

# GENDER LIBERATION IN VERMONT SCHOOLS



RESOURCES FOR  
YOUTH AND ADULTS  
WORKING TO CREATE  
GENDER INCLUSIVE  
SCHOOLS

# MAKING THE CASE FOR GENDER LIBERATION IN SCHOOLS

## WHAT IS GENDER LIBERATION?

We deserve gender liberation, where ALL people understand themselves free of pressures to conform or limit who they can be based on their assigned sex. Individuals, groups, and systems work to either uplift liberation or instill fear and conformity. Gender liberation needs to happen at all levels.

## WHY GENDER LIBERATION?

*2015 Transgender Equality Survey, Vermont report:*

- 68% of Vermonters who were out or perceived as transgender in K-12 were verbally harassed
- 22% were physically attacked
- 8% were sexually assaulted.

## THE DATA

*2019 YRBS (Youth Risk Behavior Survey): a state-wide survey given at all public middle and high schools to assess risks and protective factors for youth wellness*

LGBT youth are:

- Twice as likely to be bullied during the past month (31% vs 15%)
- 2.5 times more likely to skip school due to safety concerns at or on their way to or from school (13% vs. 5%)
- Four times more likely to have made a suicide plan during the past year (36% vs 9%)
- Five times more likely to have attempted suicide during the past year (19% vs 4%)

## YOUR STORY MATTERS



## MINORITY STRESS PERSPECTIVE

Coping with hostile environments leads trans, non-binary, and gender nonconforming youth to internalize messages of harm and risk, which limits their safety and wellness. When we say that youth are at risk, it is not because of who they are, it is because of what they have to cope with-- communities that do not welcome them.



## MAKING CHANGE TOGETHER

The challenges of living in a cis-sexist and transphobic world are not the fault of youth, but these challenges are something youth and allied adults can change. We can change the story and the circumstances for trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth in our schools.



This toolkit has resources for you to build a campaign for gender liberation in your school. Heck yeah!

# SOME IDEAS OF ACTIONS TO TAKE TO RESPOND TO TRANSPHOBIA AND CIS-SEXISM AT YOUR SCHOOL

## INDIVIDUAL

- Check in with your trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming friend. Ask, "What do you need?" and take time to listen.
- Offer a buddy system if harassment and harm is happening. No one should be alone if they don't want to be.
- Be okay with being uncomfortable, someone else's gender is not about you!
- Stop your gender assumptions! Ask about pronouns, assume nothing based on how someone looks, get used to not knowing, and be okay with it!
- Find allies everywhere! Ask people you know to stand with trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth.

## GROUP

- Plan a movie event with a trans, non-binary, or gender non-conforming lead-- one that celebrates all the gender goodness, not just the harm of transphobia
- Gender Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) can be powerful places of support, friendship, and action! Together you can organize letter writing to administrators, plan a gender free day of action, brainstorm and plan other actions.
- Find allied groups! Ask other groups-- environmental, racial justice, and social action groups in your school and community-- to show up to support trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth. Build mutual support and accountability, so you can show up for each other, and we can all get more free.
- Join Outright's GSA Network for support, people power, and fun. Work together with other GSAs across the state to make things better for trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth.

## SYSTEM

- Work to change your school's policies where inclusion of transgender and non-binary youth would help make things better.
- Advocate for training for faculty and staff on transgender and non-binary inclusion in schools.
- Find where gender exclusion impacts the school community: bathrooms, changing rooms, sports teams, etc. Research solutions, offer them to administrators.

**IT TAKES ALL THESE LEVELS IF WE WANT WHOLE SCHOOL CHANGE**

# 8 STEPS TO GENDER LIBERATION

## UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

1

### ANALYSIS AND EDUCATION

Get educated! This can look like reading a book, talking to folks impacted by transphobia in your school, going to other groups and getting more info, researching issues online, asking knowledgeable people for their take on things. And don't just accept what you learn: How does what you learn confirm or challenge what you already know? Does what you are learning lead to increasing self-determination and freedom, or limit what is possible? The more you know, the more choices you get to make. You are already doing it by reading this!

