

# GSA Quick Start Curriculum Guide

*creatingsafeschools.com*

This downloadable 10-meeting curriculum guide is designed to touch upon various aspects that are vital to LGBTQ+ youth and to GSA success.

These include: *getting to know each other and establishing group norms, recognizing and agreeing upon preferred terminology, understanding and navigating peer relationships, understanding roles in families, churches, and other connected institutions, assessing personal strengths, developing a personal support network, connecting with the broader LGBTQ+ community, and more.*

Whether your group's primary goals are advocacy to promote change, the gathering and sharing of information, socialization, mental health support, or, more likely, some combination of those, starting your GSA off touching on the topics in the 10-meeting curriculum guide can create a strong foundation for future meetings.

Remember, in the end your GSA is for you, designed to meet the needs of your school's members.

Adapt and adjust the suggested curriculum as needed for your members' and school's individual circumstances.

## Before You Begin ...

# Steps to Preparing for Your First Meeting

- Ensure that your meetings have a regularly scheduled day, time, and location, in order to facilitate full attendance.
- Include the meetings on the school calendar and P.A. announcements/school news.
- If clubs are allowed to hang posters, place signs around the school advertising your club meeting days, times, and places. Make sure to invite the faculty, staff, and administration to your meetings, to build a large, visible base of support.

*GSA's are more likely to succeed when they start each meeting with consistent activities. Suggested starter activities include:*

- \* Have the GSA executive team (President, Vice President, etc) introduce themselves.
- \* Welcome everyone and briefly review the group's ground rules.
- \* Give each student a bit of time to introduce themselves, their name, chosen pronouns, and other aspects of their identities as desired.
- \* Briefly review the activities of the previous meeting, and the planned activities for the upcoming meeting.
- \* Many people like to start meetings with an ICEBREAKER, a way to introduce the topic and relax group members. Each meeting of this 10-meeting curriculum guide has one (or more) suggested icebreakers.

*These are optional - your GSA's dynamics will guide you as to whether icebreakers might be useful.*

# Meeting 1 ...

## *Getting Off to the Right Start*

**Goals:** Perform introductions, create ground rules for meetings, elect officers, determine overall purpose(s) of the GSA (advocacy, peer support, community support, education/knowledge, small group support)

**Icebreaker 1:** Briefly discuss the concept of safety/ground rules. Have members write the ground rules that they feel are important.

**Icebreaker 2:** Everyone writes on a sheet of paper: 1. What brought them to the group; 2. What they hope to get from the group; 3. What they want the group to accomplish/ focus on (such as advocacy, knowledge, peer support, etc. - can be more than one).

### ***Suggested Activities***

- Have those interested in being President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer declare their desire, and explain to the group why they feel they would be a good fit for the position. Arrange the time/means to vote for club officers. (If not this meeting, schedule for a future meeting, or between meetings.)
- Use the Icebreaker #1 sheets to discuss possible ground rules for the group. When the rules are agreed to, write them on a poster for display (or have someone do it before the next meeting).
- Use the Icebreaker #2 papers to discuss what the focal point(s) of the group will be. Try to incorporate everyone's desires to some degree. Plan to expend more energy on meetings with more member interest. (*Reassess this focus after the initial 10 meetings in case it changes.*)
- If you do not have a mission statement yet, use the members' reasons for being there to help create one as a group. Vote on the final version. (Sample mission statements are on the website).

### ***Tips***

- Make sure you advertise your first meeting on the announcements, on posters, and by word of mouth. Talk with/invite your teachers to the first meeting. Ask your teachers to spread the word to their classes. Have cookies or some other snack if possible.
- Make sure to prepare in advance with: paper/index cards for icebreakers; pens/pencils; sample mission statements; information with different GSA general goals (advocacy, education/ knowledge, peer/community support, small group support).

