



School Toolkit

2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- **Welcome..... 1**
- **Side by Side Services..... 2**
- **Foundational Concepts..... 3**
- **Pronoun Cheat Sheet..... 5**
- **Tips and tricks..... 6**
 - **Allyship**
 - **Things to Avoid**
- **GSA Information..... 7**
- **VDOE Trans Policy Support..... 9**
- **Resources..... 10**
 - **Mental Health**
 - **Educators**
 - **Legal**
 - **Support**
 - **Videos, Lessons, Ideas**
 - **Black LGBTQ Youth**
 - **Medical**

WELCOME

Hello!

Thank you for exploring our school toolkit. The purpose of this resource is to answer common questions we receive from youth, educators, and families across the state. In this resource you will find answers to common questions, tips and tricks for allyship, information about Side by Side, and countless resources.

We want this to be a leaping off point for folks to begin their journey in helping make school communities the safest and most affirming spaces we can make them for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth to thrive!

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us at sidebysideva.org where we have information on staff, programs, and resources.

Thank you for your work!

All the best,

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SIDE BY SIDE

What is Side by Side?

Side by Side is a non-profit organization located in Richmond, Virginia. We serve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth in the Greater Richmond area, as well as the state of Virginia. Side by Side provides a housing program for LGBTQ-identified youth between the ages of 18 to 25, as well as support groups throughout each week for youth who are 11 to 20 years old.

Side by Side provides countless other services such as meals, clothing, and training, which can be offered to schools, organizations, companies, etc. The content below will focus on the school program at Side by Side, which is growing rapidly. The school program is made up of passionate school staff in both private and public, middle and high schools who want to be advocates for LGBTQ youth.

Side by Side School Programs

Outside of our weekly support groups, we have a growing school program that offers a wide variety of support, education, resources, and relationship building. Our school programs center on three areas:

1. Training - we offer training to all levels of school communities to ensure everyone knows best practices and lived experiences
2. School Staff Advocacy - we have a passionate school staff advocacy program where advocates from across Virginia join together in community to gain ongoing training experiences, resources, and support from Side by Side staff
3. GSA - we assist in creating and supporting student lead GSA (Gay Straight Alliances) to help create safer school environments for LGBTQ-identified youth and allies

We work tirelessly to help educators and school staff feel supported, trained, and empowered to be agents of change for LGBTQ youth in their school communities - let's connect!

List of Free Side by Side Services

- Weekly support groups for LGBTQ or questioning youth and young adults 11 to 20 years old
- Meals at every group that meets in person
- Community events like GSA Summit or Alternative Prom
- Free binders for youth across the state
- Partnerships with Diversity Thrift and Nationz to provide free clothing and food
- Crisis support and connections to mental health support
- Much more!

Identity Spectrum

SEX ASSIGNMENT



GENDER IDENTITY



GENDER EXPRESSION



SEXUAL ORIENTATION



ROMANTIC ORIENTATION



When we are born we get a pat from the doctor and then it is announced: “It’s a girl! It’s a boy!” This moment that we have experienced is a our **sex assigned at birth** is the assumed sex based off of our physical bodies. As we get older, we are then taught what it means to be male or female; man or woman.

Throughout our lives we are taught this is what girls do and this is what boys do. This process of socialization is determined from the moment we are born and assumes our gender identity - our internal, personal experience of how we understand our gendered selves. We never know someone’s **gender identity** as it is internal and can vary greatly. A person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth is cisgender. A person whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth is transgender, trans, non-binary, or a wide variety of gender identities!

FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS CONT.

The clothes we wear, our interests, makeup, or haircuts are our **gender expression** - this is the external expression of gender identity. For some people, they identify as a man and dress in a traditionally masculine way. However, many peoples' gender identity is not expressed as a way society expects. For example, many folks who identify as women might wear pants, button downs, or ties. Another example is folks who identify as a masculine might wear a dress. A person's gender identity does not equal their gender expression; they are related and exist separately.

Another assumption our society makes is that we all experience sexual and romantic desires - some do and some don't! **Sexual orientation** is a person's sexual, romantic, or other attraction a person feels towards another. For example, a transgender man might identify as heterosexual and is attracted to women. He might also identify as bisexual and is attracted to both men and women. Although lots of folks experience romantic and sexual attraction, there are a ton of folks who do not or it is on a spectrum - this is totally normal!

These foundational concepts are the story of us all. We have all been socialized, expected to present in a certain way, and hold hands with a specific person on the beach. In each of these foundation concepts, there is incredible diversity and various concepts, identities, and ways of being. Please continue to dive into these worlds and continue to educate yourself, your community, and your family.

