

[goo.gl/AQdRGJ](https://goo.gl/AQdRGJ)

**GSA**

**Handbook**

**2017**

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## Purpose Statement

**GSA:** *Gay Straight Alliance, Gender and Sexuality Alliance, or whatever you want it to stand for in order to be the most inclusive and understanding as you can be towards the demographic of your club.*

With this handbook, we plan to give both students, teachers, and all school staff members a tool to effectively run their GSA clubs. The contents within this handbook will discuss not only how to kick start your GSA in a quick and easy way, but how to properly maintain it throughout the entire school year. It will also provide a multitude of ideas for your GSA's function, as well as countless resources for support and advocacy that are to be used by both students and staff alike.

We hope to go over each and every one of the myriad of ways to effectively run a GSA in the hopes that it will help those who need the assistance in beginning or maintaining a competent GSA for the school year. This handbook holds basic information, such as information on beginning and maintaining a GSA, as well as more complicated information on how to make your GSA's presence known. We hope you use this handbook to its full potential for as long as is necessary, and we hope that the ideas presented in this book will help inspire new and original ideas from you and your GSA club.

## Student's Rights

More important than anything else, students have the right to be treated fairly and respectfully by other students, and all school employees including teachers, counselors, school leaders, custodians, and bus drivers.

### Your Rights as an LGBTQIA+ Student

-Sections 200-220 of the California Education Code say that schools must protect students from different kinds of bias and discrimination, including harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

- If you or another student are being harassed because of a perceived sexuality, gender identity or the gender and sexuality of a family member and a staff member is aware, they are not allowed to ignore the issue at hand.

-Section 220 of the California Education Code prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity or gender expression. Public schools must respect a transgender, gender fluid or gender non-conforming student's gender identity or gender expression.

- -The school must call you by your personal name and pronoun. The school must also allow students to dress in conformity with their gender identity or in gender non-conforming ways.
- -The school must allow students to use sex-segregated spaces such as locker rooms and restrooms as well as perform activities in physical education that correspond with a student's gender identity.
- -Schools must provide a single stall gender neutral restroom that can be used by any student.

-Under the US Constitution, you have the right to privacy. Schools do not have the right to 'out' you as LGBTQIA+ to anyone, including your parents.

**California Education Code section 200:**

[goo.gl/3qf4hD](http://goo.gl/3qf4hD)

**ACLU LGBT Student Rights:**

[goo.gl/BHG28J](http://goo.gl/BHG28J)

## Your Right to a GSA

-Under the Federal Equal Access Act, the First Amendment, and section 220 of the California Education Code, if your school allows other non-curricular clubs to meet, the school must allow a GSA to meet and must treat it the same as any other club.

- The GSA will not be allowed to meet if there is no space to meet or the group does not have a staff advisor to watch over meetings.
- The school does not have to allow a GSA to meet if the school does not allow non-curricular clubs to meet. This does not include curricular clubs such as a math or science club.
- School administrators and teachers do not have the right to censor GSA announcements and posters if other school clubs are allowed to make announcements and put up posters.

**Federal Equal Access Act:**

[goo.gl/62TKk1](http://goo.gl/62TKk1)

**California Education Code section 220:**

[goo.gl/K7cmyW](http://goo.gl/K7cmyW)

## Name Change Forms

-Students who are transitioning or no longer associate with their birth name have the ability to talk to their counselor and fill out a name change form. This form will change the student's legal name to their preferred name on rosters that will be seen by teachers and substitutes. This will help eliminate the use of a student's birth name in the classroom which can prove traumatizing to some students.