## Meeting 2 ...

### *Language and Terminology*

**Goals:** Discuss current societal and preferred group use of LGBTQ+ terminology. Help members work together to acknowledge that not every person will have the same preferred language guidelines.

**Icebreaker:** Have everyone write the most commonly used LGBTQ+ terms they can think of (positive and negative).

#### *Suggested Activities*

- Discuss the terms from the icebreaker as a group. Who considers certain terms offensive? What terms are not offensive? Where are there areas of disagreement? What terms can the group agree to use or avoid?
- Discuss how language differences that arise will be handled. Come up with a non-confrontational way to let people know if their language use bothers you. Agree to allow members to learn and grow. Remember that allies who attend may need help learning the terminology.
- Discuss how language is used in society, and the influence of language as well as the assumptions that underlie it.
- Write up a language guide of school-safe terminology to provide to teachers, staff, and admin. Ask your Faculty Advisor to distribute the guide to all faculty/staff/admin (it can be placed in mailboxes or emailed to the school as a whole). Let teachers know (on the guide) that you (advisor, officers, volunteers) are available if they want to learn more, or have more questions.

#### *Tips*

- Print the LGBTQ+ Language Guide from the website for a more detailed discussion springboard.
- Print the Gender Unicorn sheet from the website as a discussion springboard.
- Have paper, writing implements available for all attendees.
- Remember, language is ever evolving. If you make a mistake, and are corrected, please be willing to listen, learn, and adapt.

# Meeting 3 ...

## *Peer and School Relationships*

**Goals:** To help attendees discuss and process their peer relationships through the school, positive and negative. Also discuss relationships with faculty, staff, and administration. To provide support to those who have few positive peer interactions at school.

**Icebreaker 1:** Have each attendee write out one positive and one negative peer interaction at school recently.

**Icebreaker 2:** Have each attendee write out one positive and one negative faculty/staff/admin interaction at school recently.

### *Suggested Activities*

- Let those who want to share their positive/negative experiences with the group do so, and encourage them to talk about how the interactions made them feel. Discuss the current school climate, and ways to improve it, and how to avoid the negative people/spaces. Acknowledge that this is a very difficult topic, and provide support to all group members who need it.
- For instance, students who wish to come out might ask about the coming-out experiences of other members - what feelings arose during, and after, and the reactions they received from peers and others.
- Allies can discuss how to be supportive of LGBTQ+ students in the greater school environment. Students who choose not to share can benefit from knowing that they are not alone in feelings of isolation at school.

### *Tips*

- Come up with a list of things faculty and staff allies can do to show visible support; ask the faculty advisor to distribute that list.
- If instances that violate school policy, such as bullying, are discussed during the meeting, be prepared to take the issue to administration. Even if involved students do not want their names mentioned, administrators should be aware of what is occurring in the school in order to be more proactive at stopping it.
- Provide a list of local LGBTQ+ non-school peer resources, such as PFLAG/Rainbow Youth groups.

## Meeting 4 ...

### *Family and Church Dynamics*

**Goals:** Students will share their family and church experiences as LGBTQ+ youth, for the purpose of catharsis, bonding, and giving and receiving non-judgmental acceptance (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Students will learn of resources available for LGBTQ+ families.

**Icebreaker:** Have each student draw a diagram with themselves in the middle, with lines connecting them to their immediate family members, their extended family, and supportive/unsupportive non-school institutions (church, sports teams, etc). Colors/lines can show emotions and strength of bonds. (For example: solid line - strong bond/strong feelings; dashed line - weak bond/feelings; dotted line - very weak; green - positive bond/feelings; red - anger; blue - sadness; etc. You can develop your own key.)

#### ***Suggested Activities***

- Family dynamics have a large impact on LGBTQ+ youth (Higa et al., 2014). Discuss the Icebreaker diagrams. Students can talk about how their family relationships are affected by their LGBTQ+ status (which might include keeping it hidden). Talk about other systems, such as church, which offer acceptance or lack of acceptance.
- Students who feel comfortable can talk about their experiences. Others may just want to ask questions, or listen. This is a difficult subject for many. While the discussion can be important to have and hear, not all students will want to take part, and that is okay.

