruit" staff people and of wanting sexual minority youth to have "special rights." The counselor and another staff member circulate the letter to those that they believe agree with them, keeping it a secret from those who disagree. Approximately one-third of the staff sign the letter. It is presented to the principal.

One of the accused staff people, who reports the incident to Safe Schools six months later, says that the principal didn't respond to the letter very effectively. The staff became divided. Some teachers who favored the panel stopped referring students to the counselor. Some supporters of the counselor stopped speaking to those who supported the panel. The accused staff people contacted the school district and the union, but didn't really feel satisfied with the response of either one. The school year ended with school climate and staff morale in serious trouble.

The individual who called Safe Schools would have liked for the principal to do two things immediately after receiving the underground letter. First, he could have written an initial response. Then he could have called together the concerned parties on both sides of the issue and helped them to talk with one another, to prevent the conflict from escalating as it did. Six months into the next school year, the respondent says, feelings are still raw among the staff.

### **Incident 106: A Teacher Is "Outed"**

For some time there have been rumors around school that a particular teacher is lesbian, perhaps because she expresses support for gay civil rights. Then, one day, a student announces to another teacher, who happens to chair the department, that in her opinion the teacher in question is a lesbian. For a year and a half, nothing more is said, as far as the targeted teacher knows. That is, until the teacher's confidentiality is violated again to the *other* teachers in the department, this time by the chair.

When the target of the outings calls the Safe Schools Project, she wonders aloud whether the student was motivated by retribution. She says, "I [had been] on her case. She was disruptive and wasn't doing well in my class." She doesn't express any opinion about the motives of the department chair, except perhaps her religious beliefs.

Although she says she is doing "just fine," she also says that she lost people she considered friends ... that her relationships with the other teachers in the department have "cooled." She tells the interviewer that she feels scared these days, more self-conscious, and less confident. She says she has considered changing schools.

### **Incident 107: Bystander**

The target is a gym teacher, but the caller is one of his eighth grade students. She has watched him take the abuse of her classmates for years and she is fed up. They have egged his house. People have written graffiti about him under the bleachers, "Mr. \_\_\_\_ is a faggot." They've drawn illustrations of him "doing stuff to other people" on their class papers. The incident that finally prompts her to call the Safe Schools Project happens in a coed P.E. class. One of her classmates is tardy. In an effort to discipline him, the teacher tells him to go take a shower. The student reacts with blatant disrespect, in front of the entire class, "You just want to see me naked, you faggot." Other students laugh and show support for their peer.

The student who calls to report the episode doesn't suppose it did more than minor emotional harm to the teacher, but she says it has affected *her*, emotionally, as a bystander. She says she lost friends through this incident. But most of all, she lost respect for her teacher because of how he handled it. "He laid right down and took it," she says, "and he was less of an authority figure after that." She thinks the principal heard what happened, although she didn't say anything to any adults at school. But as far as she knows, no steps have been taken to educate or discipline the defiant student.

She expresses relief that she could report it to the Safe Schools Project. She says, "[At least] I don't have to just sit and watch."

### **Incident 108: When Is It Healthy To Share a "Secret"?**

This drug and alcohol specialist teaches in an elementary school. One of her responsibilities is to conduct a counseling group for children with a substance-abusing family member. She knows that secrecy is emotionally dangerous for these young people ... that it can perpetuate the cycle of drug abuse. She is thinking about modeling for them the sharing of secrets with people you trust by sharing that she is a sexual minority.

In May of 1996, in a meeting with her principal, two secretaries and two other colleagues, she discusses the possibility. No one tells her not to. They do say they think it is inappropriate and that there is no curriculum for "such a thing" at the elementary level. Later that month she does decide, despite their advice, to come out to a small group of her fourth and fifth graders.

Over the summer, a few parents write letters to the principal and to other teachers in the building, demanding that she be transferred from the school. In one of the letters, a parent discusses the teacher's supposed "deep personal problems." The teacher feels this is an erroneous attack on her character based solely on the fact that she is lesbian. Another parent expresses the fear that, because the teacher is attractive, the kids would want to be gay, too.

In September, she receives a letter from the personnel director of the school district transferring her from the school and placing her on administrative leave. The teacher feels devastated, humiliated, demoralized, and angry. Some colleagues are supportive and would like very much for her to come back. She says the principal is not. She's afraid she won't be able to get another job in the district ... even though this district is one of seven in Washington State with contract language protecting gay and lesbian employees from job discrimination.

### Incident 109: Minor Vandalism

The pink triangle on the bumper of a teacher's car is removed in the school parking lot. He replaces it. It is removed again. He replaces it. The third time they remove it, he catches the vandal and his buddy. The teacher himself and the school's security guard reprimand the young men. The offender says he doesn't like gay people, but that he would not do "anything like bash them." He says being caught was a learning experience. And, although the principal seems, from the targeted teacher's perspective, not to think the incidents are important, the teacher tells the Safe Schools Project that he is feeling OK about the resolution. He has not reported any further incidents on campus.

### Incident 110: More Serious Vandalism

One day in March, she finds two of her car windows broken in the school parking lot. This teacher suspects that they were broken because she has a bumper sticker supporting gay civil rights. When the same two windows are rebroken a month later, and no other cars are vandalized, it becomes clear to her that her suspicions were probably correct. The school custodians express concern and help her clean up the mess. Some fellow teachers and school counselors are "appalled." When she calls the Project, she says she would have *liked* her principal to assign a security guard to walk her to her car and to find the petty cash resources to pay for the damage. But she describes her principal's response as "noncommittal" and says the district "denied liability." She says she bought a new, unmarked car and that she now parks in a secret, off-campus location out of fear.

