

DAY OF SILENCE

RISE UP, TAKE ACTION!

GLSEN[®]

2024 Youth Programs Guide

glsen.org/DayOfNoSilence

INTRODUCTION

by Jaime, 17

UNSILENCING OUR VOICES

My identity and my peers' identities have been silenced. From book ban efforts to legislation targeting transgender and gender nonconforming (GNC) students, there is a noticeable effort to quiet youth voices across the nation. As a first-generation, Latine, queer person, I have had to navigate this discrimination and oppression from a different but universal experience among the queer Latine community. From a very young age, I learned that my obsession with Ariana Grande, Lady Gaga, and all things feminine was not the "norm" for my family, so I began to find outlets to express my true, authentic self.

In middle school, I founded Safe Spots, an unofficial club that students participated in during our recess period. Though the club lasted only 20 minutes, I explored parts of my identity and became aware of the issues that perpetuate our society. It was in these spots that I heard my friends' stories — stories of physical and emotional abuse, drug addiction, homelessness, and gun violence. Their stories and mine empowered me to mobilize change (in any way I could) as an 11-year-old. Additionally, while holding this space for students, a few of us participated in the day of silence despite lack of support. While we protested by staying silent, students laughed at us, calling us slurs and wishing us death. While we protested by staying silent, teachers called on us, hoping that they'd break our silence. And while we protested by staying silent, we spread awareness that LGBTQ+ students face immense amounts of bullying and harassment— that our community is a target. When my friends and I broke the silence after school in the only classroom that affirmed us, we shared what felt, to us, unshared experiences, but as we spoke, we came to find out that our experiences overlapped in some way—in a way that made me and my peers feel visible.

Although coming out was hard, I finally felt free from the fake identity I was stuck in. As a first-generation, Latine, queer person, I sought out opportunities to unsilence my and my peers' voices. The GSAs we started at our schools generated opportunities for us to find and uplift other queer students. The organizations we joined or started provided us with the autonomy to create change at the local level. The school board meetings we attended allowed us to express our opinions on what is directly impacting us. The days we protested at the capitol when we should have been in school gave us a voice that we thought would never be heard.

However, despite the work my peers and I have been doing, despite the fact that we have shown up, and despite the days we have committed to advocacy and community organization, the reality is that being an LGBTQ+ student in today's climate feels criminal. My transgender and GNC friends must use bathrooms that they do not feel comfortable with. My friends and I must use libraries that only brave, supportive teachers are willing to have. Our classrooms are becoming political battle zones. When I step on campus, I am no longer worried about turning my homework in; I am worried about my LGBTQ+ friends. When I walk into class, I am not worried about an upcoming test; I am worried about where I will exit in the event of a school shooting. These problems are seemingly unchecked by politicians. What can we do as a community? What can your supportive friends or family do? What can you do as a LGBTQ+-identifying student or ally?

THE IMPORTANCE OF DAY OF (NO) SILENCE

This year, GLSEN's Day of Silence takes place Friday April 12, 2024. With more than 800 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced last year, we must Rise Up and Take Action. GLSEN's Day of NO Silence is a nationally-recognized student-led demonstration where LGBTQ+ students and allies all around the country — and the world — protest the harmful effects of harassment and discrimination of LGBTQ+ people in schools.

This action guide was created by GLSEN's Youth Programs, National Student Council (NSC), and other GLSEN youth. In this guide, you'll read stories from members of the National Student Council (NSC), like Jaime, and then learn more

about actions you can take in your school. The actions are also centered around one of GLSEN's Four Supports: Student-led Organizations. As you're planning how you'll participate in Day of NO Silence this year, check out the examples below for ideas about ways to participate in your school and/or GSA. When these Four Supports are in place, LGBTQIA2S+ students experience less harassment and discrimination, do better in school, and experience a better school climate (GLSEN 2022).

WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

- Combat Censorship & Submit your story to the Rainbow Writes Award.
- Become a GLSEN Youth Member for ongoing connection opportunities!
- Take part in the National Student Council Survey (NSCS) and share your experiences.
- Host a Breaking The Silence or other event at your school!