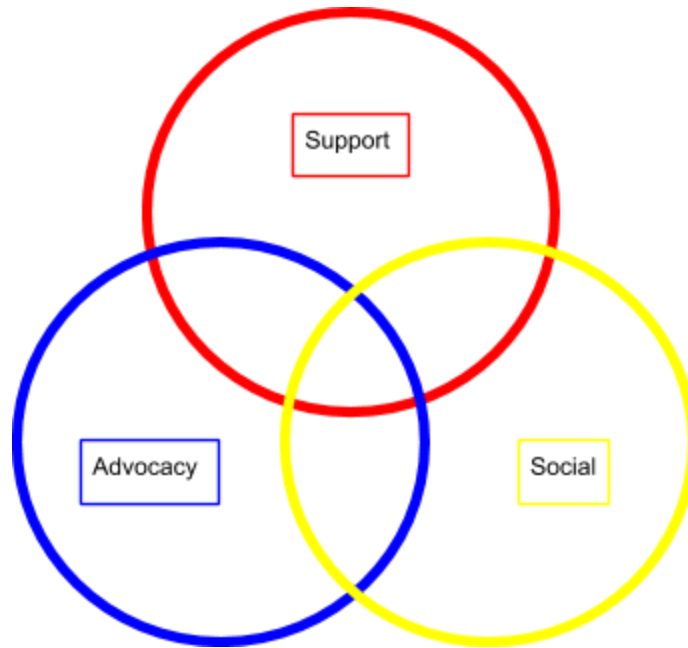
- The preferred name will not show up when logging into parent used websites or be placed on report cards as to not "out" students that have not shared their personal name with their legal guardian.
- This does not ensure that students will not accidentally be outed if a parent speaks to a teacher or staff member.

**Further name change information:**

[https://www.sandiegounified.org/sites/default/files\\_link/district/files/dept/bulletins\\_and\\_circulars/1617/so%201022%20Circular\\_Revised.pdf](https://www.sandiegounified.org/sites/default/files_link/district/files/dept/bulletins_and_circulars/1617/so%201022%20Circular_Revised.pdf)

## Getting Started

### Different Types of GSA's



#### **Support GSA's:**

-Support GSA's offer support for students in need. The focus is to create a safe space for students to talk about their feelings, any questions they have, or any issues that they may have.

#### **Advocacy GSA's:**

-Advocacy GSA's are focused on creating a safer school or community environment for LGBTQIA+ youth. These GSA's work on changing school rules, or policies to benefit all students and lower harassment and discrimination.

#### **Social GSA's:**

-Social GSA's should be a safe space where students can meet and interact with other LGBTQIA+ youth and allies. The focus of these groups is simply have fun and to celebrate its members.

## Guidelines

Starting a GSA is just like any other club. Your GSA will be held to the same rules and regulations as every other non academic club. Although every school is different you will most likely need:

1. A staff advisor to watch over meetings
2. A designated space to hold meetings

**Note:** If your school does not have student run non academic clubs, read the school's student handbook or talk to a staff member about starting one.

## GSA Agreements

- Respect others; Give them undivided attention when sharing, treat them with kindness, etc.
- Don't put down one's ideas. If you disagree, there are ways to respectfully disagree. e.g. I respect your opinion, but I think/ I get where you're coming from, but...
- If someone makes an offensive comment unknowingly, politely inform them as to why what they said is incorrect. There is no need for an attack.
- Respect confidentiality. What happens in GSA stays in GSA. Do not share someone's stories without their permission, whether it be someone from inside or outside of the GSA.
- Don't turn a meeting into "me" time. Make sure you give others the chance to share. Avoid constantly directing people's comments to your life. (Oh, yeah, I feel you. One time I had this...) If you really have something to say that relates to their comment, make sure it still includes them.
- Respect pronouns, period. This is a safe space. If you misgender someone, apologize, correct yourself, and move on. No need to beg for their forgiveness or explain why you keep forgetting, this drags on the situation and can make the other person feel uncomfortable. If someone changes their pronouns from time to time, do not question it.
- We encourage all GSA members to share and participate, but are not required to if they feel uncomfortable.
- No yiking on the tables.

## Student Leadership

Student leaders are a way to push good GSA's towards greatness. They give a sense of order as well as act as a figurehead for the club. These student leaders will be in charge of planning meetings, keeping track of the club's success, and speaking to the school about any necessary changes.

We suggest a 4-5 person student leadership board. This board will allow for there to be student leadership, and also allow multiple students to have a say in decisions made for the GSA.

## **Make a Mission Statement**

Because each GSA is different, figure out what is most important to the students about the overall goals of the GSA. This can vary from large advocacy projects to simply creating a safe space. This will help leaders stay on track and help affirm your reasoning starting a GSA.

## **“Don’t Make Assumptions”: A Note on Pronouns**

The announcements of pronouns at the beginning of each meeting is incredibly important for any GSA. Because a person’s gender identity does not always coincide with their assigned gender, it is important to allow students to talk about and understand each other’s personal pronouns.

Typically, one by one, each student and staff member present will announce they’re full name and personal pronouns (ex.) He/Him/His She/Her/Hers They/Them/Theirs. Students may have Varying levels of comfort in different environments, so a student may announce “ In this space, my pronouns are (blank).”

