Mental Health Unity (MHU): Supporting Students with Mental Illness on College Campuses

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INSPIRATION
LGBT
Safe Space Campaign
Mental Health Unity (MHU)

Promoting Supportive Environments on College Campuses for Students with Mental Illness

www.ActiveMinds.org/Unite
Potential Benefits of MHU: “Spheres of Influence”

- **Social Justice Level Benefits**
  - Decrease Stigma

- **Community Level Benefits**
  - Promote Awareness
  - Increase Visibility
  - Referrals and Resources
  - Normalizes Mental Illness

- **Individual Level Benefits**
  - Sense of Community
  - Sense of Support
  - Positive Identity
  - Pride
## Potential Concerns with MHU

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Minor Themes</th>
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| **Potential Harm to Individuals with Mental Illness** | - Creating False Expectations  
- Labeling Effect  
- Implies Other Parts of Campus Aren’t Safe  
- Paternalism |
| **Unique Problems with Mental Illness as a Minority Group** | - No Pride for Mental Illness  
- Heterogeneity of Target Group |
| **Legal/Practical Issues**                        | - Safety/Liability/Confidentiality  
- Difficulties Accommodating Mental Illness  
- Cultural Sensitivity |
JOIN ACTIVE MINDS IN CREATING SAFE SPACES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Pledge to:
- End the silence by providing a safe space for persons to discuss mental health
- Listen to mental health experiences without judgment
- Be knowledgeable of available resources
- Treat every person as capable and valuable individuals in our community
- Speak out against stigma and discrimination towards mental illness

The Active Minds Pledge for Mental Health Unity is a grassroots campaign to promote awareness and support for people with mental health concerns. Please sign up, spread the word, display your sticker, and help us reduce stigma for addressing mental illness and bring mental health out of the shadows. By signing the pledge, you will be educating your friends, family, and community about mental illness and its impact on individuals and families. This is a simple, yet powerful way to help others take a stand against the stigma of mental illness.
Pledges Signed:

- January 23, 2015: 1,330
- February 11, 2015: 1,387

+ 57 in 19 days

Pledges signed in all 50 States and 10 countries.
Next Step
Manual Development
SAFE SPACE KIT
A Guide to Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
and Transgender Students in Your School

“When students are accepting of you, it means the
world to you. You know that things will be OK and
that they are there for you.”
– Chad (Male) Student, 2006 Graduate

GLSEN®
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**What is an Ally?**

An ally is an individual who speaks out and stands up for a person or group that is targeted and discriminated against. An ally works to end oppression by supporting and advocating for people who are stigmatized, discriminated against or treated unfairly.

For the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities, an ally is anyone who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBT people. Allies have been involved in almost all movements for social change, and allies can make a significant contribution to the LGBT rights movement. It is important for allies to demonstrate that LGBT people are not alone as they work to improve school climate, and to take a stand in places where it might not be safe for LGBT people to be out or visible. Any educator, LGBT or non-LGBT, can be an ally to LGBT students.

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**Why be an Ally?**

All students are at risk of being bullied, harassed or called names at school, but LGBT students face particularly hostile school environments. Your visible support for these students can make a real difference in ways that will benefit the whole school.

In order to document the experiences of LGBT students, GLSEN conducts the National School Climate Surveys every two years. From the survey we have learned that anti-LGBT language fills classrooms, hallways, school buses, gyms, and cafeterias. For example, findings from GLSEN's National School Climate Surveys consistently show that nine out of ten LGBT students repeatedly hear the word "gay" used in a negative way and three-fourths of students regularly hear homophobic remarks, such as "fag" or "dyke," in school. Even more serious, LGBT students are routinely called names, harassed and bullied in school and will often skip classes or even full days of school because they feel unsafe. The prevalence of anti-LGBT name-calling, harassment and bullying takes a heavy toll on LGBT students, and can have negative effects on their school performance.

The reported grade point average of students who are more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression is almost half a grade lower than for students who were less often harassed.