PREPARE FOR THE DAY OF NO SILENCE

Planning is key! Here are steps to get started.

Here are some tips to get your started in planning for your Day of Silence:

- Gather interested students, GSAs, or clubs.
- Find a supportive adult ally.
- Register for the event with GLSEN.
- Coordinate with your local GLSEN Chapter.
- Develop an outreach plan, create posters, use social media, and school announcements.
- Discuss your goals, the change you wish to see, and the actions you'll take.

Event Ideas

- An art exhibition showcasing student work on LGBTQ+ rights.
- A Day of (No) Silence fashion show, allowing expression through attire.
- An open mic event for poetry and music focused on breaking silence.
- Post-event gatherings for educators to discuss safer learning environments.

Engage Your School with creative activities like:

- DIY swag parties featuring activist profiles.
- Note exchange activities with prompts about LGBTQ+ issues.
- Protest sign making focusing on intersectionality.
- Theatrical monologues or scenes depicting experiences of being silenced and speaking up!
- Create short films reflecting your experiences with Day of (No) Silence, in particular for those who have seen Day of Silence develop and respond to the moment over years.

Mobilize your school community by:

- Encouraging everyone to sign a pledge for a safer school environment.
- Engaging friends and peers to expand participation.
- Partnering with community organizations for collective action.
- Advocating for legislative changes and inclusive policies.
- Host a post-school-day community gathering for students to share stories from the day and connect with each other, while discussing ideas for creating safer learning spaces.

SILENCE IN SCHOOLS

By Ahlanna, 17

Silenced is a word that often describes my experience as a black queer woman in this society. On this Day of Silence, I asked myself what it means to actually be and feel silenced in the communities I engage in: In my school, when I try to address issues LGBTQ+ students are facing and am immediately shut down by administration, I feel frustrated, discouraged, and disappointed. When I am the only Black woman in the room during class discussions and am conveniently overlooked when I have something to offer, I feel isolated, neglected, and defeated. These feelings that I endured are not unique to my intersecting identities, but are emotions many individuals experience when they feel like they are neither seen nor heard in a space they occupy.

This Day of Silence, I plan to be loud so that when I speak about the issues that are impacting my intersecting communities I am both heard and seen as an individual. This day empowers young people who are often told to stand down and take the back seat to fight for what they believe in. No matter your age, your sexual identity, your socioeconomic status, or your cultural background your voice matters and is a crucial component to creating change in our society.

...because I am a black, queer woman and I will no longer be silenced.

HOST YOUR OWN BREAKING THE SILENCE RALLY

Make Your Voice Heard Locally

This year, GLSEN is taking a unique approach to the Day of (No) Silence: rather than hosting a large, national rally, we're empowering you to create ripples of change right in your own communities, schools, and student-led clubs. It's time to make so much noise locally that it reverberates everywhere!

Your Rally, Your Rules!

Whether it's through speeches, performances, art displays, or peaceful demonstrations, or a viewing of the 2023 Breaking the Silence Rally, your rally can be as unique as your message. Remember, the essence of this initiative is to break the silence — to speak out, to be heard, and to advocate for change.

Virtual Ideas

- Set up a video call via Zoom, Google Hangouts, Skype, etc.
- Invite your GSA, student club, and others from your school district to join virtually.
- Select a time where you will all Break the Silence virtually together! Unmute yourself and yell, say an empowering word, ring a bell, bang a pot, howl etc. Get creative!
- Set up a virtual open mic with a list of performers and speakers.
- Hold a discussion group to Break the Silence. Listen to their story, identify ways LGBTQ+ students in your group are experiencing silencing and erasure.
 - Why was it important to you to take action and participate in the Day of Silence?
 - How are LGBTQ+ students at this school experiencing silencing and erasure?
 - Identify things at this school that make you feel unsafe?
 - What is your vision for a liberated school environment? What does it look like?
 - Who is there with you? How do you feel?
 - What is different about this vision from your current reality?

In Person Ideas

- Safety plan by understanding school safety protocols for events. For gatherings and events, create a safety plan for the event space that is communicated to the students. Work with students to identify a safe location to hold an event or gathering as some students may feel unsafe being out in the open.

