

STUDENT VOICE

Setting up a student
LGBT group in secondary
schools and colleges



Stonewall

Acceptance without exception

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THE FREEDOM TO BE

Your lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) students need to learn that it's okay to be themselves and to be different. They need to know that they're not alone, and setting up an LGBT group can give them the safe space and peer support they need.

Having a group in your school or college:

- Helps the LGBT students in your school or college feel supported, accepted and included.
- Supplements and informs anti-bullying policies by offering LGBT students the space to share their experiences.
- Demonstrates your school or college's commitment to diversity, acceptance and tolerance to parents and students, whether LGBT or not.

This guide explains how to go about it, explores some of the challenges you'll face along the way and highlights some of the resources available to help you make a success of it.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

An LGBT group is a flagship for your school or college's approach to LGBT inclusion – and a platform for tackling HBT bullying.

- Our *School Report 2017* showed that anti-LGBT bullying and language was still part of the everyday experience of almost half LGBT students.
- When surveyed for the report, more one in five LGBT FE college students and one in six LGBT sixth form college students had experienced homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic bullying in the past year.
- 64 per cent of trans pupils reported being bullied.
- Seven in ten LGBT pupils report that their schools say homophobic and biphobic bullying is wrong.
- Just two in five pupils said their school spoke out against transphobic bullying.

An LGBT group is a very clear statement of support for LGBT students – and against Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic (HBT) bullying.

There are very clear benefits for the group's members too:

- It builds confidence and self-esteem.
- It nurtures their advocacy skills and encourages them to step up, take responsibility and lead.

All of which equips them to be active and committed members of the school or college community and beyond.

There's a legal aspect to this work too. Under the Equality Act (2010) the public sector is obliged to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity, as well as fostering good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who don't. And Ofsted expect schools and colleges to combat bullying of all kinds in line with its promotion of 'British Values', which place particular emphasis on respect for others. Your student LGBT group can be instrumental in helping you meet these requirements.

“LGBT+ Space is so important to me as it's one of only 3 or 4 places that I feel like I'm home. It's where I found my sexuality and identity. It's where I found my family. It's where I found my sanity. LGBT+ Space is important because it is a good way for people to connect and talk about real issues in the community and wider world. For LGBT+ Space I get a feeling of co-existing with people similar to me and whom I can connect with.”

Quinn, 14

CASE STUDY: Brighton and Hove High School

Brighton and Hove High School set up an LGBT group after several LGBT students had expressed how isolated they felt because of being different. Some trans pupils had experienced mental health issues too and there'd been incidences of LGBT bullying. At an INSET day, staff discussed establishing an LGBT group and, after seeing such a group in the Stonewall DVD 'Fit' and reading Stonewall's guide, they went ahead. Activities include socialising, fundraising and group discussions about problems that affect them and visits from guest speakers, including from Stonewall. There was some resistance to the group from some students which was tackled through PSHE sessions, assemblies and the anti-bullying policy. The group has given pupils a safe forum to be themselves and, in the wider community, put the importance of individuality firmly in the spotlight.

SETTING UP AN LGBT GROUP

- 1** Work with the group's members to establish your aims, focus, and aspirations.

- 2** Get buy-in to the group and its remit from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Support from the top is vital as it endorses both the group and its purposes, and sends a strong message to both LGBT students and those who don't agree with the group.

- 3** Get some enthusiastic students on board to make sure that the group is student led from the start.

- 4** Members don't all have to be LGBT – allies should be welcome too.

- 5** Give the students the chance and freedom to name the group. You might want to revisit the name occasionally so that it reflects changes in membership or goals and ensures students have ownership.

- 6** Spread the word. Make announcements about the group in assemblies, put up posters in form rooms and hallways.

- 7** Set the ground rules. Things to consider include confidentiality, respect and acceptable and unacceptable language. Don't forget to cover the group's aims and vision so that you stay focused.

- 8** Create a plan for the year. Build activities around key dates, such as LGBT History Month, Trans Day of Visibility and Anti-Bullying Week, linking effectively with curriculum teams who may be planning lesson input.