## Category 5: Gang Rapes

### Incident 111: Child Protective Services Report

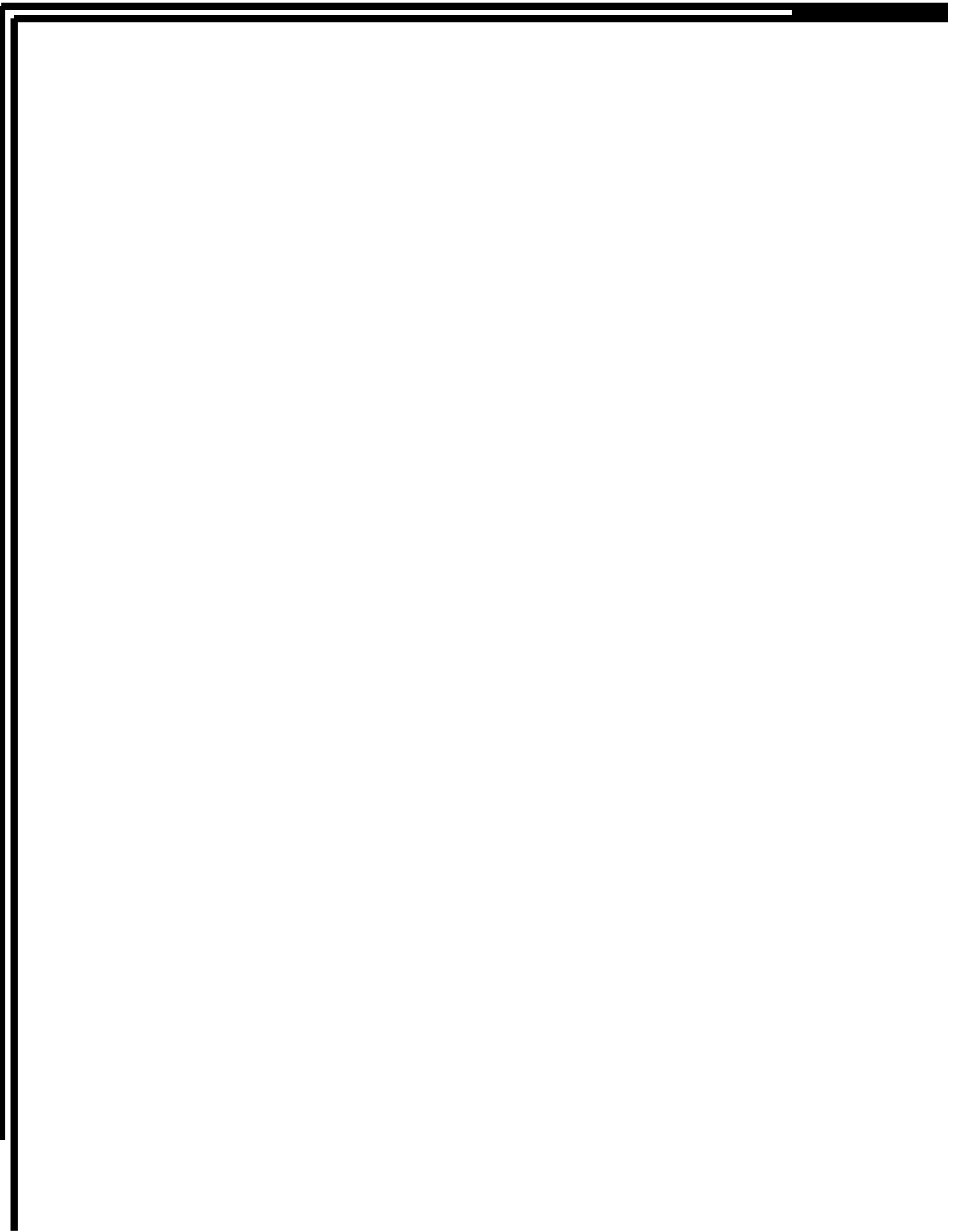
Four high school students, all young men, discover that a teacher at their school is romantically involved with a former student. They follow the two women and take pictures of them.

For two or three weeks, several times a week, they verbally attack and threaten the teacher, calling her a "dyke" and a child molester, apparently in the belief that the relationship between the two women began when one was a student. The teacher, who later calls the Safe Schools Project, denies that allegation vehemently. She says that she did not seek help, however, during these few weeks because she was fearful of being publicly accused of sexual abuse. She says she was scared that, true or not, the allegation would be believed.

Then one day after school, she says, the four young men threatened to distribute the photographs, unless she did as they said. They got her to go into a locker room at school. There, she says, they "forced [her] to have sex" with a female student, a senior, while they watched. Two of them ejaculated on the teacher *and* the student. Then they left.

**Editor's note:** *Were both individuals raped or was the adult among the offenders? The caller clearly considered herself a victim, and expressed sorrow and guilt as well as fear. The Research Team, however, counts her as an offender as well as a target ... not necessarily in a legal sense, but in a moral one. She acted under threat of a terrible ordeal, probable loss of her career, and possible criminal action, but she did not express fear for her life. Only a judge and jury could decide whether her actions were criminal. But clearly, she acted out of fright and panic, not basing her decisions on the best interests of the student with whom she was coerced into having sex. The first concern of the Safe Schools Project is the safety of children.*

*Because the Project has an obligation to try to get help for the young person involved in this incident, the case was reported to Child Protective Services. The caller, however, had declined to give her name or much identifying information. As far as we know, CPS did not have enough information to investigate the incident ... although, from a research perspective, in which many reports are made anonymously, we do consider this to be a credible report.*





# Legal Definitions, Laws, and Policies

by Karen Kane

## What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment in schools is a form of prohibited sex discrimination according to Title IX of the 1972 Federal Education Amendments. Title IX prohibits harassing behavior not only in schools themselves, but also in school-sponsored contexts such as athletic events, dances, and bus transportation.

