

The Professional School Counselor and LGBTQ Youth

(Adopted 1995, Revised 2000, 2005, 2007)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

Professional school counselors promote equal opportunity and respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation/gender identity. Professional school counselors work to eliminate barriers that impede student development and achievement and are committed to academic, personal/social and career development of all students.

The Rationale

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (LGBTQ) youth often begin to experience self-identification during their pre-adolescent or adolescent years, as do heterosexual youth (Ryan, 1997). These developmental processes are essential cognitive, emotional and social activities, and although they may have an impact on student development and achievement, they are not a sign of illness, mental disorder or emotional problems nor do they necessarily signify sexual activity.

Some students face obstacles in school and society that inhibit them from understanding and accepting their sexual/gender identity or the identity of others (Savin-Williams, 1994). Students may face bullying, harassment and name-calling based on real or perceived sexual orientation/gender identity (GLSEN, 2004, 2005).

Professional school counselors realize these issues may infringe upon healthy student development and limit their opportunities in school and the community (GLSEN, 2005; Savin-Williams, 1994).

The Professional School Counselor's Role

The professional school counselor works with all students through the stages of identity development and understands this development may be more difficult for LGBTQ youth. It is not the role of the professional school counselor to attempt to change a student's sexual orientation/gender identity but instead to provide support to LGBTQ students to promote student achievement and personal well-being.

Professional school counselors:

- are aware of their own beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identity
- are knowledgeable of the negative effects that result from stereotyping individuals into rigid gender roles
- are committed to the affirmation of youth of all sexual orientations and identities

Identity development is an important developmental process for all students, and to assist in this development, professional school counselors:

- assist all students as they clarify feelings about their own sexual orientation/gender identity and the identity of others in a nonjudgmental manner
- advocate for equitable educational opportunities for all students
- address inappropriate language from students and adults
- promote sensitivity and acceptance of diversity among all students and staff
- provide LGBTQ-inclusive and age-appropriate information on issues such as family structures, dating and relationships and maintaining physical health
- model language that is inclusive of sexual orientation/gender identity
- encourage policies that address discrimination against any student
- promote violence-prevention activities to create a safe school environment that is free of fear, bullying and hostility

Recognizing that sexual orientation is not an illness and does not require treatment, professional school counselors may provide individual student planning or responsive services to LGBTQ students to:

- promote self-acceptance
- deal with social acceptance

- understand issues related to “coming out,” including issues that families may face when a student goes through this process
- identify appropriate community resources

Summary

Professional school counselors promote affirmation, respect and equal opportunity for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Professional school counselors also promote awareness of issues related to sexual orientation/gender identity among students, teachers, administrators, parents and the community. Professional school counselors work to eliminate barriers that impede student development and achievement and are committed to the academic, career and personal/social development of all students.

References

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Savin-Williams, R.C. (1994). Verbal and physical abuse as stressors in the lives of lesbian, gay male, and bisexual youths: Associations with school problems, running away, substance abuse, prostitution, and suicide. *Journal of Consulting Clinical Psychology*, 62, 261-69.

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