

Overcoming Gender Identity Harassment



Being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, gender queer, or questioning, or other (LGBTQIA+) often means having to deal with prejudice and harassment from childhood on.

LGBTQIA+ teens are often targets of bullying, harassment, and aggression. Bullying can range from verbal abuse, like name-calling, to life-threatening physical assault and sexual abuse.

Even if young people escape physical violence, the effects of bullying can be psychologically devastating. Young bullying victims who are LGBTQIA+ may engage in risky behaviors. They may start having sex with multiple different partners. Or they may start abusing drugs and alcohol. LGBTQIA+ kids and teens may skip school or even run away from home. Many suffer from depression. And some are driven to suicide.

Some victims of this kind of harassment may not even be LGBTQIA+. Some can become targets simply because their peers think they are LGBTQIA+.



For students dealing with harassment

The most important step in dealing with harassment is to believe in who you are. The bullying isn't your fault. And you should not have to change to please anyone, or to be accepted by other people. Understand that you are not to blame for other people's prejudices, hatred, or actions.

If you are being bullied or harassed about your sexual orientation, take steps to put an end to the bullying right away. Don't fight back or make threats. Simply tell the bully to stop. Leave the situation and get help if you are being physically attacked or fear that you could be.

Try the following:

- Protect yourself until you can get away.
- Don't fight back. Find an adult you trust to help stop the bullying on the spot.
- Stay with a friend who can offer protection or get help when needed.
- Tell a trusted adult about what is happening.
- Go to a safe area, such as the library or a teacher's classroom, if you are threatened.

How LGBTQIA+ young adults can stay safe

- When out in public, stay alert and trust your instincts.
- Let your friends and loved ones know where you are.

- When walking, plan the safest and most direct route.
- Carry a whistle to attract attention in case you feel threatened.
- Cross the street, change direction, or run into a crowd if you sense danger.

Don't deny that the problem exists

It can be easy to brush off harassment or bullying after the fact, once you're safe and the confrontation has ended. But you don't need—or deserve—to live in fear or reduce the trauma. Address the issue by reporting the harassment to an adult you feel safe with, such as your parents, school staff, or teachers, or to the police.

It's normal to feel ashamed after a traumatic bullying experience. But it's also normal to feel angry, afraid, confused, or even numb. There is no right or wrong way to react to harassment. It will help to talk with a trusted friend, counselor, family or therapist. Bullying or harassing people about their sexual orientation is never acceptable, funny, or appropriate. If you see it happening, speak out. And if it happens to you, get help.

To learn more

Find more information at:

- stopbullying.gov

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