



National LGBTQ Institute on Intimate Partner Violence

A PROJECT OF THE LOS ANGELES LGBT CENTER

In partnership with the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs and In Our Own Voices, Inc.

Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth Experiencing Teen Dating Violence: A Guide for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Service Providers Working with Schools

This resource was created in collaboration with roundtable participants from OVW funded programs working in schools around the country. Our hope is that this resource can be utilized by domestic violence service providers—including OVW grantees, potential grantees, and other community partners in schools to better support school staff in creating safe spaces for LGBTQ+ survivors of teen dating violence.

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Context

Youth in their teens and early adulthood often explore dating. Many receive education about what dating relationships should be like through role models in their families and communities, or through school health curricula. But LGBTQ+ youth are too often left without this education. With a lack of LGBTQ+ representation in the real-life experiences of LGBTQ+ youth and in healthy relationship curricula, LGBTQ+ youth are left to navigate relationships on their own, frequently in environments shaped by anti-LGBTQ+ oppression, which increases their vulnerability to dating violence.

It cannot be overstated how critical it is for LGBTQ+ youth's mental health and safety that they have safe and supportive adults in their lives. Supportive adults, according to research conducted by the Trevor Project, are one of the single largest protective factors for LGBTQ+ youth (Trevor Project, 2019). Youth spend more time at school than anywhere else, making it rich with possibilities to combat dating violence against LGBTQ+ youth and create safe environments for LGBTQ+ youth survivors. School-based service providers, such as therapists, nurses, Title IX officers, and providers who conduct dating violence education and response programs in schools, have an obligation to provide safety and guidance to youth in moments where they overhear conversations full of red flags about a student's dating life or witness troubling behavior between students in a relationship. But school-based service staff need tools and support to best respond to LGBTQ+ students in a way that is helpful, safe, and does not overstep the limits of their roles. This is where OVW grantees, potential grantees, and other community partners can provide tangible support, skills building, and technical assistance to better prepare school systems to respond to the unique and specific experiences of LGBTQ+ youth survivors of teen dating violence.



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This guide will equip providers with tips and strategies when working with school-based professionals on how to support LGBTQ+ students who may be in or are at risk of being in an abusive relationship, while maintaining your professional boundaries. This guide can also be shared with other school staff who are searching for more resources on supporting LGBTQ+ youth survivors of dating violence.





Supporting School-Based Staff in Creating a Safe Environment for LGBTQ+ Youth to Open Up and Learn about Healthy Relationships

LGBTQ+ youth are vulnerable to bullying, harassment, and isolation at school by their peers as well as by educators, security, and other school staff. This can make LGBTQ+ youth more at risk of experiencing dating violence and less likely to report instances of abuse or seek help. Domestic violence service providers can support school-based staff in ensuring that LGBTQ+ youth who are experiencing dating violence know that they can come to them for help. Support staff in providing avenues for students to learn about healthy LGBTQ+ relationships in a way that protects their privacy and safety. Some strategies that domestic violence service providers can recommend are:

- Display visual cues of an LGBTQ+ friendly environment (e.g. flags, pronoun pins/ stickers, rainbow decor, etc.) so that survivors are aware that they will not face stigma when reporting abuse or seeking help.
- Be aware of your school's/ school district's policies about signage. Some schools prohibit using pride flags and rainbows in classroom decorations. If that is the case for your school, get creative with your visual cues. Some alternatives include:
 - General and vague language about safety and inclusion (e.g. All Are Welcome Here, Safe Space for All).
 - Pictures and quotes from notable LGBTQ+ people in history.
 - Hanging prisms by a window: they will naturally create a rainbow in the light.
- Place stickers, posters, and resources about healthy and unhealthy relationships and hotline numbers where youth can see them.



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- Using the language “healthy and unhealthy relationships”, as opposed to “abusive relationships”, can make these resources more accessible and relatable to a variety of ages and experiences, as some survivors who need help may not readily see themselves as being in an abusive relationship or dating violence situation. Classrooms, libraries, community spaces, bulletin boards, and even the back of bathroom stalls are effective places.
- **Recommended resources:**
 - The National LGBTQ Institute on Intimate Partner Violence’s youth zine, [Here, Queer, and Safe](#)
 - Anti Violence Project’s [24/7 hotline](#)
 - [The Trevor Project](#)
 - [loveisrespect](#)
 - [Recognize Violence Change Culture](#)
- Include information about LGBTQ+ identities, experiences, and healthy relationships in your health curriculum.