- 9** Create a display as a showcase of the group's plans and work so that the whole learning environment can share and celebrate it.

- 10** Give the group members the chance to organise events and activities for other students.

- 11** Encourage staff members to point the way to the group to any students who are having issues with coming out etc.

- 12** Engage parents, carers and the wider community. Ask them to help with events and invite them along.

If you're new to this kind of work, or your students have differing needs from those in mainstream education, you might feel more confident by involving your school council or student council in diversity work first. You can find full details of what's involved in the Stonewall Guide *Celebrating Diversity Through Pupil Voice*.

You may feel that additional training for you and the students on managing sensitive discussions would be helpful. You should also ensure issues which arise are approached in a way which is in line with the safeguarding, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and equality policies.

It's worth noting that, as there is an increased opportunity for young people to reveal personal information in such groups, it's important to ensure any disclosures are managed in line with the safeguarding policies. It's also important to recognise, however, that a person revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity is not in itself a safeguarding issue, so this information should not be passed on to a safeguarding lead unless there is evidence of other concerns.

“A group like this is vital in every school or college or place of education. Without groups like this, LGBT+ students find themselves drifting through the motions, never acknowledging a key aspect of their identity because there is no one around can relate. Spaces like this are vital for LGBT+ student because vulnerable young people need a support network that can understand their struggles on a degree that non-LGBT+ people cannot.”

Sadie, 17



CASE STUDY: Hertfordshire and Essex High School

Hertfordshire and Essex High School set up their group, Kaleidoscope, following a few incidents of LGBT bullying and after attending a Stonewall seminar about School Champions at a teachers' conference. The group was launched at a whole school assembly and advertised in form rooms and is open to everyone; students aren't asked about their identity. The group's guidelines were drafted by the students following the examples in the School Champions programme, and students also decided the group's main purposes – a safe space, fundraising for LGBT causes and raising the profile of LGBT issues. During LGBT History Month there are displays of LGBT role models throughout the school and a permanent Equalities noticeboard is regularly updated with LGBT news. The group was given a further boost when the school's first Equalities Prefect was awarded the title of Stonewall Young Campaigner of the Year.

THE GROUP'S SET UP. WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Now your group's up and running, you'll need to nurture it so that it becomes a relevant, valuable and enjoyable part of your LGBT students' life at school or college. These pointers will help keep you on track:

- Ask your students to help plan events for the year ahead, perhaps around LGBT History Month or Pride.
- Make a display celebrating LGBT role models. Be sure it's as diverse and inclusive as possible.
- Host an assembly or an EqualiTea event to raise money for a chosen charity.
- Run a No Bystanders or Come Out for LGBT campaign.
- Discuss and review books and films with LGBT characters or themes.
- Make rainbow bracelets or badges; or run a visibility campaign.
- Write articles for the school or college blog or magazine.
- Invite representatives of your local LGBT organisation.
- Look and see who is not at your group and why that might be; make sure that all LGBT students are able to access the group if they wish to.

- Ask the students about the way the policies and curriculum handle LGBT issues and map LGBT inclusion.
- See if members of the group would like to deliver staff training.
- Ask students to research sources of further support and information on LGBT issues. They can use this to create posters to help inform other young people of the support available.

CASE STUDY: London Academy of Excellence

Students at the London Academy of Excellence formed their group as they wanted to celebrate diversity and help change a school culture that wasn't very positive. Students promoted the group and its aims through school assemblies; the regular slots in the assemblies helped highlight and educate the whole school on LGBT issues. The group works to celebrate diversity and fundraise, with a total of almost £2,000 raised in two years. An annual diversity day sees everyone wearing rainbow coloured non-uniform and a rainbow-themed bake sale. A lecture on LGBT issues, organised by the group, featured an impressive range of LGBT guest speakers and an audience made up of the entire school. Members of the group have felt secure and included while the school has experienced a drastic change in culture and atmosphere.