2

### WHO'S GOT THE POWER?

There are lots of ways we can exercise our power. Figure out who in your community has these 3 types of power-- including you!, and think about WHERE you are wanting to target your actions. Oftentimes we need to activate all types of influence in making change.

- **Numbers**, which usually means masses of people calling for change.
- **Influence**, People who have moral and social power in the community.
- **Money**, people who have a ton of it, to give, to take, to lose.

## DECIDING ON PRIORITIES

3

### VISION TOGETHER!

Come together with your people around a shared vision-- build it together! Don't start small, start big and check your actions against your vision. If your vision is to end transphobia and gender segregation in your school, don't settle for a vision of a single gender free bathroom. Check in with your vision as you move on your change project.

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### ALLIES ARE EVERYWHERE

Allies come in all shapes and sizes. When we understand the issues that lead to transphobia and gender segregation in schools, we see that there are folks who could benefit from these changes, and asking them for support, partnership, and coalition is for all of our benefits. Folks working to end rape culture, sexism, racism, ableism-- everyone is impacted. Working together, we can all get more free.



# CAMPAIGN PLANNING FOR YOUR SCHOOL

## TAKE ACTION

### ALL THREE LEVELS

Planning actions targeted at a change for ending gender binary domination requires awareness of all three circles (individual, group, and system). Choose a progression of actions that work at different circles, and work to see how the actions you all choose build on each other. If individuals go and talk to a single administrator, what actions can be geared toward the group of teachers? What messages, media, or statements to the whole system will uplift your individual and group actions?

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### RISK TAKING

Everyone has a move they can make that will constitute a risk for them. Some folks' risks are other folks' comfort zone. What risks are you willing to take to make this change happen? How can you ask for support from your comrades and allies to take the risks that feel right for you?

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## ACT, REFLECT, CELEBRATE, AND ACT!

### SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

When you are making moves-- having meetings, making tshirts, tabling, making events happen-- you need to give and receive support! Our work in gender liberation means that we want ALL of us to be free, and we get free by taking care of each other and supporting each other in the work we are doing together. Build each other up! Make space for each other to give and receive support

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### ASSESS, LEARN, ACT, AND CELEBRATE

How did it go? Once you do a thing, make sure you assess its impact on you campaign goals and vision. What did you learn? How did it feel to take those risks? Be sure to schedule time to reflect, let those reflections inform your next moves, and make sure to celebrate when you achieve a goal along the way. Gender liberation is a long process, and the moves we make for trans, gender non-conforming, and non-binary youth are worth celebrating.

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# SCHOOL BASED CHANGE

## DECISION MAKING BODIES

### VERMONT AGENCY OF EDUCATION

"The Agency of Education implements state and federal laws, policies, and regulations to ensure all Vermont learners have equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities." - AOE website



The Agency of Education can be a resource for information and accountability about laws in the state and how your school is implementing those laws. Here is a link to best practices for schools in creating welcome for trans youth. [www.outrightvt.org/bestpracticesfaq/](http://www.outrightvt.org/bestpracticesfaq/)

### LOCAL AUTONOMY

Vermont has a high level of local and school autonomy. School districts work to set policies, and individual schools implement those policies. Depending on the change desired, choosing to focus on specific teachers, school administrators, or school boards impacts different levels of change. Even if policy changes happen at the district level, they need to be followed up with in the school to make sure there is accountability for the changes that are called for.



## STRATEGIC MOVES

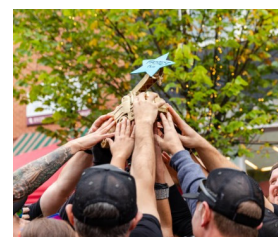
### STARTING FROM THE GROUND UP

Often called base building, doing grassroots on the ground work of educating your school community, increasing visibility and awareness around gender liberation, and building allies and support is a key piece to making the change more possible. People power is real, and having more people in your corner builds support for the risks we need to take.