When and How to Intervene with Abusive Student Relationships

LGBTQ+ students are the targets of harassment on school campuses- in fact, almost 6 in 10 LGBTQ+ students have experienced verbal or physical harassment in the last 30 days at school (HRC, 2023). Despite this, LGBTQ+ youth do not feel like school staff can, or will, help them when they need it.

- Only 1 in 5 LGBTQ+ youth ever told a school staff member that they were being bullied at school. Of those who did seek help,
 - Almost 1 in 4 said that the staff member “didn’t help me at all.”
 - Only 1 in 5 said that the staff member “helped me a lot.”
- Sadly, while transgender and gender-expansive youth were more likely to seek help from a staff member, they were less likely to report that that adult was helpful than their cisgender LGBTQ+ peers (HRC, 2023).

These forms of harassment occur not just between peers who are classmates or friends, but between romantic and sexual partners who are students on campus. This might look slightly different than peer-to-peer violence, especially for LGBTQ+ students. It is important for school-based staff to be made aware of these displays of abusive behavior:

- Shaming and/or attempting to change the student’s gender expression.
- Perpetuating “conversion” or corrective assault¹ to change an LGBTQ+ student’s identity.
- Perpetuating stereotypes about the student’s LGBTQ+ identity to control, manipulate, embarrass, or frighten them.
- Demanding access to the student’s devices, social media accounts, and location.
- Preventing contact with LGBTQ+ peers.
- Touching body parts or touching the youth’s body in a way that they are not comfortable with.



- Following the student around campus, waiting outside of classes, or attempting to meet with the student during class time to an excessive and alarming degree.
- Threatening to out the LGBTQ+ student to control, manipulate, or frighten them.
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Domestic violence and sexual assault service providers can educate school-based staff on strategies for intervention when they witness behaviors like these, or when a student confides in the staff member that they are in an unhealthy or abusive relationship. It is important that school-based staff intervene as they would with other cases of harassment or violence, in accordance with their school's policy. Youth who exhibit abusive patterns need help and need to be held accountable. However, many schools do not have policies that adequately protect or meet the needs of LGBTQ+ youth.

After acting in accordance with their school's required protocol, they can follow through by supporting the LGBTQ+ student in finding resources and sources of safety. The "Help Set Boundaries and Safety Plan" and resources sections at the end of this guide provide may be helpful for service providers to use with school-based staff.

1) Corrective assault: A hate crime where sexual assault is committed with the express purpose of "correcting" an LGBTQ+ person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity to be straight and/or cisgender.



Safety Considerations

School staff making reports of dating violence involving LGBTQ+ students can place those students in heightened danger. DV service providers should have open and honest conversations with school-based staff, encouraging them to exercise best judgement when reporting to protect the privacy of the LGBTQ+ student(s) involved while still documenting the necessary information. Under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), until a youth is 18, their legal guardians have the right to review any official records held by the school about the youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

When documenting dating violence, school-based providers must consider:

- What information is strictly necessary to communicate what happened?
 - Utilize gender neutral language to protect student privacy.
- What might happen if this information is seen by the legal guardians of the youth involved?
 - Don't assume that a student's family knows about their LGBTQ+ identity, would approve of their LGBTQ+ identity, or is aware of their relationship.



Example

Maria (she/her) is a 10th grader who comes to you, a therapist at her school, for help. She shares that she recently broke up with her girlfriend, Caitlyn (she/her).

Caitlyn did not take it well and has started following Maria around and is constantly sending Maria threatening messages, including messages saying that she will out Maria to her family if she doesn't take her back.

After Maria shares this with you, she asks you for help to keep Caitlyn away from her. With Maria's permission, you report to administration that Maria is being harassed and threatened by Caitlyn, specifically naming that Maria is being followed and constantly messaged without mentioning their previous romantic relationship. You are able to help Maria get her schedule changed, and Caitlyn is given a warning to adhere to the school's anti-bullying policy.

There are other strategies school-based providers may utilize before escalating the situation with a formal report:

- If they have a strong connection with the youth, talk personally with the student(s).
- If they do not know the student(s) well, alert another staff member who has a strong rapport with the student(s) to talk with them.
- If they do not know who else might have rapport with the student(s), alert the guidance counselor.



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School-based staff should also be advised to avoid notifying a student's family if it is not necessary or required. In addition to the possibility that an LGBTQ+ student may not be open about their identity to people in their lives for any reason, that student might not be allowed to date by their caregivers and could face dangerous retaliation. Keeping the youth's safety and autonomy at the forefront of the process by checking in with them will avoid inadvertently causing further harm.





Mandatory Reporting

People who have direct contact with children through their work—including domestic violence and sexual assault service providers—are mandated reporters. Mandated reporters are required by law to report known or suspected child abuse to child protective services.

