

Anti-LGBT harassment is one of the most pervasive, frightening, and potentially damaging threats LGBT students face in our public schools. If you're being bullied, called names, threatened, or physically harmed at your school because of your sexual orientation, you don't have to take it!

Under the U.S. Constitution, public schools have to address any harassment against LGBT students the same way they would address harassment against any other student. And a federal education law called Title IX bars public schools from ignoring harassment based on gender stereotyping. What this all means is that public schools can't ignore harassment based on appearance or behavior that doesn't "match" your gender: boys who wear makeup, girls who dress "like a boy," or students who are transgender. Nor can school officials tell you that you have to change who you are or that the harassment is your fault because of how you dress or act.

If anyone at school is harassing or threatening you, it's crucial that you report it to a principal or counselor. Then the school has been put on notice and can be held legally responsible for protecting you. And keep notes about all incidents of harassment and interactions with the school about it. There are tips on how to effectively do this at the end of this handout.

If you've reported harassment to your school and they've done little or nothing to stop it, contact your local ACLU affiliate or the ACLU LGBT Project.

Your school does NOT have the right to "out" you to anyone without your permission, even if you're out to other people at school.

Doing this to a young person can have tragic consequences, such as when police officers in 1997 told a young man in Pennsylvania that they were going to tell his family he was gay. He committed suicide rather than face what he feared would be rejection from his family. His mother sued, and a federal appeals court has held that threatening to disclose private information violated the teenager's Constitutional right to privacy. This applies to schools, too.

If a teacher, counselor, or any other school official threatens to tell your parents or anyone else that you're gay and you don't want them to, make it clear that this is against your wishes. If they still do it or threaten to do so, you should contact your local ACLU affiliate or the ACLU LGBT Project.

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