Cases of sexual harassment in schools most often involve students harassing other students, but anybody (adult or student, male or female) can be harassed, and anybody can be a harasser. Most sexual harassment is ongoing, especially if there is no intervention. Sometimes it involves one person with more authority who demands or requests sexual contact in exchange for a grade, promotion, or some other privilege.<sup>1</sup> This type of behavior is called "*quid pro quo* harassment."

Another type of sexual harassment can be perpetrated by anybody, and involves a pattern of behavior - or one serious, single incident - that creates an intimidating or hostile environment in which the targeted person cannot work or learn. This is called "*hostile environment* harassment."

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance, request for sexual favors, or verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature that:

- ◆ alarms or annoys someone, or
- ◆ interferes with someone's privacy, or
- ◆ creates an intimidating or hostile environment.

Examples of sexual harassment could include:

- ◆ sexual comments, gestures, looks, or whistles
- ◆ spreading sexual rumors
- ◆ name calling
- ◆ touching or grabbing someone's private parts
- ◆ sexually offensive graffiti
- ◆ pulling down pants
- ◆ flipping up skirts
- ◆ forced sexual contact
- ◆ any other behaviors or words that make someone a sexual target

In Washington State, *all school districts are mandated* by law to develop and implement policy prohibiting sexual harassment.

## When is anti-gay harassment a form of sexual harassment prohibited under Title IX?

While Title IX does not specifically prohibit harassment or discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, it does prohibit harassing conduct of a sexual nature regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the people involved. Guidelines released in 1997 by the U.S. Department of Education state that, "*sexual harassment directed at gay or lesbian students may constitute sexual harassment prohibited by Title IX...[For example] harassing conduct of a sexual nature directed toward gay or lesbian students (e.g., if a male student or a group of male students target a lesbian*

<sup>1</sup> "Drawing the Line on Sexual Harassment," by Gabriella Möller, Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, 1998.

*student for physical sexual advances) may create a sexually hostile environment and, therefore, may be prohibited by Title IX."*<sup>2</sup>

The issuing of those guidelines was followed by a 1998 agreement between the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights and the Fayetteville Public Schools, resolving the case of a student targeted for being perceived to be gay. The case made clear that the federal government perceives all forms of sexual harassment to be covered under Title IX, no matter who the targets are or why they are targeted. (See "Arkansas")

## What is malicious harassment?

According to Washington State criminal statutes,<sup>3</sup> malicious harassment is defined as *"physical injury, damage to property, or threats directed toward individuals or groups on the basis of:*

- *sexual orientation*
- *race*
- *color*
- *religion*
- *ancestry*
- *national origin*
- *gender*
- *mental, physical, or sensory handicap"*

In other words, malicious harassment has occurred when any crime (i.e. assault, rape, vandalism, etc.) is motivated by the perpetrator's perception of the victim's sexual orientation.

**Threats are illegal under this law as well.** If a victim has reasonable cause to believe that a perpetrator could carry out a threat of harm, and if the threat is motivated by the perpetrator's perception of the victim's sexual orientation, it's malicious harassment, even if no other crime takes place.

It is also important to know that ***under the malicious harassment law, the victim's actual sexual orientation is irrelevant. It is the perpetrator's perception that matters,*** whether that perception is correct or not. When making a report, victims do not have to identify their sexual orientation, nor should they be asked to do so.

A bill is expected to be introduced in the 1999 Washington State legislative session that would require school districts to develop policy prohibiting malicious harassment as defined by current state law.

## What is sexual assault? What is rape? <sup>4</sup>

Sexual assault is any forced or unwanted sexual contact. Examples of sexual assault include pinching or twisting someone's breasts, grabbing someone between the legs, and cornering or pinning someone and rubbing against his or her body. In Washington State, sexual assault is legally defined as *"indecent liberties."* Rape is a specific *type* of sexual assault, and involves any type of forced or unwanted sexual penetration of someone's body. For example, any forced vaginal, anal, or oral sex is rape.

## When is a school employee mandated to report an incident of abuse or assault to CPS or to law enforcement?

All school employees are required by law to report any known or suspected abuse or assault of a young person under the age of 18, regardless of who the perpetrator is. The law defines abuse as *"the injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child ... by any person under circumstances which indicate that the child's health, welfare, and safety is harmed."*<sup>5</sup>

In other words, when a young person under the age of 18 is raped or physically or sexually assaulted, no matter who the

<sup>2</sup>"Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties," Federal Register, U. S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, March 13, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> RCW 9A.36.80

<sup>4</sup> Information for this section comes from King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, Renton, WA.

<sup>5</sup> RCW 26.44.020

perpetrator is, school employees are mandated to report the incident to the proper authorities.

The person reporting does not have to have proof of assault or abuse; the purpose of reporting is to protect young people by requesting an investigation and allowing for the possibility that a young person and/or his or her family will receive appropriate services and legal intervention. In general, situations of abuse where the alleged offender is in the young person's home are reported to Child Protective Services. Situations of physical or sexual assault that involve perpetrators who are not caregivers - such as school employees, teen peers, neighbors, or strangers - are reported to local law enforcement.

## What are "failure to protect" and "failure to report?" Do they mean the same thing?

While both have to do with the responsibility of adults to protect children and teens, the phrases "*failure to protect*" and "*failure to report*" refer to two different laws.