## **Promotion**

The hardest part about running a GSA is not starting the GSA, but getting students to show up

Ways to promote your GSA:

- Work alone or with other clubs to host events at lunch or after school
- Make posters
- Promote awareness days
- Campaign change for the benefit of lgbt students
- Fundraisers (bake sales, selling t-shirts/buttons, etc)
- In the beginning of the year, host an event to draw in a crowd (free food is a great incentive for most people)

## **Building Solidarity**

Gain the help of your school’s ASB, library, and any other influential bodies that are willing. Work with these groups to host events and promote learning about the community. (See Awareness Days section for more examples of ways to work with others). Be sure to promote Ally Week as well, try to create activities or posters that draw people’s attention.

GLSEN Ally Action Week: <https://goo.gl/Mr5c8u>



## How To: Advocacy

Advocacy is an important part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Advocacy allows us to stand up for the rights of ourselves and those that we love. If students of the community or otherwise are not being treated with respect or equality, it may be a good idea to advocate for them.

1. Gather a group of people and discuss how you feel about a given issue. This way you will be able to hear other people's arguments and feelings on the topic. If others feel as strongly about the subject as you do, they can help advocate.
2. Make a plan. Discuss exactly what you would like changed, and how you plan on changing it. It may also help to set a timeline for various aspects of your plan.
3. Create a proposal. A proposal to make change from a student or students will show staff members how much effort you have put into your advocacy. This proposal will also show clearly what is to change and what is not to change as to not bring forth any confusion.
4. Send a representative to present the changes that your group wants to make. Whether it is a teacher, a principal, or the school superintendent, none of them want a hoard of students telling them they need to make changes. By sending one or two representatives, the group will be able to easily express what needs to be done in a professional manner.



### When should you advocate?

Any time that you feel that you or others are not being treated equally or respectfully, you should consider advocacy. If the school curriculum does not feel inclusive enough for any race, religion, gender, or sexuality, you should at least start the conversation of how to make things better. The more students advocate for themselves, the more they are heard. Even if you do not win every battle, you are still putting your voice and opinion forward.

## Purpose of GSA

### GSA, Then and Now

#### Brief History:

With only 40 clubs city wide, the first GSA's were started in the San Francisco area during the the 1998-1999 school year. By 2001, the GSA Network became a statewide organization, and by 2005, the program was operating nationwide. In 2008, the GSA Network officially became a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.



#### GSA Today:

Today, there are over 4000 GSA's nationwide, including over 900 clubs in California alone. Despite growing in size, not many of the GSA Network's core values have changed. GSA still fights to provide a safe space for any students as well as empower students of the LGBTQIA+ community and allies alike.

### Your GSA

Every GSA is different. They each have a different purpose for being, and that is why it is important to speak with your GSA about why all of you are there and what you are working to achieve.

Although your GSA may be different from others, you must retain these core values:

- Provide a safe space for all students
- Respect the Gender, Sexuality, race, religion, and economic status of each student.
- Work to better the school environment for LGBTQIA+ students

## Sustaining Your GSA

### Ideas for Meetings

- **Ice Breakers**

-Ice breakers or other games played at the beginning of a meeting, help students that are less comfortable with sharing relax and better interact with the group. Ice breakers do not necessarily have to do with gender or sexuality, because they are simply made to better connect the group. Ice breakers can be as simple as stating your name and giving a few fun facts about yourself. Here is a website that will help you with ideas.

-Ice breaker ideas: [goo.gl/jvaUyu](http://goo.gl/jvaUyu)

- **Discuss coming out to family and friends**

-Remember that coming out is a very sensitive subject. Some students may not have come out to their families, or even the rest of the school, so it is important to treat this with care. Allow students that would like to speak to share their story, but do not pressure anyone to share. Try your best to make this a positive experience for all.

- **Discuss suicide prevention and pass out resources**

-Unfortunately, suicide and self harm are much more common throughout the LGBTQIA+ community than the heterosexual or cisgender community. This makes the discussion of suicide and self harm very important in any GSA. This is another sensitive subject, so be sure to present it with care and do not put pressure on any students. We have provided a list of hotlines in the resources on page (insert page number). These numbers should be made available to every student whether they need it or not.

