

# What is a GSA?

**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 barbecues 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](#) <sup>[1]</sup> under the Federal Equal Access Act. If you are in California, you have additional protection under the law [AB 537](#) <sup>[2]</sup>.

# 10 Steps for Starting a GSA

## 1. **Follow Guidelines:**

Establish a GSA the same way you would establish any other group or club. Look in your Student Handbook for the rules at your school. This may include getting permission from an administrator, finding an advisor, and/or writing a constitution.

## 2. **Find a Faculty Advisor:**

Find a teacher or staff member whom you think would be supportive or who has already shown themselves to be an ally around sexual orientation issues. It could be a teacher, counselor, nurse, or librarian.

## 3. **Inform Administration of Your Plans:**

Tell administrators what you are doing right away. It can be very helpful to have an administrator on your side. They can work as liaisons on your behalf with other teachers, parent groups, community members, and the school board. If an administrator is resistant to the GSA, let them know that forming a GSA club is protected under the Federal Equal Access Act.

## 4. **Inform Guidance Counselors and Social Workers About The Group:**

These individuals may know students who would be interested in attending the group.

## 5. **Pick a Meeting Place:**

You may want to find a meeting place which is off the beaten track at school and offers some level of privacy or confidentiality.

## 6. **Advertise (and Get Food!):**

Figure out the best way to advertise at your school. It may be a combination of school bulletin announcements, flyers, and word-of-mouth. Also get food and tell people there will be food: people always come to meetings when you provide food! If your flyers are defaced or torn down, do not be discouraged. Keep putting them back up. Eventually, whoever is tearing them down will give up.

Besides, advertising for your group and having words up such as "gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning" or "end homophobia" or "discuss sexual orientation" can be part of educating the school and can actually make other students feel safer -- even if they never attend a single meeting.

## 7. **Hold Your Meeting!**

You may want to start out with a discussion about why people feel having this group is important. You can also brainstorm things your club would like to do this year.

## 8. **Establish Ground Rules:**

Many groups have ground rules in order to insure that group discussions are safe, confidential, and respectful. Many groups have a ground rule that no assumptions or labels are used about a group member's sexual orientation. This can help make straight allies feel comfortable about attending the club.

## 9. **Plan For The Future:**

Develop an action plan. Brainstorm activities. Set goals for what you want to work towards. Contact Gay-Straight Alliance Network in order to get connected to all of the other GSAs, get supported, and learn about what else is going on in the community.

## 10. **Register Your GSA**

Now that you've started it up, register your GSA with the GSA network in your state! Visit our [National Directory](#) [1] to find your state's GSA network. And if you're in California, [register with GSA Network here](#) [2] and sign up for an [event](#) [3] or request a site visit or training at your school.