"*Failure to report*" refers to state mandated-reporting laws that require individual professionals to report known or suspected child abuse to protective services and/or law enforcement. In Washington State, failure to report can result in a gross misdemeanor charge.<sup>6</sup>

"*Failure to protect*" refers to the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. This clause states that all citizens are due equal protection under the law and cannot be discriminated against through selective enforcement. This means schools are responsible for equally protecting all students. Sexual harassment policies, for instance, must be applied consistently, regardless of a student's (or an employee's) gender, race, religion or sexual orientation. In the United States, failure to protect can result in administrative intervention by the U. S. Department of Education as well as civil suit.

## Do the schools have policies or union contracts that specifically prohibit harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation?

Washington has a *state* policy on "Equity in Education," jointly adopted in 1994 by the Washington State Board of Education, the office of the Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Washington State Human Rights Commission. The policy strongly encourages districts to "*eliminate prejudice, bigotry and discrimination ... [based on, among other things] sexual orientation.*"

At least eleven school districts in Washington State have, in turn, established policies and/or collective bargaining agreements explicitly protecting students and employees from harassment and discrimination based on perceived sexual orientation as of Fall, 1998:

- ◆ **Cheney** and **Spokane**, in addition to prohibiting "*sexual harassment*" and "*race, religion, ethnic origin, or physical, mental, or sensory disability harassment,*" explicitly ban what they call "*other harassment.*" Both districts define the latter as including "*intimidating another person in a way that is related to [among other things] sexual orientation ... that causes physical injury, or by words or conduct that places a person in fear of harm to his/her person or property or causes disruptive conduct.*"<sup>7,8</sup>
- ◆ **Federal Way** defines malicious harassment as including, among other things: "*any derogatory action or intimidation of another person ... in a way that is related to a person's race; religion; national origin; gender; sexual orientation; physical, mental or sensory disability or condition*" and sexual harassment as including, but not limited to: "*making unwelcome, offensive or inappropriate sexually suggestive comments, gestures, jokes or remarks of a sexual nature about a person's appearance, gender, sexual orientation or conduct.*"<sup>9</sup>
- ◆ **Port Townsend** declares its intention to "*establish a learning and employment environment in which the dignity and worth of all individuals are respected.*" It says that harassment is "*unacceptable conduct and will not be tolerated.*" It defines harassment as "*any behavior or environmental factor that offends a person, by referring negatively or stereotypically to one's age, race, color, creed, handicapping condition, national origin, sexual orientation, or status*

<sup>6</sup> "Educator's Guide to Child Protective Services," Division of Children and Family Services, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.

<sup>7</sup> Cheney School District No. 360, Policy 5013, which is referenced in Policy 3200, both adopted 3/9/94.

<sup>8</sup> Spokane School District No. 81, Policy 5170, adopted 9/17/93, effective 7/28/93.

<sup>9</sup> Federal Way School District No. 210, Policies P4011, P5149, R4011, and R5149, all adopted 6/12/95.

with regard to public assistance."<sup>10</sup>

- ◆ **Seattle** asserts that: "every participant in Seattle Public Schools [has] the right to an educational environment in which differences among people are accepted and valued, including [among other factors] sexual orientation." The Board expresses its commitment that "every student [has] the right to learning experiences infused with the value of cultural diversity." It "prohibit[s] harassment based upon national origin, race, economic status, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy, marital status or disability...[by] employees, volunteers, parents/guardians, and students."<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ **Edmonds, Everett, Issaquah, Kent, Lake Washington, Seattle and Vashon Island** School Districts all protect certificated employees from employment discrimination on the basis of, among other factors, sexual orientation.<sup>12</sup>

## Recent Lawsuits and Settlements

### **Wisconsin**

In July 1996, a U.S. District Court of Appeals upheld a student's right to sue school officials, under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, for failing to protect him from harassment and harm to the same extent that they protected other students. The student, Jamie Nabozny, had experienced anti-gay harassment from his peers throughout his middle and high schools years. He sued. The jury found the school district harmless, apparently because it had protective policies in place. Three school principals, however, were found personally liable for failing to enforce those policies. They settled with Jamie for \$900,000.

### **Arkansas**

In 1997, high school student Willi Wagner and his parents filed a Title IX sex discrimination complaint with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR). The complaint alleged that his middle and high schools had failed to address ongoing sexual harassment by peers who perceived Willi to be gay. OCR agreed. In 1998, Fayetteville Public Schools reached an agreement that called for the school district to "recognize the various forms of sexual harassment," including "sexual harassment directed at gay or lesbian students," to revise policies and procedures accordingly, and to provide appropriate training to staff and students. This complaint was the first filed under Title IX on behalf of a gay, lesbian or bisexual student.

### **Ohio**

In May 1998, a U.S. District Court judge ordered the Williamsburg Local School District to reinstate a sixth-grade teacher, Bruce Glover, who the court agreed had been denied a contract renewal because he is gay. The federal court order, believed to be the first of its kind in the country, awarded the teacher \$46,492 in back pay and \$25,000 for emotional distress.

### **California**

In April 1998, five former and current students in Morgan Hill Unified School District filed a federal lawsuit against the district alleging that school officials failed to protect them from years of anti-gay harassment by other students. The students are seeking monetary damages, as well as an agreement from the district to take steps to ensure student safety in the future. Outcome pending as we go to press ...

### **Washington State**

Just after he graduated in 1997, Mark Iversen brought suit against school officials and the Kent School District, for allegedly not having protected him during six years of escalating anti-gay verbal harassment (by peers and, in some cases, school district employees) and physical harassment, leading to an assault by eight students his senior year. In November, 1998, Kent School District settled out of court, agreeing to pay Mark \$40,000 and signing a series of written commitments regarding its policies, procedures and training.

<sup>10</sup> Port Townsend School District No. 50, Policy 4013, approved 6/17/93.

<sup>11</sup> Seattle School District No. 1, "Cultural Diversity Bill of Rights," passed 7/24/91, and Policy C03.00 and Procedure C03.01 revised 6/16/95.

