

ETR Associates

Six Simple Strategies for Including Gay and Lesbian Youth

Many gay and lesbian youth engage in sexual intercourse with members of the other sex. They may engage in intercourse to try convincing themselves or others they are not gay or lesbian, they may simply be experimenting, or they may have other reasons. Regardless of the reason, these youth face the risk of unintended pregnancy and need to know about pregnancy prevention.

Unwittingly, many instructors alienate gay and lesbian youth during pregnancy prevention lessons with the language they use. Taking steps to creating a classroom climate that is safe for and inclusive of gay and lesbian youth is important if we want to include them in the learning.

The following simple strategies will help educators create safe, productive learning environments for their gay and lesbian students.

1. Assume that 10% of youth may be gay or lesbian and that a greater number of youth have important people in their lives who are gay or lesbian.
2. Change language that assumes everyone is or should be heterosexual; use “partner” rather than “girlfriend/boyfriend,” “permanent” relationship instead of “marriage.”
3. Use the term “sexual orientation” rather than “sexual preference” to avoid the inference that homosexuality is just a choice one makes.
4. When talking about puberty, describe sexual development in terms of becoming aware of romantic attractions and sexual feelings for someone rather than “when you become attracted to the opposite sex.”
5. Use the terms “gay” and “lesbian” rather than “homosexual.” The term homosexual focuses exclusively on the sexual aspect of being gay and lesbian.
6. Do not tolerate name calling or put-downs of gays and lesbians. Deal with derogatory statements as you would ethnic or racial slurs.

In addition to these simple strategies, you should become aware of local organizations and support groups for gay and lesbian youth. Share these resources with your students as appropriate.

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