- Ring a bell or honk a horn and shout a word that makes you feel seen and strong!
- Set up an in person open mic with a list of speakers and performers.
- Host a panel discussion.
- Break the Silence by watching an LGBTQ+ focused movie, show, or youtube influencer. Movies and TV Series like [HairSpray](#), [Love, Simon](#), [Love Victor](#), [The Half of It](#), and [The Prom](#) have discussion guides you can use afterwards.

FIGHT CENSORSHIP WITH RAINBOW WRITES

By Via, 18

As a queer student, the entire genre of LGBTQ+ young adult literature completely changed my life. I remember being ten years old and reading my first book with a queer girl as the main character and being awestruck by the idea that I was lucky enough to have found another girl in the universe who had a crush on another girl (albeit a fictional girl, but who was I, a random tween Floridian, to be picky about this sort of thing?).

Naturally, I spent the next years of my life dedicated to devouring pretty much any novel I could find with a rainbow on the cover. I am embarrassed to say that I absolutely ransacked my local Barnes & Noble pride table every weekend (apologies to whoever walked in after me looking for organization). Like many other students who begin to come to terms with their own identity after seeing representations of people like them, I felt, for the first time ever, that I was not alone in my confusion about who I was and who I'd grow up to be.

Throughout my early teenage years, I began to compile a list of every queer book I read, writing notes about details that I thought were incredible, and sharing this with all of my friends who I thought needed to read something beautiful and impactful. This project of finding, reading, and sharing queer YA books began my own passion of sharing representation of marginalized groups to people who needed them. Eight years later, as an 18-year-old senior in high school, I entered a group of equally passionate teen activists around the country who shared my dreams of finding a way to spread this same queer joy to other kids across America.

Of course, time and time again, research has shown that diverse reading lists can further a sense of acceptance among students and allow all youth to see themselves represented within their materials — fostering a sense of self-confidence and self-validity in all respects. Queer kids are no different and especially require examples of affirming literature to support their identities and journeys toward self-acceptance. However, in 2023, LGBTQ+ students are facing unprecedented legislation and culture shifts across the country that aim to silence queer voices and push our stories out of school lessons, suggesting that learning from queer lives is unimportant and unvalued. This messaging is completely damaging to the millions of LGBTQ+ students in America today. GLSEN, in conjunction with all of us on the *Rainbow Writes* Team, is tackling this issue with a creative solution: if students do not freely get access to proper representations of themselves, they should be encouraged to write them.

Rainbow Writes, a national GLSEN writing contest, launched last year in an attempt to amplify queer voices and produce examples of authentic LGBTQ+ representation. In an age of rampant literary censorship of queer literature, we wanted to inspire and empower students to join the fight to perpetuate and normalize queer experiences in creative writing.

Visit [GLSEN.org/RainbowWrites](https://www.glsen.org/rainbowwrites) for the information on where to submit, writing prompts, and more!

Talk to your teacher or school administrator about requesting a [Rainbow Library](#) in your school or classroom!

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH AWARENESS

Navigating Hostile School Environments

As you gear up for Day of (No) Silence and plan to take action in your school, it's crucial to be informed about your rights, especially in less supportive environments. Understanding your rights is the first step towards effective and confident advocacy. This section is dedicated to empowering you with the knowledge you need to navigate potentially hostile school settings while making your voice heard.

We'll delve into the legal protections you have as a student, including the right to free speech, to form clubs, and to participate in peaceful protests. It's important to recognize the extent and limitations of these rights within the school context, so you can make informed decisions about your actions.. From organizing events to voicing concerns, we'll provide strategies to help you navigate challenges you might face, including how to respond to opposition or disciplinary actions.

Remember that even in the most hostile places, if a public school allows any extracurricular student-led clubs, they must allow students to start an LGBTQ+ focused club as well! The Equal Access Act of 1984 guarantees students the right to form a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance or Gender Sexuality Alliance) or any other type of LGBTQI+ student-initiated club and have it be recognized and treated the same as any other non-curricular student clubs.