<sup>12</sup> Trust agreement for Edmonds School District No. 15, and collective bargaining agreements for Everett School District No. 2, Issaquah School District No. 411, Kent School District No. 415, Lake Washington School District No. 414, Seattle School District No. 1, and Vashon Island School District No. 402.

# Towards an Appropriate Response to the Problem of Anti-Gay Harassment in Schools

by Carolyn Halley

Although there are multiple examples in the literature of school-based violence prevention programs, there are few that focus on prevention of harassment or bullying, and fewer still that include bias-based harassment, particularly anti-gay harassment. This dearth of published studies on school-based bias-reduction programs is clearly a function of the general lack of such programs. Indeed, most school districts are not offering program elements related to sexual orientation issues, including those elements recommended within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, there are a few good programs in place suggesting specific actions that schools and communities may take in an effort to create schools that are positive and safe places for sexual minority youth.

## Training of Staff and Faculty

Training of teachers and other school staff about the difficulties facing their gay and lesbian students is an important part of a successful anti-gay-bias program. If teachers and other school staff do not understand the stress that gay adolescents feel, they are unlikely either to teach about these risks in classes, to give full support to students who are harassed, or to notice signs and symptoms of suicide risk. Some studies have indicated that teachers and education majors felt themselves incompetent to teach about homosexuality,<sup>14</sup> believed themselves unable to treat homosexual students fairly,<sup>15</sup> and reported high levels of homophobia but limited desire or intention to expand their knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Studies such as these indicate that training about the needs of sexual minority students may need to be mandatory in some cases to be effective, and ought to be presented creatively in order to reach an unreceptive audience.

In-service training about sexual diversity has been shown to be effective in decreasing the level of anti-gay prejudice reported by participants and in increasing their knowledge about the multiple difficulties associated with the coming out process for adolescents and young adults.<sup>17</sup> Effective activities engage participants in discussing sexual issues, allowing teachers to learn about and empathize with the daily experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals. These discussions present opportunities for exploring both the intrapersonal and institutional dynamics of anti-gay bias.

## School Policy

School policies need to be established that foster the norm that the dignity and rights of all students will be respected at school. Schools that do not actively provide for the protection of minority group members lend implicit support to their continued harassment. They may even be legally liable, as was the court's judgment in the case of *Nabozny vs. several Ashland, Wisconsin school district administrators* (*see page 68*). Unfortunately, few school districts explicitly

<sup>13</sup> Rienzo, B, Button J, Wald, K. The Politics of School-Based Programs Which Address Sexual Orientation. *Journal of School Health*. January 1996, 66(1):33-40.

<sup>14</sup> Telljohann SK, Price JH, Poureslami M, Easton, A. Teaching About Sexual Orientation By Secondary Health Teachers. *Journal of School Health*. January 1995, 65(1): 18-22.

<sup>15</sup> Walters, A, Hayes, D. Homophobia Within Schools: Challenging the Culturally Sanctioned Dismissal of Gay Students and Colleagues. *Journal of Homosexuality*. 1998, 35(2): 1-23.

<sup>16</sup> Sears, JT. Educators, Homosexuality And Homosexual Students: Are Personal Feelings Related To Professional Beliefs? In KM Harbeck (Ed), *Coming Out of the Classroom Closet: Gay and Lesbian Students, Teachers, and Curricula* (pp29-79). Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press.,1992.

<sup>17</sup> Walters & Hayes, 1998

disallow anti-gay language and behavior at this time. However, those districts that *do* disallow such behavior have usually implemented such policies within the past five years, indicating increasing acceptance.<sup>18</sup>

The National Education Association recommends that school districts establish policies that recognize the rights of all students to:

- ◆ attend school free of verbal and physical harassment,
- ◆ attend schools where respect and dignity for all is standard,
- ◆ be included in all support programs that exist to help teenagers deal with the difficulties of adolescence,
- ◆ attend schools where education, not survival, is the priority, and
- ◆ have a heritage free of crippling self-hate and unchallenged discrimination.<sup>19</sup>

Many people believe that involving students in defining appropriate behavior is beneficial in creating consensus on moral standards. Rules of conduct may be brainstormed on the classroom level before being brought to the larger school so that all students get opportunity for input. Programs may engage students in a series of formal role-playing exercises and related assignments that can teach alternative methods of interaction to those students directly involved in bullying. These programs can also show other students how they can assist victims and how everyone can work together to create a school climate where bullying is not tolerated.<sup>20</sup> Creative methods of reinforcing appropriate behavior may be utilized: teachers can use staff meetings, student meetings, assemblies, plays, school newspaper articles, PTA meetings and other community activities to discuss harassment issues. In addition, teachers must also monitor their own and their colleagues' behavior.<sup>21</sup>

## On-site Support for Gay and Lesbian Youth

Support groups and special counseling services for gay, lesbian and bisexual students are a profound and visible message to sexual minority students as well as would-be harassers. However, more than half the health teachers in one study indicated their school administrator would not support gay/lesbian support groups.<sup>22</sup> The proportion of school districts offering mental health services targeting sexual minority youth appears to vary widely as a function of the political climate of the community. One study of over 250 school districts reported that nearly a quarter of districts in communities with anti-gay-bias ordinances offered support groups or counseling for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, while nearly none of the non-ordinance districts had such programs.<sup>23</sup>

Treadway and Yoakum suggest that school counselors include questions related to sexual orientation when assessing student concerns, such as "Do you have any concerns about your sexual orientation?" Students may avoid this question at first, but refer to it later.<sup>24</sup> If counselors *do* raise this issue, however, it is imperative that they explain that they ask the *same* questions of *every* student, and are not assuming that this particular student has orientation issues. Alternately, counselors and social workers can include the issue when listing "*all the kinds of things people talk with me about.*" And they can demonstrate their openness to conversation by displaying a gay-affirming poster or two among all the other visual cues in the counseling center.

