

“Gay Adolescents in Crisis in the U.S.”
by Toni D. Crespi & Richard P. Bieu
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One in six gay youth are beaten so savagely as to require medical attention. Approximately 20 percent of gay youth have been reported to remain at home rather than attend school because of risks for personal safety. In a basic way, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth are far more likely to be assaulted at school than their heterosexual classmates. Unquestionably, the issues are grim. Still, how many youth are impacted? How well informed are school counselors, administrators and teachers of the issues?

Physical beatings, threats and a fear of reprisal represent typical apprehensions faced by GLBT youth. At the same time, it is not solely peers who physically and emotionally abuse GLBT youth. It has also been reported that approximately 10 percent of GLBT youth have experienced emotional maltreatment by school faculty. In fact, the New York Governor’s Task Force on Biased-Related Violence described schools as one of the more homophobic institutions in the country.

School counseling can help!

Considerations for School Personnel

Schools and school faculty can exert a profound influence on a child’s development. Taking a long-sighted perspective, it may be time for schools to consider the positive ramifications of enhancing counseling and consultation services surrounding the issues confronting GLBT youth. With a myriad of mental health service providers – including school counselors, psychologists and social workers – schools can serve as a vital force in confronting this dramatic problem. We suggest the following:

- Fostering enhanced faculty awareness. There exists a paucity of knowledge about GLBT youth among faculty. School counselors, psychologists and social workers can increase understanding and awareness through in-service workshops, faculty handouts and by encouraging school administrators to create continuing education initiatives focused on increasing faculty awareness;
- Fostering school-community partnerships. Schools can serve as a vital community resource for GLBT youth. Community presentations, parent education workshops and

diversity classes are illustrations of different ways schools can serve as community resources;

- Fostering faculty consultation services. School faculty and administration can benefit from direct consultation services involving GLBT youth. Consultation models – which include client and consultee centered administrative consultation – are examples of theoretical approaches that can be used to help. Depending on the goal, consultation offers the opportunity to enhance skills, facilitate growth for students and faculty and provide a vehicle for active collaboration;
- Fostering opportunities for individual, group and family counseling. Direct counseling services remain a key role for school-based mental health professionals. With GLBT youth at risk for a range of physical and emotional difficulties, school-based counseling interventions can and should be elevated in priority. Whether providing individual counseling to students, working with classroom groups to foster sensitivity and awareness or working with families around identity development issues, counseling is a vital service for GLBT youth; and
- Fostering increased understandings of home-school issues. School-based mental health practitioners need to be up-to-date on relational issues and understand the particular stresses and strains experienced by families with GLBT youth.

With more than 2.6 million gay youth attending public schools and at risk for verbal abuse, physical assaults, alcoholism, depression and suicide, school-based mental health professionals are in a critical position from which to counsel students, educate faculty and provide consultative services for families and community resources.