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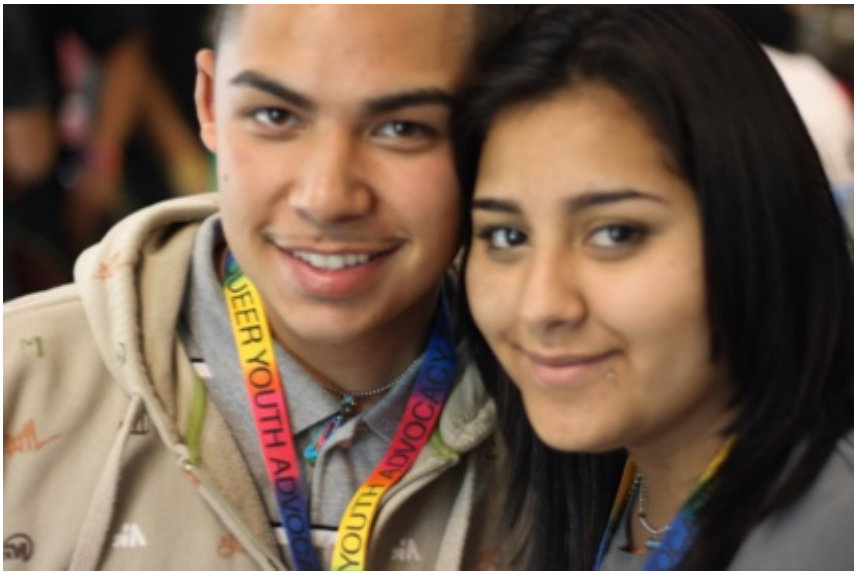
How to Be An Awesome Advisor



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Gay-Straight Alliances are clubs run by and for students. However, these clubs would not be possible without the advisors who open the doors of their classrooms and offer support to students in GSAs.

Advisors are behind-the-scenes advocates, allies, and mentors. They offer advice and assistance, while supporting students in making their own decisions and empowering students in their leadership.

To start a GSA, students need a faculty advisor (typically a teacher, staff member, counselor,

librarian, or nurse) who is supportive or has already shown him or herself to be an ally around sexual orientation, and gender identity discrimination issues at school. To keep a GSA going, advisors offer continuity from year to year, as student leadership often changes.

As an adult in a school, the advisor has the ability to communicate with and educate other faculty and administrators. Having faculty and administrators as advocates helps students feel safe, supported, and empowered. Adult allies can help other adults learn to respect young people?s rights to be treated fairly, to express themselves, and to form GSA clubs.

To get a GSA started, adults can act as allies by:

- Offering positive encouragement and advice in starting a GSA club.
- Providing a safe space to meet and materials to use.
- Assisting in creating the GSA Constitution and Mission Statement.
- Promoting the club to teachers, staff, and administrators.
- Speaking up for students? rights to express themselves and form clubs.
- Putting in extra time, for example working on weekends or after school.
- Using neutral labels like ?partner? and ?significant other? and stopping the use of slurs or other name-calling.

Once the club gets started, advisors can help it be effective by:

- Helping youth put together meeting agendas that reflect the needs of the club as determined by the students.
- Defining the differences in leadership roles and setting clear expectations for youth and adult allies.
- Stepping back once the club is organized and allowing youth to rise to occasion of running GSA.
- Making sure the students have all of the resources they need.
- Supporting youth in gaining leadership skills to run the club and facilitate meetings.
- Evaluating the structure and group dynamics of the club: Did youth or adults start the group? Who leads the group? Have both youth and adults always participated? Do adults overpower the group? As an adult, be sure that the youth share responsibilities. Be able to discuss responsibility with the youth, and allow them to finish their own tasks and responsibilities with help only when asked.
- Raising concerns about a particular project of the GSA by posing questions instead of handing down authoritative decisions.

Be an adult ally to a GSA club in the broader school environment by:

- Bringing up the club in staff meetings and asking for colleagues to support the club.
- Leaving club flyers in the teachers lounge.
- Inviting faculty and administration to GSA events and meetings.
- Locating other adult allies for support in addressing the anti-LGBT climate at school.
- Intervening when a co-worker engages in anti-LGBT comments or actions.
- Becoming familiar with federal and state laws, as well as district policies that protect LGBT students, and speaking up to administrators if those laws aren?t being followed.
- Forming a separate Gay-Straight Teachers? Alliance or faculty support group if adults tend to outnumber youth or dominate the student GSA meetings.

Additional Resources:

GSA Legal Resources [2]

GLSEN?s ?Advice from GSA Advisors?

http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/news/record/466.html [3]

Gay And Lesbian Allied Administrators

http://www.galaaonline.org/programs.html [4]

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