Additional resources for definitions:

- [GLAAD's Ally Terminology Toolkit](#)
- [The Safe Zone Project list of definitions](#)
- [GLSEN Key Concepts](#)
- [Gender Spectrum Gender Explanation](#)

PRONOUN CHEAT SHEET

SUBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	POSSESSIVE	REFLEXIVE	EXAMPLE
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking. I listened to her.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking. I listened to him.
They	Them	Their	Themselves	They are speaking. I listened to them.
Ze	Hir/Zir	Hirs/Zirs	Hirself/Zirself	Ze is speaking. I listened to zim.

Example introduction:

Hi, my name is DeHaven. I use they/them pronouns. If you feel comfortable, can you please share with me the pronouns you feel safe using in this space?

Process:

1. Share and ask - share your name and pronouns with peers, students, and family! If you feel comfortable, find ways to ask others' their name and pronouns either in conversation, in an email, a survey, and so on!
2. Safety - if you ask someone their pronouns, be certain to make clear they can share the pronouns they feel comfortable in the space; we don't want to out folks.
3. Affirm - when someone shares their name and pronouns respect, honor, and use the name and pronouns given.
4. Mistakes - we all make them. If you use the incorrect name and pronouns this is called misgendering; simply apologize, correct, and move on. Don't make a scene!

Practice - if you feel you are struggling with pronouns practice by yourself, with a trusted person, or in your head. The more your practice the more natural it will feel.

TIPS & TRICKS

Allyship

1. Listen without judgement
2. Believe people when they tell you who they are
3. Use the person's name and pronouns they are most comfortable with
4. Think before sharing a youth's identity with others
5. Don't assume a person's sexual or gender identity(ies) is their top priority
6. Be aware of the warning signs for suicidality and self-harm
7. Share positive representation about the LGBTQ+ community
8. Check in with youth on their coming out process and let them do so in their own time
9. Connect LGBTQ+ youth to resources
10. Continue to treat people with care and support

Advocacy

- Being an advocate is what feels best and natural for you as a school staff person.
- You can try:
 - Meeting with students individually
 - Creating a GSA in your school
 - Sponsoring a GSA
 - Finding ways to make curriculum more inclusive
 - Creating representation in your classroom and the school
 - Asking school administration to change policies and provide ongoing education
- Find what is true and authentic to you when working with LGBTQ youth
- Don't underestimate the impact one person can have in other person's life

Avoid

- Outing - if a youth comes out to you don't assume they are out to everyone
- Boundaries - don't ask a youth for information you don't need to know. For example, if you are not a medical professional don't ask a youth about medical transitioning
- Don't assume - don't assume you know a person's name, pronouns, or how they identify; ask instead of assuming.
- Listen - if a youth comes out, listen without judgement. If you don't know the identity disclosed, thank the youth and ask if they will tell you what that identity means to them.
- Full humans - there is more to LGBTQ youth than being LGBTQ, remember they are full complex humans with a wide variety of interests, passions, and joys!

GENDER & SEXUALITY ALLIANCE SUPPORT

Why Are GSAs Important?

Gender Sexuality Alliances (GSA) offer a safer space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students to find community and be their full selves. The presence of a GSA in a school has been shown to increase academic performance of LGBTQ-identified youth, decrease bullying, and create a more inclusive school culture (GLSEN, 2017). Here are some tips in changing the lives of LGBTQ youth in your school!

1. Learn School Policies – any public school in VA can have a GSA. It should operate like any other school club/organization.
2. Fill out Paperwork – Find out the process to start a student organization and follow the policy. A GSA should not have any additional requirements.
3. Find students and Faculty Sponsors – Most GSA's must be student created and organized. Help students start the conversation at your school by being a visible advocate and find fellow faculty to help sponsor the club.
4. Advertise and Meet – Like any school club a GSA has the right to advertise to find students. Be mindful of outing students and find a secure meeting time and space.
5. Let Youth Lead – Once youth can come together follow their lead and be an advocate and a resource for them.

Remember – You have the right to have a GSA!

GSA Myths

1. “GSAs will only talk about sex” or “Our youth are too young for that”
 - Sexual orientation is only one part of LGBTQ+ identities, and you can talk about feelings without talking about behaviors. These clubs are about support, identity, coping skills and community.
2. “We don’t need that at this school”
 - There are LGBTQ+ youth that need support at every school in Virginia. The only question is whether they feel safe enough to be out—and if they don’t, then all the more reason for a GSA.
3. “Allowing a GSA discriminates toward other students”
 - Providing support for students with a specific identity doesn’t take away from support or care for any others. LGBTQ+ youth experience specific harassment, identity development, and questions, and need a safe space and community with others to navigate this.

GENDER & SEXUALITY ALLIANCE SUPPORT CONT.

How Do I Run a GSA?

Congrats on starting a Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) at your school! Now that you've followed the steps to start a student lead organization at your school and have both youth and staff sponsors, it is now time to run the GSA. Remember, every GSA is different, and it is about what the youth in your club need at this time. There is no right or wrong way to facilitate a GSA as long as it is student-led. Below are three common models that GSAs follow; the club can follow one, two, or shift as the youths change in the club.