CASE STUDY: The Queen's School

The Queen's School in Chester, took a stepped approach to establishing an LGBT group. Year 12 students identified the need for LGBTQ Well Being prefects to sit on the Student Leadership Team. Although there's no LGBT group as such, the prefects plan a couple of projects a year, their roles communicated alongside those of other prefects and their work shared through the school's newsletter and website. Recent projects have included fundraising and arranging a visit under the Stonewall School Champion scheme. The prefects have raised the profile of LGBTQ issues throughout the school and the students and staff are exploring the idea of an LGBT/Equality & Diversity Group.

“LGBT+ Space means a lot because it is a nice place to go. We also accept everyone, and we are all friends here. No matter what sexuality, gender, everyone is welcome. It is important to have groups like that because you get to hear all the latest LGBT+ news, you talk, and all the latest issues come alive.”

Benson, 13

CASE STUDY: Kingsdown School

The LGBT group at Kingsdown School in Wiltshire was built on the foundations of an existing after school club, the Equalities Team. It has evolved into an action group working to raise awareness of diversity at school, and includes LGBT students as well as allies. The group's ground rules, priorities and activities are all driven by group discussion. Their work is shared with others in the school community through Spotlight sessions, where all students are invited to have tea and biscuits with the Equalities Team and to discuss the group's ideas, views and work. There's been a significant impact throughout the school; most students are now comfortable to openly discuss LGBT issues and do so with confidence, they take the conversation home to have with their families and the group's work was highlighted by Ofsted inspectors.

HOW TO SUPPORT THE LGBT GROUP

It's vital you create a supportive and welcoming environment. If the students don't feel safe and able to be themselves, they won't come along.

- Ask students you feel would benefit to join in and make sure to actively signpost to the group.
- If people who did come suddenly stop attending, ask them why – but don't pressurise them.
- If someone you think might benefit from the group has chosen not to get involved, just accept that some people aren't into groups and prefer to find their own way.
- Invite local LGBT groups to introduce new voices and perspectives.

CASE STUDY: William Farr School

The LGBT group at William Farr school in Lincoln, grew from an initial question from a single student about the school having a Gay Straight Alliance. The school set about supporting its LGBT students by forming a group, open to LGBT people and their allies. The group, named by its members as The LGBT+ Space, was launched at a school assembly during LGBT History Month. It promotes itself in the school bulletin and has its own Twitter account. A dedicated email address offers anonymous advice for those not comfortable with going to a public meeting. Apart from socialising, activities have included film viewings, discussions on LGBT rights across the world and bi-visibility. Perseverance was needed to get the number of people attending the group from just one at the first meeting to an average of 25 people now. The group has led staff INSET training and raised the issue of gender neutral toilets – all school blocks now have gender neutral toilets. And the single student whose initial enquiry started the group, went from getting C and D grades to A and A*.

THE TRICKY BITS

No matter how well organised your group is, there are a few things you need to keep an eye on.

CONFIDENTIALITY

When you first set up the group establish that anything that's said in the group goes no further. Remind the group of this golden rule every so often and make sure it's reiterated whenever a new student joins. However, you should also stress that if something is shared in the group that suggests someone is at risk of being harmed, then people must speak up.

THE CONCERNS OF PARENTS AND CARERS

LGBT issues can be sensitive for some parents and carers, so let them know your door is always open if they want to discuss something. Be sure to tell them that it's important that LGBT people are supported and made to feel safe at school or college and that having an LGBT group benefits all young people. And stress that the group is just another way the school or college expresses its ethos and policies.

GETTING SUPPORT FROM SLT AND STAFF

The group will be more successful if it has the full support of your colleagues so get them onboard from the start.

Their open support gives the group and its activities visibility and credibility. Get them involved too, by sharing the group's plans and activities and invite them to lend their specialist skills when appropriate.

MAINTAINING GROUP COHESION

Any group of young people has its ups and downs. Ask members to keep any disagreements outside of the group; remind them that it's a safe space and any tension will undermine that security for others. Get the members involved in the running of the group to keep them motivated and engaged – it helps to always have specific activities planned for each session.