- If your school already has a GSA, share this Day of (No) Silence Guide and use it as a guide to plan an action.
- If your school doesn't have a GSA, consider starting a GSA! Check out GLSEN's Jumpstart Guide and other [resources on starting a GSA in your school!](#)
- If your school refuses to recognize a student-initiated GSA, consider sharing this [letter from the ACLU](#) with school leadership. The ACLU has several relevant letters to use when fighting LGBTQ+ discrimination in school.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

In the U.S., it's crucial for students to be aware of their rights regarding school protests. While students in public schools retain their First Amendment rights, meaning they can speak out, wear expressive clothing, and distribute flyers, these activities must not disrupt the functioning of the school or violate content-neutral policies.

Schools can discipline students for participating in walkouts since attendance laws require students to go to school. However, this discipline must be consistent with the punishments given for other unexcused absences. Schools cannot impose harsher punishments just because the absence is for a political protest, as this would violate the First Amendment.

Walkouts, as acts of civil disobedience, are not granted the same protection as other forms of speech like wearing political symbols. This means schools can take corrective actions for unexcused absences, even those related to political protests, but these actions must not be more severe than for other similar infractions.

Additionally, while students have broad rights to express political views at school, including wearing buttons or distributing petitions, schools can adopt reasonable rules regulating the time, place, and manner of these activities. These regulations are permissible as long as they don't discriminate based on the message's content and don't disrupt school operations.

While students have the right to express their political views and engage in protests, they must also adhere to school policies and be prepared for the standard consequences of missing class, ensuring that any disciplinary actions are fair and consistent with those given for other reasons

At schools with policies that explicitly protect students based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion, LGBTQ students report experiencing less

bullying and feeling safer overall. They also report that teachers are more likely to intervene when bullying occurs (GLSEN, 2022). Inclusive policies reduce the likelihood that an LGBTQ+ person's rights are violated and make clear what someone can do to remedy the situation if there is a violation. In hostile environments without clear, inclusive protective policies, LGBTQ+ educators and students are still protected by Title IX in U.S. public schools.

If you witnessed or heard about discrimination against a student, you can file a complaint with your school or district's Title IX Civil Rights Coordinator, or directly with the [U.S. Department of Education](#).

Every student has the power to make their school more inclusive for BIPOC youth, LGBTQ+ youth, and disabled youth. Keep in mind that there is strength in numbers: Leverage your network to advance change! Find supportive teachers, administrators, families, organizers, and local organizations who will fiercely advocate for inclusive policies in your school. Review your school & district policies with these advocates, especially those relevant to bullying, bathroom/locker room access, and dress code.

As a final note, we would urge any student in a hostile environment to have an action plan in the event they experience retaliation.

- Create documentation of times, dates, locations, and witnesses. Build a file for notes and evidence, and keep it secure.
- Remember: time is of the essence. In many cases, a complaint must be filed within 180 days of when the bullying, harassment, or discrimination occurred.
- For legal advice, contact the ACLU's National LGBTQ Project (help-lgbtq@aclu.org) or Lambda Legal.

EMPOWERING VOICE

Self-Advocacy in Rural Communities

By Mia, 17

It's the most hopeless feeling when suffering occurs in silence and you are told to bite your tongue. Growing up queer in a small, rural town, I was told to sit on my words and mind my hubris. It was something adventurous and daring to advocate for my worth. When I was jagged and crooked trying to fit into the straight boxes that everyone else was able to, existing and taking up space felt like a burden. It felt almost villainous to say that I needed help. I tried limitless ways to make myself small but it was futile. It wasn't until I'd discovered others facing the same issues that I realized that the problem wasn't with me, it was with the spaces which refused to accommodate an existence outside of the status quo. Regardless of your place in the status quo, you are worthy, wanted, and loved. You deserve a space which allows for your existence.

Rural towns' lack of resources can make advocacy incredibly difficult. While those from urban and suburban areas may appear to have the world at their fingertips, those in rural towns often need to relentlessly advocate for the same resources. Additionally, echo chambers can easily arise in rural towns, meaning that toxic beliefs are empowered and many are gaslighted into believing that they do not belong or that their needs are "too much." For example, many trans youth are told that learning their name and/or pronouns would be "too difficult" for reasons ranging from upbringing to the amount of time someone has known the trans person. When an entire community backs these beliefs, it's hard to see the fallacious nature of these statements. This is why self advocacy is so important. But how do you effectively advocate for yourself?