-Facts on suicide: [goo.gl/EoXYFy](http://goo.gl/EoXYFy)

- **Screen a video or host an LGBTQIA+ movie night**

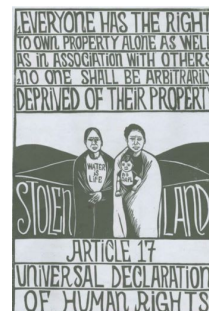
-Films about or created by members of the LGBTQIA+ community are a fun way to inspire and teach GSA members. These events also potentially allow students to be less inclined to suppress their true selves if they meet up outside of the normal school day.

[goo.gl/t6Pv7x](http://goo.gl/t6Pv7x)

- **Discuss the Declaration of [32 Universal Human Rights](#)**

-Great opportunity to consider the implications and intersections of the various identities and experiences in our school populations.

[goo.gl/vj2Y2U](http://goo.gl/vj2Y2U)



- **Guest speakers**

- Guest speakers offer their individual story or a new look on life that can reach out to a student in ways that other resources can not.

- It is recommended to invite guest speakers to come after school so that more time will be allowed for the speaker to give their presentation as well as give time for students to interact with the speaker in conversation.

- GSA guest speakers list: [goo.gl/DqicJj](https://goo.gl/DqicJj)

- **Make GSA buttons and shirts for fundraising**

- Art is a great way to pull people together. If your GSA works together to design a shirt, button, flyer, or any other GSA associated items, this will not only give your group unity, but also give the members an opportunity to show their pride in the group.

- **Throw a party**

- Who needs an excuse to party? Don't wait for the holidays; throw a party at any time in the school year. Parties and potlucks guarantees a large attendance and gives students an opportunity to relax around each other and have a good time.

- **Have a "bring a friend day."**

- Students will be encouraged to bring along a friend that is not already part of the GSA. These friends can be part of the LGBTQIA+ community, or they can simply be an ally. Days like these will possibly bring in more students or give a larger portion of the school an understanding as to what the GSA does during a meeting.

- **Host a performance**

- No matter what artform, it is important that students in any GSA are able to express themselves artistically or otherwise. Your GSA can host karaoke, a poetry night, a drag show, or any other performances that would allow students to show off their talent. These events can also act as a chance for your GSA to raise money.

- **Make a change**

- Talk to the students in your GSA about what they would like to see change at your school campus in regards to the GSA's key values. If your GSA feels that one thing in specific needs to change, work together to make a proposal for your school's administrative staff. Even if the change is small, this will be a good stepping stone to teach students about advocacy and hopefully make your school a more inviting place for all students.

## Activities at School

Lunchtime activities for spreading the word about your GSA

GSA students can be standing by with mini flyers that give the time/day/place of each of the meetings to invite them into the group. They can also have a large poster with the time/day/place of the meeting

Some examples of lunchtime activities that can be put on by your GSA (with permission from the school of course)

- Vocab Quiz / Game Show on LGBTQIA+ terms and concepts.
- Make a T-Chart with sections on things heard in schools like “that’s gay” or “no homo” and have students come up and tally if they’ve heard that said recently.
- Make a poster for students to come up and sign as a pledge to be an ally.
- Have a dress up day (dress all in rainbows or something similar) and offer a prize that’s easy to buy in bulk (cookies, donut holes) for showing up to a certain place at lunch in the outfit.

## Games and Activities for Your GSA

Games within a GSA enable students to get to know each other and create a bond. These should be quick and easy to play.

### **Some examples:**

- Name games (say an adjective that starts with the first letter of your name and your name, then the next person must repeat that and all others before them and say their name, etc, such as Awesome Abby, Busy Bryce, Perfect Peter, etc)
- Beach Ball: Get a beach ball and use a permanent marker to write questions on it. The person who catches it has to answer the question touching their left thumb. They say their name, answer the question, and throw it to someone else.

Activities are more for after the GSA has been up and running for a while, and is more for a sort of “team bonding” rather than a get-to-know-you.

### **Some Examples:**

- Go as a group after school to do something fun and either team-based or competitive such as bowling, a breakout room/challenge, or other such activities that ensure everyone is together.
- Go as a group out to a restaurant for breakfast or lunch.

Try to avoid activities that will separate you; even if it’s all in the same area, if everybody is doing their own thing, it defeats the purpose.