GSA Models

1. Social
 - Focuses on building support and community for youth. There might be more focus on events like Pride, dances, or movie nights.
2. Support
 - Focus on creating a safer space for youth in school. This could look like youth sharing, learning about LGBTQ topics, or discovering themselves.
3. Activist
 - Focuses on educating students/ staff. Might work to change policies or culture of school

Tips for All Models

1. It is important for the GSA to be youth lead, but as the sponsor help the youth find their voice and needs – don't be afraid to step in as needed
2. As a new community, create ground rules for everyone – regardless of identities to feel safer in the space. The youth can take the lead, but the sponsor should add rules or guidance they feel might help.
3. Once the rules are created, don't be afraid to hold youth accountable to the rules. So all youth feel safer, any form of homophobia, transphobia, or racism needs to be addressed immediately.
4. Keep checking in with the youth to see if they are getting what they need and help them be productive within the limits of the meetings.

GSA Community

Remember, you are not the only GSA! If the youth are interested, consider exploring other GSAs in your county or state! At Side by Side we have a GSA Registration and would love to connect with you! Our goal is to connect with as many GSAs as possible and to connect clubs to others as well. In Spring 2022 we are planning to host a statewide GSA and want as many youth organizations from across Virginia to be there to find community, support, resources, and to empower all of us in community.

VDOE TRANS POLICY SUPPORT

We at Side by Side worked closely with the Virginia Department of Education and incredible community partners like Equality Virginia and He, She, Ze, and We to assist in creating the guidelines to support trans and non-binary students.

During this work, we created our own best practices and guidelines to help school communities find support, resources, and guidance when changing and creating policies to support trans and non-binary students. Side by Side is currently offering training and support around this policy.

If you go to our website: <https://www.sidebysideva.org/trans-students> you will find our guidance surrounding the VDOE Trans Policy and an Inclusive Policy Guide - we hope both of these resources offer support to you during this time. Although there are many nuances and things to consider while working on this policy, we ask everyone to consider:

- Affirm
 - be certain the policy your school community is affirming trans and non-binary youth.
- Youth Centered
 - let the youth lead their own journey and trust them to know what they need and what is safe for them; we as adults can help guide.
- Listen
 - when a youth communicates with you their identity or their journey listen and listen without judgement.
- Intersectional
 - think how the policy will impact trans and non-binary youth of all paths, especially trans and non-binary youth of color.

RESOURCES

Mental Health

- [Trevor Project](#)
- [Trans LifeLine](#)
- [It Gets Better Project](#)
- [LGBTQ Hotline 1-866-356-6998](#)
- [Lisa Griffin](#)
- [Discovery Counseling](#)
- [LaunchPad Counseling](#)

Educators

- [GLSEN National](#)
- [GSA Network](#)
- [Gender Spectrum](#)
- [Teaching Tolerance](#)
- [GLAAD](#)
- [Safe Zone Project](#)
- [ACLU Resource Page](#)
- [True Colors United](#)
- [GSA Advisor Handbook](#)
- [Teaching LGBTQ Youth](#)

Legal

- [Equality Virginia](#)
- [Equality Virginia Legal Resources](#)
- [Lambda Legal](#)
- [HRC](#)
- [Virginia ACLU](#)
- [National Center for Trans Equality](#)
- [LGBTQ Life Center](#)
- [MAP](#)

Support

- [Side by Side](#)
- [Nationz](#)
- [Virginia Anti-Violence Project](#)
- [Diversity Richmond](#)
- [Transgender Resource List](#)
- [CenterLink](#)
- [Q - Chat Space](#)

Videos, Lessons, Ideas

- [Brick by Brick Curriculum](#)
- [Gender Spectrum Inclusive Schools](#) (video)
- [Understanding Gender Support Plans](#) (article and video)
- [Trans Love in the Black Community](#) (video)
- [Explaining My Asexuality](#) (video)
- [What is Intersectionality](#) (video)
- [LGBTQ: How You See Me](#) (video)
- [LGBTQ 101](#) (video)
- [What does Intersex Mean](#) (video)
- [Genderqueer](#) (video)
- [LGBTQ+ Terms and Identities](#)
- [GLAAD Media Resource Guide](#)
- [GLAAD Trans FAQ](#)
- [Healthy Relationships](#)
- [Live Out Loud](#)
- [Queer Youth Advice for Educators](#)
- [Students and Gender Identity Toolkit](#)

Black LGBTQ+ Youth Resources

- [Relias Trauma Informed](#)
- [Black LGBTQ Youth Experiences](#)
- [Center for Black Equity](#)
- [The Audre Lorde Project](#)
- [Supporting Black LGBTQ Youth](#)
- [Resources for Talking about Racism](#)

Medical

- [Virginia League Planned Parenthood](#)
- [Health Brigade](#)