1. Assess your safety

Your safety is paramount in all situations. Especially for youth that are not fully out, it's important to consider how to best and most safely approach advocacy. In rural towns, gossip spreads extremely quickly so be sure to assess that sensitive information is only shared with trustworthy people.

2. Find a trusted adult

There are a number of reasons why this is an important step. Due to adultism, youth and their ideas are often dismissed which is why having an adult to back you is vital. Additionally, having a trusted adult can help if things go past the point that you are able to advocate for yourself. Part of your advocating for yourself may mean that for your own mental health or safety, you may need to ask another to advocate on your behalf.

3. Figuring out how to best convey your message

The first thing to consider is who you want your message to get to. Is it a student, a parent, an administrator? What will that person be most receptive to? Would they prefer you bring up the issue face-to-face or would an email be better? If it's a repeated offense, would asking a higher up, like an administrator, to step in be more effective? What tone do you want your message to convey? These are all some great questions to start with when trying to communicate your needs.

4. Document, document, document

If this is the first time an issue is arising, you may not think that this is a necessary step but being over-prepared never hurt anyone. It's important that you document exactly what the issue is and how you advocated to resolve it. This is easy for electronic advocacy, like text messages and emails, but it's important to document what doesn't have a paper trail as well. This can be as simple as making use of your Notes app or jotting a quick note in a journal. In case the problem becomes recurring (or even if it already is), this will become very useful.

5. Say something

Now that you've assessed the safety of your situation, found your trusted adult, worked out the best way to convey your message, and documented the issue thoroughly, it's time that you address the issue. Make sure that you remain calm and respectful. Remember that when an individual is causing harm, it may be entirely unintentional. Assuming good intentions and giving them the benefit of the doubt will not only help them be more receptive to your message but will likely be better for your mental health and peace of mind. However, regardless of intention, when someone is doing harm or a system is not accommodating you, it is their responsibility to correct it. Make it clear to them exactly what the issue is and how you think it would be best resolved. If you are unable to advocate alone or you need help figuring out what to say, it is okay to ask for help. I know that it can be incredibly difficult, but I am so proud of you for taking the steps to ensure your needs are met.

SPEAK UP: PARTICIPATE IN THE NATIONAL SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY

By Mary, 17

It was a new school, a whole new hallway to get used to. Stuck with online learning due to COVID-19 for a year, the noisy, clustered hallway seemed out of place. I still remember my outfit that day: white straight-legged jeans and an oversize white t-shirt with some designs on the back. I picked a pair of sneakers with vibrant colors to have a piece of clothing stand out, and my hair was tied back. Being Eastern Asian in a white-dominated school makes me stand out. Still, dressing gender-neutral and embracing my sexual orientation makes me stand out more within this conservative school of mine. A group of boys, four, were walking towards me in the hallway. I did not know if it was the ambience I gave off or my outfit of the day, but I was called a slur, and certain aggressive remarks were made about me. I yelled back, and defended myself, but that feeling of emptiness and helplessness remained.

Within the newest data from GLSEN School Climate Survey, LGBTQ+ students who were surveyed, 81.8% of LGBTQ+ students in the survey reported feeling unsafe in school because of at least one of their actual or perceived personal characteristics. And the data doesn't end there unfortunately.

The sense of helplessness, sympathy, and empathy bring us, LGBTQ+ students, to solidarity to fight back and voice our anger towards this unfair treatment. And that is the importance of the Day of Silence. We have no choice in our sexual orientation, gender and so many personal indicating factors, so why should any one deserve to be shamed for being themselves. But this fight can not be done on our own, we need the support of everyone and allies. So please join us and fight this unfair battle. Please speak up for us, share our stories, and let our voices be heard. It may take time and effort, but if this can make one child feel easier being themselves, then it is all worth it.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY

This survey is about school experiences of youth who are LGBTQIA2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, two-spirit, and more) or questioning. The information you share will be used to work toward safe and affirming schools for LGBTQIA2S+ youth like yourself. In this survey, we will ask questions about you, your school, and your experiences in school during the 2023- 2024 school year. For example, some questions are about where you feel safe or unsafe at school, what you might look forward to at school, and your participation in extracurriculars.