THE FEELINGS OF NON-GROUP MEMBERS

It's unlikely that your group will enjoy universal support so make sure your anti-bullying and behaviour policies are clear and upheld rigorously by all staff. You can help students find a way to respond to difficult situations and pair younger students up with an older or more experienced buddy in the group for an extra bit of personal support.

IS IT MAKING ANY DIFFERENCE?

The sense of safety and support your LGBT group will provide is fantastic to experience – but you need to demonstrate it's having the desired impact and worth the time and resource it demands. You can do this by:

- Monitoring levels of bullying and compare them with previous levels.
- Conducting well-being surveys.

“LGBT+ Space means a lot to me because it is one of the only places I can go and not be judged about who I am and what I look like. My sexual orientation has a lot to do with who I am and nothing to do with what I do. LGBT+ Space helps us to connect with each other and have a really good time.”

Alex, 13



CASE STUDY: Portsmouth Grammar

A survey at Portsmouth Grammar found that 58% of students used casual homophobic language, compared to 79% who did so before their LGBT group started. 21% of students found use of such language offensive, almost double the number from before. They also witnessed a fall in bullying. And an LGBT student who was struggling with issues around their sexuality went from Ds and Cs before the group started, to As and A*s afterwards.

“I know that the lessons I learned in LGBT+ Space about caring for younger LGBT+ youth have helped me care for people at University and have helped me feel more connected to a community that can feel frightening to young closeted kids. I will be grateful for it forever.”

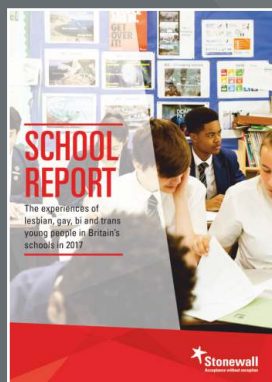
Grayson, 20 (ex-student)

CASE STUDY: Kircaldy High School

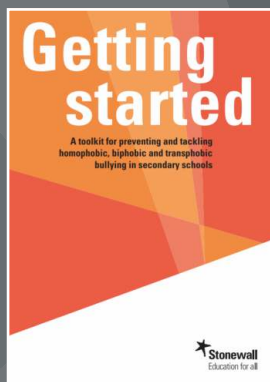
The LGBT group at Kircaldy High School started after a potential school prefect pointed out that the school did nothing for LGBT students. Since then the group has gone from a relatively informal gathering with no talk of guidelines to one with a constitution and committee. Discussions aren't structured as the aim of the group is to be more like a meeting of minds. The members have enjoyed an increase in confidence and their organisational, management and leadership skills have all developed as a result of their involvement. The impact has been felt on the wider school community too; it has become a school where everyone is respected and supported and the LGBT group has been crucial in creating that change.

WE'RE RIGHT BY YOUR SIDE

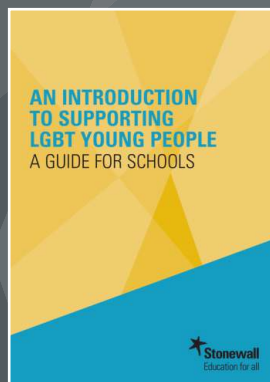
Setting up an LGBT group might seem a bit daunting but our suite of resources will help you every step of the way.



Stonewall School Report



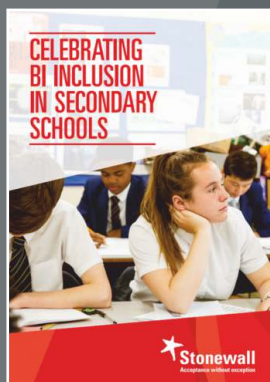
Getting Started – A Toolkit for Secondary Schools



An Introduction to Supporting LGBT Young People



Stonewall posters



Stonewall Bi Inclusion Guide



Secondary School Book List

If you'd like to order any of these support materials please email education@stonewall.org.uk



Many thanks to all of the schools that contributed case studies to this resource. All names in quotes have been changed for anonymity.

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