

The School Counselor and LGBTQ+ Youth

(Adopted 1995; Revised 2000, 2005, 2007, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2022)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors promote equal opportunity and respect for all individuals of any sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. School counselors recognize the school experience can be significantly more difficult for students with marginalized identities. School counselors work to eliminate barriers impeding LGBTQ+ student development and achievement.

The Rationale

Despite widespread efforts, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning/queer (LGBTQ+) students continue to face challenges that threaten their academic and social/emotional development in schools. Students report feeling unsafe in school due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression and report experiencing homophobic remarks, harassment and bullying (Kosciw et al., 2020). LGBTQ+ individuals often face multiple risk factors that may place them at greater risk for suicidal behavior (Johns et al., 2020). School counselors realize these issues affect healthy student development and psychological well-being and advocate for conditions that protect LGBTQ+ youth. Students report lower levels of verbal and physical harassment when they have a supportive adult in school, participate in inclusive curriculum and have delineated policies protecting students from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2020).

The School Counselor's Role

The school counselor works with all students through the stages of identity development and understands this may be more difficult for LGBTQ+ youth. It is not the school counselor's role to attempt to change a student's sexual orientation or gender identity. School counselors recognize the profound harm caused by therapies alleging to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity (Ryan et al., 2020) and advocate to protect LGBTQ+ students from this harm. School counselors provide support to LGBTQ+ students to promote academic achievement, career development and social/emotional development.

School counselors are committed to the affirmation of all youth regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression and work to create safe and affirming schools. School counselors:

- Provide counseling to students with feelings about their sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as students' feelings about the identity of others in an accepting and nonjudgmental manner
- Advocate for equitable educational and extracurricular opportunities for all students regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression (ASCA, 2019)
- Advocate for transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive students regarding access to building facilities (e.g., ensuring a safe environment for restroom use and changing) and gender presentation (e.g., wearing a dress or pants for an orchestra or vocal performance)
- Understand the intersections of students' sexual, gender and racial identities and the additional victimization experienced by LGBTQ+ students of color (Kosciw et al., 2020) and the need for cultural competence when working with them and their families (Craig et al., 2018)
- Promote policies to reduce the use of offensive language, harassment and bullying and improve school climate
- Address absenteeism, lowered educational aspirations and academic achievement, and low psychological well-being as a result of victimization and feeling unsafe at school (Kosciw et al., 2020)
- Provide a safe space for LGBTQ+ students and allies, such as Genders and Sexualities Alliance Clubs
- Promote sensitivity and acceptance of diversity among all students and staff to include LGBTQ+ students and diverse family systems
- Advocate for the rights of families to access and participate in their student's education and school activities without discrimination (GLSEN, 2021)
- Support an inclusive curriculum at all grade levels (Flores, 2014; Simons et al., 2018)
- Model language inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity
- Advocate for adoption of school policies addressing discrimination and promoting violence-prevention programs to create a safe and supportive school environment (Gower et al., 2017)
- Support students in addressing possible discrimination by staff members (ASCA, 2019)
- Engage in training on supporting LGBTQ+ students and advocating for their rights in schools (Beck & Wikoff, 2020; Gonzalez, 2017; Kull et al., 2017; Simons et al., 2017)

- Encourage staff training on inclusive practices, creating an affirming school environment, accurate information and risk factors for LGBTQ+ students (Dragowski et al., 2016)
- Know the impact of family acceptance on student well-being and ability to thrive (Craig et al., 2018; Roe, 2017; Ryan et al., 2020)
- Support families whose children are coming out by helping them navigate these important developmental milestones in ways that protect LGBTQ+ students from harm and help families stay together (Ryan et al., 2020)
- Identify LGBTQ+ community resources for students and families and assess the quality and inclusiveness of these resources before referring to such resources

Summary

School counselors promote affirmation, respect and equal opportunity for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. School counselors promote awareness of and education on issues related to LGBTQ+ students and encourage a safe and affirming school environment. School counselors work to eliminate barriers impeding student development and achievement and are committed to the academic, career and social/emotional development of all students.

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Resources

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