#### ***Tips***

- If the school social worker or psychologist would be willing to attend this meeting, it might be helpful for some students. Otherwise, students who share difficult experiences should be given referrals by the Faculty Advisor to talk with the social worker or psychologist.
- Give students information on PFLAG and other LGBTQ+ adolescent family support groups. Their families might wish to contact those groups.

# Meeting 5 ...

## *Personal Strengths and Support Networks*

**Goals:** For students to acknowledge and discuss personal strengths and protective factors. For students to share ways to develop protective factors.

**Icebreaker 1:** Group members will write 5 personal strengths and/or protective factors in their lives.

**Icebreaker 2:** Group members will write a personal strength they have noticed in each other group member. (It can be: You're good at math; You're a wonderful brother; You are persistent; You are honest ...).

### ***Suggested Activities***

- Discuss the icebreakers. Recognize and affirm each other's strengths.
- Discuss how the group members have affected each other over the course of the group.
- Share ideas for developing protective factors.
- Invite faculty/administration who have been vocally supportive of the GSA to the meeting, in order to express appreciation for their support.
- Discuss ways group members can spread positivity through the student body - distributing cards that say "you matter," asking people who seem upset if they are okay, smiling at others, etc.

### ***Tips***

- Group members sharing the strengths they see in each other can help build cohesiveness.
- Group members hearing positive statements from their peers can help build resilience and self-esteem.
- Spreading positivity to the school will have positive repercussions on the group.

## Meeting 6 ...

### *Information About the Broader LGBTQ+ Community*

**Goals:** To share information about the LGBTQ+ community - local resources; school board actions; state and federal laws; legal fights, etc.

**Icebreaker:** Have each person try to write about one external resource/law/lawsuit/news story concerning the LGBTQ+ community.

#### ***Suggested Activities***

- Share what the group members wrote in the icebreaker.
- Have a group discussion about issues raised.

**Examples:** *One member knows of a local LGBTQ+ health clinic. Members discuss if they've gone there for treatment, and, if so, what they thought of the facility; whether their family would take them; other resources they would like to find;*

*Someone brings up a recent bill in the legislature, or an act of the School Board. Members discuss the repercussions of the bill/action, larger laws/court decisions that might be relevant. They can also discuss ways to use their voice; that will also be discussed in the Advocacy meetings.*

#### ***Tips***

- Be prepared with a list of local resources, in case members do not know of any.
- These can include: LGBTQ+ health clinics; parent/peer support groups (like PFLAG); safe monitored online forums (Empty Closets); hotlines; affirming religious or spiritual organizations.
- Be prepared with a list/some information about current bills in the legislature; recent laws passed (state or federal); recent court decisions; and actions by your school board on LGBTQ+ issues.

# Meeting 7 ...

## *Connecting with the Broader LGBTQ+ Community*

**Goals:** To begin to connect the members of the group with the LGBTQ+ community outside of the group for added support.

**Icebreaker:** If you have community guests at this meeting, you might skip the icebreaker and, after check-in, introduce the guest(s), allow them time to speak, and then have a Q&A session.

### *Suggested Activities*

- Introduce community speaker(s). These could be: doctors/care providers from a local LGBTQ+ health clinic; representatives of PFLAG or other community support organizations; supportive school board members; lawyers discussing the current state of LGBTQ+ issues in the courts, and the role young people can play in influencing those issues.
- NOTE: If these people are not allowed into the school setting due to visitation restrictions, you can invite them via Zoom.