Teen dating violence may be a reportable form of abuse depending on your state. Once a report is filed, a youth's family is contacted about the report, which may result in the disclosure of a youth's LGBTQ+ identity. To protect the youth's privacy, providers can advise school staff on how to avoid being put in a situation where they are required to report to CPS:

- Tell youth that they are a mandated reporter. Inform them about what that means, what would be required for them to report, and what would happen if a report were to be filed.
- Advise youth to speak in hypotheticals or to speak about “a friend” if they are seeking advice or support about dating violence. Neither of these situations require legal action from the mandated reporter.



Forced Outing of Transgender Youth

As of April 2026, 15 states required the forced outing of transgender youth in K-12 schools if that youth expresses that they are transgender, asserts a different name than their legal name, and/or asserts different pronouns than the ones associated with their assumed gender (Movement Advancement Project, 2025). Even in states without this legislation, individual school districts may implement their own forced outing policies.

Such policies may require school staff to notify the student's caregivers about the student's transgender identity if that identity is disclosed in the process of witnessing or being told about dating violence. This can place the youth in increased danger from both their abuser and a potentially anti-LGBTQ+ family. To avoid endangering the youth or contributing to the further stigmatization of LGBTQ+ identities, providers can make recommendations to school staff:

- Inform youth of forced outing policies in your state or school district before disclosure may occur.
 - Share information at the beginning of the school year and have periodic reminders.
 - Display a poster or sign that includes information about this policy.
- To avoid triggering the reporting process, encourage youth to ask questions about a hypothetical scenario or about a scenario involving an unnamed "friend."
 - If youth still choose to disclose their own identity and experiences, walk them through what the reporting process will involve on your end and create a safety plan with them about what may happen once their caregiver are informed.



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- Remind youth through your words and actions that they deserve safety and support regardless of their background or identity. Let them know that being LGBTQ+ is not unnatural, immoral, fake, inappropriate, or a mental illness—no matter what they might be told elsewhere.





Help Set Boundaries and Safety Plan

Providing emotional support to LGBTQ+ youth survivors of dating violence is always within the role of school staff. That emotional support can take the form of discussing boundaries and safety planning. These conversations are shaped by guiding, reflective questions asked by the service provider, while all the solutions and resources identified are proposed by the youth themselves.

Questions school-based staff can ask include:

- How do you know what your boundaries are?
- How do you enforce your boundaries?
- What do you do when someone crosses your boundaries?
- Who can you talk to/where can you go when someone crosses your boundaries?

Additionally, school-based staff can work with the youth to create a safety plan. This is a thorough plan of action in the case of danger or threats from a dating partner.

- Recommended resources for safety planning:
 - loveisrespect's [Teen Safety Plan](#)
 - Forge Forward's [Safety Planning Guide for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Individuals who are experiencing intimate partner violence](#)



Fill In Your Local Resources

Your local (or nearest) LGBTQ+ center(s):

- _____
- _____

Don't know if you have a local LGBTQ+ center? Head to lgbtqcenters.org/LGBTCenters to search Centerlink's national directory.

Your local teen dating violence program(s)—these may be housed under your local domestic violence/ intimate partner violence organizations:

- _____
- _____

Don't know if you have a local DV service provider? Head to domesticshelters.org to use Domestic Shelters's national directory.



Recommended National Resources

[National LGBTQ Institute on Intimate Partner Violence:](#) Utilizing ongoing input from providers, experts, and consumers, the Institute offers state-of-the-art training and technical assistance that significantly expands the capacity of public and private agencies to provide culturally relevant, survivor-centered LGBTQ IPV intervention and prevention services, including to LGBTQ persons from racially and ethnically diverse communities. The Institute provides a wide range of specific educational resources for demographics of LGBTQ+ survivors who are often left out of mainstream DV/IPV resources such as transgender, bisexual+, Black, AAPI, Native, and Latine with more resource pages continuously being added.

[Planned Parenthood:](#) The nation's leading provider and advocate of high-quality, affordable sexual and reproductive health care for all people, as well as the nation's largest provider of sex education.

[EndTAB \(End Tech-Enabled Abuse\):](#) Presentations, trainings, and talks that take the mystery out of addressing and preventing online harm.

Trans Lifeline: Run by and for trans people, Trans Lifeline is a grassroots hotline and microgrants 501(c)(3) non-profit organization offering direct emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis.

[National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs \(NCAVP\):](#) NCAVP works to prevent, respond to, and end all forms of violence against and within LGBTQ communities.



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