Who can take the survey?

If you are 13 years or older and identify as LGBTQ+ and/or two spirit and you attended middle or high school in the US last year, this survey is for you. At GLSEN, we know that LGBTQ+ youth of color, trans students, students with disabilities, youth living in rural areas have unique experiences in schools. If you are a student with those experiences and identities, we especially want to hear from you!

Why should I take this survey?

You get to be part of thousands of LGBTQIA2S+ students who are making their voice heard. Sharing your experiences will help GLSEN's work toward safe and affirming schools for LGBTQIA2S+ youth like yourself. GLSEN has consistently advocated for schools across the country to have teachers and staff that support students like yourself, opposed book bans, and supported school policies that are about your well-being and safety in schools.

Where can I take this survey?

You can find the survey here: <https://www.glsen.org/research/2024-national-school-climate-survey>

If you have questions about the National School Climate Survey, you can email GLSEN Research, glsenresearch@glsen.org

Join the Movement: Become a GLSEN Youth Member!

Are you passionate about making a difference in your school and community? Do you want to connect with LGBTQIA2S+ youth nationwide and be a part of something bigger? If so, GLSEN invites you to become a Youth Member!

As a GLSEN Youth Member, you'll have the unique opportunity to join a vibrant network of LGBTQIA2S+ students from across the country. This is your chance to engage in meaningful programs, contribute to our vision, and play a crucial role in creating safer, more inclusive schools for everyone.

By signing up, you'll gain access to exclusive resources, participate in national campaigns, and have a platform to share your voice and ideas. This is more than just a membership; it's a chance to be at the forefront of change, to learn, grow, and lead in the movement for LGBTQIA2S+ rights and education.

Ready to Rise Up? It's easy to get started! Simply email us at students@glsen.org with the subject line "YOUTH MEMBERSHIP," and we'll send you the application. Don't miss this chance to be part of a community that's reshaping the future, one school at a time. Join us and be a part of the change you wish to see!

Conclusion: Together, We Create Change

As we close this guide, remember that your journey in advocating for LGBTQIA2S+ rights and creating safer schools doesn't end here. Each step you take, each voice raised, contributes to a larger movement—a movement towards understanding, acceptance, and equality.

The Day of (No) Silence is just the beginning. There are countless opportunities to continue making a difference, to keep learning, and to find support.

Below are some resources that can guide and empower you on your journey:

- GLSEN: For comprehensive resources, support, and information on LGBTQIA2S+ student rights and advocacy. Visit [GLSEN.org](https://www.glsen.org)
- LGBTQ+ Legal Rights: The ACLU provides information on legal rights for LGBTQ+ students. If you're facing challenges in school or need legal guidance, they can help. Learn more at [ACLU.org](https://www.aclu.org)
- It Gets Better Project: A platform to uplift, empower, and connect LGBTQ+ youth across the globe, offering stories and resources to inspire. Check out [ItGetsBetterProject.org](https://www.itgetsbetterproject.org)
- The Trevor Project: Offers crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ+ youth. Reach out to [TheTrevorProject.org](https://www.thetrevorproject.org)
- Lambda Legal: Provides legal assistance and advocacy in LGBTQ+ rights cases. Explore [LambdaLegal.org](https://www.lambdalegal.org)
- PFLAG: An extensive network of support for LGBTQ+ individuals, their parents, families, and allies. Connect with [PFLAG.org](https://www.pflag.org)

Every action you take towards advocacy, every story you share, and every stand you make against injustice strengthens our collective journey towards a more accepting and equal society. You are not alone in this fight, and your efforts make a real difference in the lives of many. Together, we can continue to push boundaries, change hearts and minds, and build a world where every student, regardless of their identity, feels valued and safe. Keep speaking, keep acting, and keep striving for the change you wish to see. Thank you for being an essential part of this movement.

Forward Ever. 🏳️‍🌈👑

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