## Curriculum Inclusion

Two separate samples of high school health teachers reported that less than half formally teach about homosexuality, with only a quarter of these teachers perceiving themselves as very competent in teaching about homosexuality.<sup>25,26</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Rienzo, Button, Wald, 1996

<sup>19</sup> National Education Association. (1991). *Affording Equal Opportunity to Gay and Lesbian Students Through Teaching and Counseling: A Training Handbook for Educators*. Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>20</sup> Banks, Ron. *Bullying in Schools*. Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. April 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Shakeshaft C, Mandel L, Johnson Y, Sawyer J, Hergenrother M, Barber E. *Boys Call Me Cow*. *Educational Leadership*. October 1997, 22-25.

<sup>22</sup> Telljohann et al, 1995

<sup>23</sup> Rienzo, Button, Wald, 1996

<sup>24</sup> Treadway L, Yoakam J. *Creating a Safer School Environment for Lesbian and Gay Students*. *Journal of School Health*. September 1992, 62(7): 352-355.

<sup>25</sup> Telljohann, et al., 1995

<sup>26</sup> Rienzo, Button, Wald, 1996

Optimally, instruction on the issues facing gay and lesbian students would occur not only in health class, but also as an integrated topic essential to multiple disciplines. It would be especially unjust (and counterproductive, in terms of reducing anti-gay harassment) to teach only about homosexuality in relation to HIV/AIDS. Literature classes may discuss prominent gay/lesbian/bisexual authors (e.g., Oscar Wilde, Audre Lorde, and Virginia Woolf). History courses may discuss such events as the Stonewall Rebellion and the assassination of Harvey Milk, as well as the contributions of historical figures who loved partners of their own gender (e.g., Eleanor Roosevelt, Bayard Rustin). Science and math classes may conduct surveys about teasing and harassment and analyze the results. Art courses may encourage students to portray in paintings and other representations how they feel about verbal attacks.<sup>27</sup> There are ways to redesign any course to be more inclusive.<sup>28, 29, 30, 31</sup> And there are age-appropriate resources for school libraries by and about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. Schools should prepare young people to live in our democratic society by replacing children's ignorance and *misinformation* about *all* minority groups with accurate portraits of real people and their contributions to society.

## Violence Prevention

Besides providing students with accurate information about gay people, schools must address violence directly. The non-profit research institute Drug Strategies has identified nine "key elements" to successful violence prevention efforts.<sup>32</sup> They consider the first two especially crucial. They are:

1. **activities designed to foster school norms** against violence, aggression and bullying;
2. **skills training** based on a strong theoretical foundation, such as the Social Learning Theory;
3. a comprehensive, multifaceted approach, including family, peers, media and community;
4. physical and administrative changes to promote a positive school climate;
5. at least 10-20 sessions during the first year and 5-10 booster sessions in the succeeding two years;
6. interactive methodologies (group work, role-play, etc.);
7. developmentally tailored interventions;
8. culturally sensitive material;
9. teacher training.

Programs they recommend, based upon these criteria, include *"Get Real About Violence"* (C.H.E.F., 800-323-2433), *"No Bullying"* (Johnson Institute, 800-231-5165), *"Positive Action"* (Positive Action Publishing, 800-345-2974), *"Safe & Sound: A Violence and AOD Prevention Curriculum"* (Bureau for At-Risk Youth, 800-99-YOUTH), and *"Second Step"* (800-634-4449).

## Peer Counseling and Mediation

Peer counseling has been extensively used in school-based conflict mediation and anti-violence programs. The National Association for Mediation in Education reports a 40 percent increase since 1991 in the number of school programs that teach students to manage their own conflicts without violence.<sup>33</sup> Integrating sexual orientation issues into the training of peer counselors is an excellent method of contextualizing anti-gay harassment into the larger themes of peer harassment within schools. Initiation of peer support programs that discourage bias may be especially beneficial at the elementary school level. Through these programs, young children may develop skills of communication, empathy, critical thinking, impulse control and friendship, as well as moral standards which affirm the rights of all students. Peer programs have

<sup>27</sup> Shakeshaft et al., 1997

<sup>28</sup> Besner, HF, & Spungin, CJ (1995) *Gay & Lesbian Students: Understanding Their Needs*. Washington, DC: Taylor & Frances.

<sup>29</sup> National Education Association, 1991

<sup>30</sup> Safe Schools Coalition of Washington, *Safe Schools Resource Guide*. Washington State: Fall, 1997 and Winter, 1999. Website: [www.safeschools-wa.org](http://www.safeschools-wa.org)

<sup>31</sup> Walters, Andrew S. Using Visual Media to Reduce Homophobia: A Classroom Demonstration. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*. 1995. 20(2): 92-100.