In addition to the damage it can do to LGBT students, anti-LGBT bias also affects other members of the school community. Anti-LGBT behavior creates a hostile environment and an uncomfortable and unsafe space for everyone. Homophobes and transphobes can be used to stigmatize, silence and, on occasion, target people who are perceived as LGBT, but are not. If certain actions and behaviors are deemed "gay," students may avoid those for fear of being targeted for anti-LGBT behavior. For example,
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“Allyhood is more clear for LGBT students because sexual identity is not an illness.

What is the most important way people can be an ally to students with mental illness?”
Check Yourself:
A Worksheet to Guide Evaluation of Personal Bias

Check Yourself: Understanding Your Own Beliefs

Anti-LGBT bias is all around us. Yet we tend to overlook the subtle biases — the anti-LGBT jokes, the exclusion of LGBT related-themes in curricula, even anti-LGBT name-calling. Subtle or not, bias has the power to hurt and isolate people. Your work as an ally includes recognizing and challenging your own anti-LGBT bias. Answer each question honestly, and consider how these will affect your work as an ally to LGBT students.

1. If someone were to come out to you as LGBT, what would your first thought be?

2. How would you feel if your child came out to you as LGBT? How would you feel if your mother, father or sibling came out to you as LGBT?

3. Would you go to a physician whom you thought was LGBT if they were of a different gender than you? What if they were the same gender as you?

4. Have you ever been to an LGBT social event, march or worship service? Why or why not?

5. Can you think of three historical figures who were lesbian, gay or bisexual?

6. Can you think of three historical figures who were transgender?

7. Have you ever laughed at or made a joke at the expense of LGBT people?

8. Have you ever stood up for an LGBT person being harassed? Why or why not?

9. If you do not identify as LGBT, how would you feel if people thought you were LGBT?

Recognizing your own biases is an important first step in becoming an ally. Based on your responses to these questions, do you think you have internalized some of the anti-LGBT messages pervasive in our world? How might your beliefs influence your actions as an educator of LGBT students? The more aware we are of our own biases and their impact on our behavior, the easier it is to ensure that our personal beliefs don't undermine our efforts to support LGBT students.
Dos and Don’ts of Being an Ally to LGBT Students

**DO...**

- Listen. One of the simplest yet most important ways to be an ally is to listen. Like all students, LGBT students need to feel comfortable expressing themselves. If a student comes to talk to you about being harassed, feeling excluded or just about their life in general, keep in mind that you may be the only person they feel safe speaking to. Be there to listen.
- Respect confidentiality. Effective allies will respect their students’ confidentiality and privacy. Someone who is coming out may not want everyone to know. Assume that the person only told you and just wants you to know, unless they indicate otherwise. Informing others can create an unsafe environment for the student.
- Be conscious of your biases. Effective allies acknowledge how homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism may affect their efforts to be an ally to LGBT people. They continuously work to recognize and challenge their own biases.
- Seek out knowledge. Effective allies periodically brush up on LGBT-related language and current issues facing the LGBT community.
- Be a resource. An effective ally will also know when and how to refer students to outside help. The last section of this guide includes a list of LGBT-related resources and referral sources for LGBT youth.

**DON’T...**

- Think you have all the answers. Do not feel you must always have the answers. If you are faced with a problem you don’t know how to solve, let the student know you will look into the subject to try and find an answer. Sometimes the best thing for you to do is to refer the student to an outside source that may be able to help them. The last section of this guide includes a list of LGBT-related resources and referral sources for LGBT youth.
- Make unrealistic promises. Be careful not to promise something you may not be able to deliver. This can damage the relationship you have with the student as an ally.
- Make assumptions. It is important to avoid making assumptions and perpetuating stereotypes. These can be extremely offensive and may turn a student away from you. It is also important to avoid assuming you know what the student needs. Be sure to listen to your student and ask how you can support them.

**ASK YOURSELF**

- Which of these strategies are you most likely to use in your school?
- Are there other strategies that you have used when intervening in anti-LGBT language, harassment and bullying at your school?
"I stand with you as you are."