### *Tips*

- Talk to the administration to determine if guest speakers are allowed, and the process for approving them. Begin having guest speakers approved if possible.
- If guest speakers can not come onto school grounds, invite them via Zoom. Make sure that the administration knows who is being invited and the reason for their invitation. Bringing community members into your group is a time when administration support is important.
- If you cannot get approval for guest speakers:
  - 1) Ask people who would have been guests to send a short writeup about what they do in the community, with their contact information.
  - 2) Watch YouTube videos on local resources/organizations.
  - 3) Work together as a group to research the local LGBTQ+ community and associated resources.

# Meeting 8 ...

## *Advocacy in the School*

**Goals:** Explore ways to be advocates for LGBTQ+ inclusion and rights in the school environment.

**Icebreaker:** Have the group members each write a list of ways they can think of to advocate in the school.

### *Suggested Activities*

- On the whiteboard or a posterboard, combine/collate the ideas from the icebreaker into a comprehensive list.
- Discuss as a group which ideas members would like to consider implementing.
- Rank the ideas from those with the most interest to those with the least.
- Pick the ideas with the most interest, and discuss specifics of implementation.
- Plan implementation of the top item on the list.

### *Tips*

- The list of school advocacy ideas should be saved and revisited in future meetings.
- If the group decides to have an advocacy focus, members can decide to choose a new school advocacy item to implement on a regular schedule (weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.).
- Advocacy actions can include: sales of LGBTQ+ friendly/GSA supportive items; advertising and observation of national LGBTQ+ days of recognition, such as the Day of Silence (this can be more effective if students know the administration is on board with observing these days; also, if background information on the day is provided to faculty, admin, and the student body, through announcements, posters, flyers, etc.); representation at school-wide club events; education of the student body on LGBTQ+ issues, through flyers, announcements, etc.; write articles (suggest a column) on LGBTQ+ issues for the school paper; create your own paper/newsletter on LGBTQ+ issues for distribution in the school.

# Meeting 9 ...

## *Advocacy in the Community*

**Goals:** To learn about and initiate community LGBTQ+ advocacy.

**Icebreaker:** Each member writes about at least one advocacy event in the community they are aware of.

**Note:** Some may not know any, depending on their family situation; that is okay, team them with someone who does know of some).

### ***Suggested Activities***

- Discuss the advocacy events described. What are the events and how do they promote advocacy?
- Discuss whether club members would be interested in taking part in any of the discussed events/activities.
- If there is interest, choose an event/activity and begin to make a plan for GSA participation.

### ***Tips***

- Prepare for the meeting with a list of possible advocacy action items, in case the group members cannot think of any to discuss. Consider having a guest speaker (administration approved) to talk about local advocacy opportunities (in person or via Zoom).
- Use member strengths. If one member is a good writer, ask if they will write an article for the local paper. If one member is an excellent public speaker, ask if they are interested in speaking to the school board or the legislature. Young people's voices are especially meaningful as often young people do not speak out.
- Community advocacy can include: representing the GSA at a gay pride march, parade, rally, or appreciation day; preparing comments and speaking in front of the school board, county commission, or state legislature on LGBTQ+ issues; writing editorials on local issues for local/state newspapers.

# Meeting 10 ...

## *Small Group Support*

**Goals:** To let members know of the possibility for small group support, gauge member need for/interest in setting up small support groups as part of the GSA mission.

**Icebreaker:** Have each member (anonymously) write their largest support need.

### *Suggested Activities*

- Read the support needs of the members aloud.
- Discuss the stated needs, and compare and contrast different member needs. Share experiences via discussion.
- Discuss ways needs can be met.
- Provide members with a list of places to go for support when needed. This can include: school counselors; school psychologist; school social worker; affirming teachers; hotlines; local mental health providers; community support groups.
- Have group members write strategic plans for difficult times, so that they have plans in place in the event that need arises. These plans should include what they will do and who they will reach out to.

### *Tips*

- The school psychologist or social worker could be invited to attend this meeting.
- Small group meetings could potentially be arranged with the psychologist or social worker, during which specific issues could be discussed in-depth and worked through.