<sup>32</sup> Drug Strategies, *Safe Schools/Safe Students: A Guide to Violence Prevention Strategies*. Washington, DC Website: [www.drugstrategies.org](http://www.drugstrategies.org)

<sup>33</sup> San Diego Office of Education. *Safe Schools: Productive Learning Environments*. 1997. Website: [www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/notes/8/safe-school.html](http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/notes/8/safe-school.html)

been shown to be effective in various contexts: a meta-analysis of 143 drug and alcohol abuse studies showed peer programs to be the single most effective school-based approach for reducing alcohol and drug use among youth.<sup>34</sup>

Another method of engaging students in creating communal moral standards based on compassion and fairness is the "open meeting." Open meetings are regularly scheduled times when the class and the teacher sit together in a closed circle to discuss important topics; this model has been used most widely in elementary classrooms. The topic may be a problem that the group or an individual is having, such as name-calling or harassment. The group is asked to personalize the issue (e.g., "When have you been called a name? How did you feel?") and to consider solutions to the problem being discussed (e.g., "Try to make name-calling go away for everyone in this room. Think about what you can do to get your feelings out without using name-calling."). One study reported that open meetings build trust, group cohesiveness, respectful interactions and children's self-esteem.<sup>35</sup>

Particularly at the elementary level, teaching conflict management skills can help to reduce peer harassment as well as improve overall school performance. One curriculum, "*Fighting Fair Model*," teaches students to deal with conflict positively, and to replace aggressive behaviors with constructive ones. The curriculum contains The Rules for Fighting Fair, which students are to adopt in conflict-provoking situations. Negative behaviors such as name-calling, threats, and hitting are termed "fouls." Students learn through "hands-on" techniques including role-playing, brainstorming, puppetry, classroom discussion, stories, and skits. Students also learn to mediate disputes between others. The importance of listening, questioning, and paraphrasing skills is explained, then reinforced through interactive exercises and mock mediations. During a seven-week implementation of the curriculum in three elementary classrooms, teachers introduced conflict resolution into existing language arts and social studies curricula, through almost daily 30-minute lectures. Evaluation of the program showed students' hypothetical responses to conflict situations changed significantly from "aggressive" responses to "pro-social" responses. In addition, a decrease of actual objectionable behaviors (i.e., disruptive, rude, defiant behaviors, as defined by school staff) occurred.<sup>36</sup>

**Important note:** Although peer-counseling models can be productive and effective methods of setting positive peer norms, mediation (especially by peers) is *not* appropriate intervention for a situation that has escalated to malicious harassment. It is unfair to expect the target of a hate crime to confront the offenders face-to-face and negotiate a solution. It is also likely to be ineffective in changing the offenders' behavior. Instead, adults must intervene and schools must have clear punishments for threatening behaviors.

## Unbiased On-site Health Care

School nurses and school-linked clinics are often the first to know about physical assaults on sexual minority youth, as the providers of first aid. And they *may* be involved in the counseling and support of students who are experiencing verbal abuse as well. They will not, however, be considered a resource during these sorts of crises if they have not already demonstrated their respectfulness and their openness.

Nurses and clinics can communicate their desire to serve all youth by displaying posters, books, and pamphlets that address, among other things, families with two moms or dads, gay and lesbian issues and anti-gay bias. They can explicitly list among their services support groups for gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning students. They can begin taking a health history by assuring the patient, "I have to ask everyone these very personal questions in order to provide the best care." And they can use inclusive language when taking health histories by asking high school students, for example, "Are you seeing anybody (dating anybody, going with anybody) now?" and following that up with, "Guys? Girls? Both?" rather than, "Do you have a boyfriend?" or "Do you have a girlfriend?"

## Parental Involvement

Parents are often the last to know if their child is being harassed at school, particularly if the harassment is based on sexual orientation. Youth may be unlikely to tell their parents out of fear or shame, and teachers may experience their

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

<sup>35</sup> Lundeberg M, Emmett J, Osland P, Lindquist N. Down with Put-Downs! *Educational Leadership*. October 1997, 36-37.

<sup>36</sup> Powell K, Muir-McClain L, Halasyamani L. A Review of Selected School-Based Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation Projects. *Journal of School Health*. December 1995, 65(10)426-431.



own discomfort at approaching the topic with families. Indeed, not all parents would be supportive of their child in this situation, though certainly many would.

Given this context, increasing parental awareness of peer harassment, including explicit mention of harassment based on sexual orientation, may be beneficial when introduced in a safe setting such as a PTA meeting. One program encourages a parental awareness campaign on the topic of bullying to be conducted during parent-teacher conference days, through parent newsletters, and at PTA meetings. This campaign would be a part of an overall program to reduce bullying, with the goal of increasing parental awareness of the problem, pointing out the importance of parental involvement for program success, and encouraging parental support of program goals.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

Although most school districts are not yet offering optimal or even adequate support for gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender students, there is evidence that these types of programs are increasing in numbers. In order to be effective in halting peer harassment and providing support for the healthy and positive development of sexual minority students, multiple approaches are indicated.

First, teachers and those receiving teaching certificates should be provided interactive training on the topic of homosexuality so all teachers have a better understanding of the issues facing this population. Second, schools should create policy prohibiting anti-gay language and behavior on the district or building level. These policies would optimally be created with student input, and would be posted prominently. Third, schools should provide specific mental health support for sexual minority students, including counseling services and support groups in the schools. Teachers and counselors should be able to refer students to community-sponsored support groups and other services for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth. Fourth, education about issues facing sexual minority students should be provided at all schools and sexual minority issues should be integrated into the broader curriculum. Fifth, violence should be addressed through curriculum and school-wide efforts. Sixth, peer counseling and mediation programs that contextualize anti-gay harassment into the broader topic of peer harassment should be implemented, creating normative values against harassment and threats of any kind. Seventh, school health care providers should be inclusive of and sensitive to the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students. Finally, schools and PTAs and community organizations can form partnerships to educate parents about the reality of peer harassment and programs that are being implemented to control it, and about sexual orientation, along with other aspects of human growth and development.

