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# What is a GSA?

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**A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student-run club, typically in a high school or middle school, which provides a safe place for students to meet, support each other, talk about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and work to end homophobia and transphobia.**

**There are three typical functions of a GSA club: Support, Social, and Activist.**

## GSAs Provide Support

Many GSAs function as a support group and provide safety and confidentiality to students who are struggling with their identity as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning or those who are experiencing harassment at school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. These groups often provide one of the few safe spaces for students to express themselves.

## GSAs Build Community

GSAs are also social groups. They provide a sense of community and a space for LGBTQ and straight ally youth to build a social network where their identity is respected. Lots of GSAs organize barbeques or movie nights, organize field trips to a local LGBT prom or an LGBT pride parade, and attend conferences together. GSAs are a great way to build community at your school and lessen the isolation that LGBTQ students might otherwise experience.

## GSAs Take Action to Create Change

In addition to support, some GSAs work on educating themselves and the broader school community about sexual orientation and gender identity issues. They may bring in outside speakers to cover a particular topic such as LGBTQ history. They may organize a "Pride Week" or "LGBTQ Awareness Events" and offer a series of educational workshops, panels, and pride celebrations. Some GSAs organize a "Teach the Teachers" staff development day, which focuses on teaching school staff how to be better allies for LGBTQ students. There are many other types of educational and activist events that GSAs can do. Check out the Change Your School section to take action.

Remember, if your GSA is at a public school, your GSA has Legal Rights [1] under the Federal Equal Access Act. If you are in California, you have additional protection under the law AB 537 [2].

## > Ready to start a GSA? Check out the 10 steps! [3]

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**Source URL:** http://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/building-your-gsa/what-gsa

**Links:**
[1] http://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/legal-resources
[2] http://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/legal-resources/ab-537-fact-sheet
[3] http://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/building-your-gsa/10-steps-starting-gsa