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# 4

## LIFE AT SCHOOL



**I can't even think straight.**

One of the most challenging parts of being a GLBTQ teen can be coping with life at school. You've got social hierarchies and cliques, teachers piling on the homework, and administrators watching your every move. Meanwhile, you're going through the normal stages of adolescence, which probably have you feeling anything *but* normal. And on top of all that, you're coming to terms with being GLBTQ.

From *GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens* by Kelly Huegel, copyright © 2003. Free Spirit Publishing Inc., Minneapolis, MN; 866-703-7322; [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com).

## School Life for GLBTQ Teens: The Big Picture

Recent surveys have revealed that life at school can be pretty uncomfortable and even scary for many GLBTQ teens. A national survey conducted in 2001 by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that 83 percent of the GLBTQ teens had been called names or threatened; 65 percent had been sexually harassed with sexual comments or inappropriate touching; 42 percent had been physically harassed by being pushed or shoved; 21 percent had been physically assaulted at school by being punched, kicked, or hurt with a weapon; and 31 percent had been harassed because of their gender expression (the way they dressed or acted).

Other surveys in Massachusetts and Vermont have had similar findings: GLBTQ teens are more likely to get involved in fights at school that require them to receive medical attention, more likely to be threatened or injured with a weapon, and (not surprisingly) more likely to skip school because of concerns for their safety than their heterosexual peers.

### BEEN THERE

**“In ninth grade, my second day at public school, I was walking down the hall and a young male said the word that wounds every gay teenager—fag. From there on things snowballed. Daily, more and more people would use those hate words: fag, homo, queer, sissy. Eventually, things moved from words to also violence and pranks. I even had death threats.”—Robert, 15**

The picture isn't all bad, though, and it's changing. There are some very exciting things happening in schools all across the country that are improving life for GLBTQ students. Kevin Jennings, Executive Director of GLSEN, states, “From policy makers to parents, an increasing number of people are realizing the urgent need for LGBT students to receive equal treatment in our public schools. And more and more of them are willing to advocate for this cause.” GLSEN still says the majority of GLBTQ high school students are regularly harassed by their peers, but as of March 2003, it also had 1,680 student gay-straight

"Dealing with the realization that you are or might be gay, lesbian, transgender, or questioning (GLBTQ) can be a real challenge. *And I know just how it feels.*"

—Author Kelly Huegel

# GLBTQ

Are you queer or questioning? If you are, this book is for you. Do you know someone who might be queer or questioning? If so, this book is for you, too. Or are you someone who just wants to learn more about what it's like to be queer or questioning? This book is a great place to begin.

Discovering that you, or someone you love, might be GLBTQ is a revelation. Accepting it is a process. One thing that can help that process is information. This book can't answer all of your questions or counter all of the misinformation, misconceptions, myths, half-truths, and outright lies you might have heard about being GLBTQ, but it's a start.

Look inside for:

- Insights and findings from experts in psychology, sociology, and health care
- Tips from people in national GLBTQ organizations
- Strategies and advice you can try (or share) about coming out, responding to homophobia, dating, staying healthy and safe, exercising your rights, life at school, building community, dealing with religion and culture, and planning for the future
- Books, organizations, and Web sites you can go to when you want to know more
- True stories of teens and young adults who've experienced or witnessed the prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and violence that are part of everyday life for many GLBTQ teens
- First-person comments from GLBTQ teens who are happy, well-adjusted, loved and supported for who they are, the way they are

"Addresses the concerns and questions GLBTQ youth face every day . . . helps to dispel the myths . . . advocates on behalf of GLBTQ teens . . . gives GLBTQ youth a real voice. *Kelly Huegel has written a truly inspiring book.*" —Steve Cozza, Eagle Scout, Cofounder of Scouting for All

**KELLYHUEGEL** is a writer and communications professional. She received critical acclaim for her first book, *Young People and Chronic Illness*. She lives in the Washington, D.C., area.

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