<sup>37</sup> Banks, 1997



# INCIDENTS INDEX

## with sample incident #'s

### PERSPECTIVES

- ◆ Administrators' perspectives 50, 83
- ◆ Other school employees' perspectives (non-admin.) 5, 7, 9, 11, 20, 22-23, 30, 39, 52, 58, 61, 84, 90-91, 97, 105-106, 108-111
- ◆ Parents' and guardians' perspectives 4, 12, 14-15, 27-28, 32, 37, 87, 91, 94
- ◆ Students' perspectives 1-2, 8, 10, 13, 16-18, 21, 24-26, 29, 33-36, 38, 40-49, 51-57, 59-82, 85-86, 88-92, 95, 98-102, 103, 107

### CATEGORIES (of offense)

- ◆ Category 1: One-time events 1-10, 12, 19-20, 31-33, 58-63, 93-94, 103-104
- ◆ Category 2: On-going harassment 11, 13-15, 21-24, 34-41, 64-75, 95-98, 105-110
- ◆ Category 3: Physical har. & sexual assault short of rape 16, 25, 42-47, 76-84
- ◆ Category 4: Physical assault 17, 26-30, 48-55, 85-91, 99
- ◆ Category 5: Gang rape 18, 56-57, 92, 100-102, 111

### LOCATIONS (of incident &/or surrounding events)

- ◆ Bus and other in-transit events 21, 25, 40-41, 50, 53-54, 98
- ◆ Elementary schools 12-18, 108
- ◆ Field trips & other off-campus & extracurricular events 18, 41, 45, 47, 51, 57, 58, 88-90, 94, 102
- ◆ High schools 2, 4-5, 7-11, 31-57, 58-92, 93-102, 103-107, 109-111
- ◆ Locker rooms and gyms (in or near) 23, 35, 39, 48, 51, 57, 58, 77, 89-90, 94, 102, 107, 111
- ◆ Middle schools 1,3, 6, 19-30, 40, 103
- ◆ Playgrounds 12-16

### ADULTS' AND STUDENTS' ROLES

- ◆ Administrators perceived as harming \* 15, 27-28, 30, 32, 35, 39, 44, 53, 55, 59, 61, 69, 75, 79, 81, 91, 99, 105, 108-110
- ◆ Administrators helping \*\* 5, 46, 54, 64, 70, 81, 87, 89, 91, 94
- ◆ Other school employees perceived as harming \* 1, 4, 6, 8-10, 15, 24, 35, 41, 43, 51, 59, 62, 64, 79, 86, 91, 98, 105-106
- ◆ Other school employees helping \*\* 1, 5, 7-8, 14-15, 18, 20, 29, 31, 40, 45, 54, 81, 87, 89-91, 94, 97-98, 109-110
- ◆ Parents and guardians perceived as harming \* 35, 64, 98, 108
- ◆ Parents and guardians helping \*\* 4, 10, 12-15, 18, 27-28, 32, 37, 41, 50, 54-55, 64, 81, 86-87, 89, 102
- ◆ Students perceived as harming \* 2, 4, 12-15, 17-18, 20-30, 31, 33-53, 55-57, 58-60, 63, 66-68, 70-80, 82-87, 89-92, 93-102, 103-107, 111
- ◆ Students helping \*\* 16, 26, 33, 39, 41, 50, 54, 88, 91, 94, 97

### OUTCOMES (the most severe, only)

- ◆ Missing classes or whole days of school 10, 27-28, 39, 51, 55-56, 64, 70, 73, 79, 85, 99
- ◆ Dropping out 17, 55-56, 65, 70, 73, 79, 85-86, 99
- ◆ Suicide attempts 35, 38, 42, 56, 65, 79, 85
- ◆ Suicides 87, 98

\* "harming" includes: blaming, rejecting, minimizing, offending/harassing (includes failure-to-protect and/or doing-too-little only when they obviously knew and their omission was grievous)

\*\* "helping" includes: supporting the target, stopping the abuse, and/or disciplining the offender

"other school employees" are teachers, bus drivers, secretaries, counselors, social workers, teachers' aides, security guards, etc.





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## Question:

What will the Safe Schools Coalition be doing now that the Safe Schools Anti-Violence Research Project is completed?

## Answer:

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- ◆ sponsors **training events** and maintains a **speakers bureau** offering workshops on "anti-gay harassment and violence and schools." See [http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/help\\_trainers.html](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/help_trainers.html) *To arrange for training or a speaker, contact the Safe Schools Coalition's training coordinators — email [training@safeschoolscoalition.org](mailto:training@safeschoolscoalition.org)*
- ◆ publishes and distributes the **Safe Schools Resource Guide** and **Posters**, to assist educators in making appropriate community referrals and in accessing resources such as books, videos, websites, posters, theater troupes and curricula. *To order copies of this Report or other Safe Schools publications, see current order information at: [http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/ssc\\_order.htm](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/ssc_order.htm) You can also download Safe Schools Coalition reports, the resource guides, and poster from Safe Schools' website: <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org> If you have questions about any of our publications, e-mail us at [publications@safeschoolscoalition.org](mailto:publications@safeschoolscoalition.org)*
- ◆ continues to distribute its three Emmy-nominated **public service announcements** for television and training events, challenging adults to "be there for every child." *To order a copy, contact the Safe Schools Coalition's PSA coordinator at phone: 206-252-0982; Email: [LLove@seattleschools.org](mailto:LLove@seattleschools.org)*
- ◆ provides **testimony and technical assistance** to lawmakers and school boards regarding the potential impacts of bills, policies and procedures. *For help with policy matters, contact Coalition Co-chair, Frieda Takamura, 800-622-3393 (from outside Washington State: 253-941-6700) or e-mail: [fktakamura@wa.nea.org](mailto:fktakamura@wa.nea.org)*
- ◆ consults with fellow researchers around the U.S. who are doing school violence, hate crime and gay youth-related studies. *To consult regarding research, contact Coalition Co-chair, Beth Reis, 800-325-6165 ext. 64970 (in or out of state), E-mail: [elizabeth.reis@metrokc.gov](mailto:elizabeth.reis@metrokc.gov)*

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