### STARTING FROM THE TOP

When you have done the analysis to identify the decision maker who can make all the difference, direct communication and request to that decision maker can be a good choice. Developing education tools for leaders, practicing standing in the truth and vision of gender liberation that you are reaching for and honing requests to be as clear as possible can help make this strategy more effective.



## KEY DEFINITIONS

- **Trans(gender):** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Gender nonconforming:** umbrella term used to describe people who do not follow other people's ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Many gender non-conforming people identify as trans and/or non-binary, not all trans and non-binary people identify as gender non-conforming.
- **Non-Binary:** umbrella term for all genders other than female/male or woman/man, used as an adjective. Many nonbinary people identify as trans; not all trans people identify as nonbinary.
- **Cissexism:** prejudice or discrimination against transgender people.
- **Gender Binary:** A system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two, opposite categories, termed "male and female", in which no other possibilities for gender or anatomy are believed to exist.

for youth

# 6 WAYS TO ALLY

with your trans, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming friends

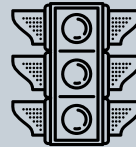


## 1 PRACTICE PRONOUNS

When your friend tells you pronouns, use them! Practice makes perfect-- practice alone, with friends. Show respect folks' pronouns.

## 2 LEARN AND LISTEN

If you don't understand something, instead of having your friend explain all of it, look it up online! A great site to check out is [www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org) for all kinds of good info. Then, when you are listening to your friend, you can make space for your friend to share thoughts, feelings experiences without having to educate you!



## 3 WATCH YOUR GENDERED ASSUMPTIONS

We learn, FROM BIRTH, that gender is fixed and a binary. Take the time to look at your assumptions, talk to other folks about it, ask yourself why do I think this is normal for a gender? Unlearn your assumptions!



## 4 ALLY IS A VERB

Think about what YOU can DO to show up in your school, with your other friends, as an ally Stand up against transphobia. Recognize transphobia when it happens and work to make it stop.



## 5 STAY IN YOUR LANE

When we show up as allies, we might overstep and think that we need to speak FOR our friends. As an ally we are there to stand WITH your friend, and share why ending transphobia is important for YOU. A great way to be an ally is to help make space for your friend so your friend can speak.



## 6 COMMUNICATE!

Most important is to keep on communicating with your friend, include your friend in your life, and make space to check in. You are there as an ally and friend, learning and growing together. Also know your limits here, and reach out for help if you need it. Your friend should not feel alone, and neither should you.





for adults

# 5 WAYS TO ALLY

with trans, non-binary, and gender  
non-conforming youth in your life



## affirm self-determination

The most powerful gift you can give to youth who share their truth as trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming people is the gift of affirmation.

Accepting the self-determination of coming out is always the right choice. Use correct pronouns and names, and educate yourself about trans and non-binary realities.



## question your gender assumptions

We learn, FROM BIRTH, that gender is fixed and a binary.

Take time to look at your assumptions, talk to other folks about it, ask yourself: why do I think this is normal for a gender? Unlearn your assumptions!



## leverage your authority

As an adult in relationships with youth, you have the opportunity to take your position of authority-- as a parent, a teacher, an employer, a friend-- to uplift the needs of youth who do not have that. Listen to youth needs, understand your role in advocating for change that impacts youth.



## ally is a verb

Think about what YOU can DO to show up for the youth in your life as an ally. Stand up against transphobia. Recognize transphobia when it happens and work to make it stop.



## communicate!

Most importantly, keep on communicating with the trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth in your life. Include them in decisions that are relevant to them. Learn and grow in relationship together. And know your limits: reach out for help if you need it. The youth in your life should not feel alone, and neither should you.



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