## GSA Initiatives

### Awareness Days

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>August</b></p> <p>9th: International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>September</b></p> <p>Suicide Prevention Week (surrounds the 10th) 10th: World Suicide Day 19th-26th: Bi(sexual/romantic) Awareness Week 23rd: Celebrate Bisexuality Day Ally Week (typically 3rd week)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>October</b></p> <p>LGBT History Month Bullying Prevention Month 11th: National Coming Out Day 16th: Spirit Day Asexuality Awareness Week (typically 3rd week) 26th: Intersex Awareness Day</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>November</b></p> <p>National Homeless Youth Awareness Month Week Before Thanksgiving: National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week 8th: Intersex Day of Solidarity 20th: Transgender Day of Remembrance</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>December</b></p> <p>1st: World AIDS Day 8th: Pansexual Pride Day 10th: Human Rights Day</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>January</b></p> <p>27th: Holocaust Remembrance Day No Name Calling Week (typically 3rd week)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>February</b></p> <p>Black History Month 19th-25th: Aromantic Awareness Week 20th: World Day of Social Justice 24th: GSA Day of Racial Justice</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>March</b></p> <p>21st: International Day for the Elimination of Discrimination 31st: Trans Day of Visibility</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>April</b></p> <p>Autism Awareness Month National Child Abuse Prevention Month 10th: National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day 26th: Lesbian Awareness Day Day of Silence (changes every year)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>May</b></p> <p>Mental Health Awareness Month 17th: International Day Against Homophobia 24th: Pan(sexual/romantic) Awareness Day</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>June</b></p> <p>Pride Month 26th: Anniversary of US Same-Sex Marriage Legalization 28th: Stonewall Riots Anniversary</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>July</b></p> <p>30th: International Day of Friendship &amp; World Day Against Human Trafficking</p>

All of these days/weeks/months can be promoted by GSAs and schools through posters/activities/etc and can be used to create fun school activities that work either with the GSA alone or with other clubs

### Example of things to do with these awareness days/weeks/months

In October work with the library to promote LGBT community history books and work with your school's ASB or another club/class that is heavily involved in the school to promote bullying awareness, especially in the LGBT Community.

## Gender-Specific School Activities

The Student Non-Discrimination Act ensures that public schools may not discriminate against students due to sexual or gender roles.

<https://www.aclunc.org/our-work/know-your-rights/school-dress-codes-and-uniforms>

<https://goo.gl/eFXHK2>

Graduation		Dances	
<b>CAN</b>	<b>CAN'T</b>	<b>CAN</b>	<b>CAN'T</b>
Hold a Lavender Graduation (not mandatory, just celebratory)	Stop students from graduating or people from attending due to their orientation or failure to adhere to gender roles	Encourage students to express themselves and promise to keep them safe.	Stop students from bringing a same-sex date, wearing clothes that don't fit their assigned gender, stop students from running for King/Queen if it doesn't fit gender roles

## Other Gender-Specific Situations That Students Have the Right to Oppose

### **School Uniforms**

Students retain the right to wear whatever uniform aligns most closely to their gender identity

### **Battle of the Sexes / Similar Events That Separate Into Boy/Girl Groups**

These events force nonbinary students into uncomfortable situations.

These events force transgender students to either come out against their will or force themselves into the uncomfortable situation of siding with their assigned sex rather than their real gender.

What can be done about it? Change events to more inclusive ones (eg. separation through grade level).

### **PE Classes and Sports Teams**

Gendered PE clothes and locker rooms make nonbinary and transgender students uncomfortable.

Students have the right to use whichever locker room or join whichever sports team makes them most comfortable and aligns with their identity.

What can be done about this? - PE classes should have non-gendered uniforms and must allow students use of their corresponding facilities.

## Gender Neutral Bathroom Challenge

Challenge your GSA or even your entire school to participate in the gender neutral bathroom challenge. This is a great way for students to not only gain more of an understanding for each other, but also help students grasp the basics of advocacy.

### What is it?

The Gender Neutral Bathroom Challenge is a challenge to attempt to not use any gendered restrooms for a month. This will give cisgender people a bit more of an understanding as to how hard it may be to use the restroom for a person that is transgender or gender non-binary who may not feel safe or comfortable in a gendered restroom.

**Gendered restroom:** Any restroom that is specifically designated to a man or a woman, whether multi stall or single stall.

**Cisgender:** Anyone whose gender and personal identity corresponds with their birth sex



### Purpose

1. To give those that are normally comfortable or feel safe in gendered restrooms to gain a small understanding of the difficulties of those that do experience that discomfort.
2. To help inspire more people to advocate for the installation of all gender or gender neutral bathrooms in schools, offices, and public places.
- 3.





## Expectations of GSA Advisors

1. Provide a space for consistent GSA meetings as agreed upon by GSA leadership/members (usually this is a classroom or meeting room space).
2. Be physically present at meetings. If you cannot be physically present at a meeting, arrange with a co-advisor or supportive professional colleague to cover for you.
  - (Note: Depending on the level of leadership and involvement of the students, you might have to do very little at the actual meetings. Often, the students are highly involved in the weekly facilitation of the GSA meetings to the extent that an adult advisor feels comfortable in “stepping back.” However, it is important for an advisor or other supportive educator to be physically present at each meeting).
3. Check emails that are tagged with “GSA” in the subject header. If you are asked to respond, please DO RESPOND. The Department of LGBTQIA Education and Advocacy (typically Mick or Sophia) send emails to advisors. At the very least, forward emails along to the GSA student leadership and confirm that the student leaders have responded to Mick or Sophia.
4. Be supportive. Listen and respond to what the students have articulated as their priorities. If you have questions or need guidance around specific concerns or issues, please feel free to reach out to Mick Rabin at [mrabin@sandi.net](mailto:mrabin@sandi.net).



### Middle School

Middle School GSA's are run in a way that is very similar to High School GSA's; they should do the same general basics as High Schools in setup and meetings, but they should focus less on the

petitions and movements for drastic change, and instead focus on giving their school a safe and friendly environment for students.



Most middle schools are socially focused, so make sure the GSA stays fun. By making GSA fun, students will not only be more likely to come, but also learn the joys of being a part of our wonderful community at a young age. Potlucks, parties, and hang out sessions are all great ways to get middle school students engaged and interested in GSA.

Middle school students may not fully understand their own gender and sexuality, so it is important to remind everyone that the GSA is a space for LGBTQIA+ students, questioning students, or allies. Allow students to have discussions or ask questions that they may not be able to ask anywhere else.

-It is a good idea to have an anonymous question box. This allows students who are shy or embarrassed to ask questions that they are too scared to ask in front of a class.



## Resources

### GSA Network Sources

Register your GSA: [goo.gl/tbMoKv](http://goo.gl/tbMoKv)

### Support Resources

#### Support Groups

##### **The Trevor Project**

Non-profit organization focussed on suicide prevention among LGBTQIA+ youth. Offers a support lifeline, an online chat, and a support text chat.

Website: [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)

Lifeline: 866-488-7386

Trevortext: Text TREVOR to 1-202-304-1200

##### **PFLAG**

The largest organization for parents, families, friends, and allies of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Website: [plfag.org](http://plfag.org)

Phone number: 888-398-0006

##### **Trans Family Support Services**

Dedicated to guiding and supporting families of transitional youth.

Website: [www.transfamilyosos.org](http://www.transfamilyosos.org)

Phone number: 858-382-9156

#### Student support hotlines

-National Suicide Hotline:	800-SUICIDE (784-2433)
-Rape hotline:	408-287-3000
-Planned Parenthood:	650-948-0807
-Child Protective Services (CPS):	408-299-2071
-SAFE (Self Abuse Finally Ends):	800-273-8255
-Gay youth hotline:	800-246-7743
-Trans lifeline:	877-565-8860
-BRAVE (Bullying hotline):	212-709-3222
-The Trevor Project hotline	866-488-7386

## Social Resources

### Social Groups

#### **Hillcrest Youth Center**

Provides a safe and enjoyable space for youth in the San Diego area five days a week.

Website: [goo.gl/QzPfy](http://goo.gl/QzPfy)

Email: [HYC@thecentersd.org](mailto:HYC@thecentersd.org)

Phone number: 619-692-2077

#### **Guest speakers:**

-Program approved GSA guest speakers list: [goo.gl/DqicJj](http://goo.gl/DqicJj)

## Advocacy Resources

### Advocacy Groups

#### **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)**

Organization devoted to fighting for the rights of every person in the country regardless of race, gender, sexuality, or financial background.

Website: [aclu.org](http://aclu.org)

Phone number: 619-232-2121

San Diego Address: 2760 Fifth Ave #300, San Diego, CA 92103

#### **Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)**

The nation's largest LGBTQIA+ advocacy group focused on ensuring the safe and affirming schools for LGBTQIA youth.

Website: [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

San diego contact: [sandiego@chapters.glsen.org](mailto:sandiego@chapters.glsen.org)