

SCHOOL WALKOUTS



BY QUEER YOUTH, FOR QUEER YOUTH



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Queer Youth Assemble Queer Youth Walkout guide. Created for the nationwide Queer Youth Walkout and modified into a general walkout resource, this guide features everything you need to know about walking out of school. Inside, you will find tips on organizing a walkout, walkout safety & security, handling backlash from school administration, accessibility, COVID safety, and more information on how to make your walkout accessible and successful.



WALKOUT STATEMENT

Queer Youth Assemble fully supports the right to freedom of speech, and the concept of peaceful student walkouts, as we believe both are integral parts in creating an environment where new ideas can spread, grievances can be shown, and immediate, effective change can occur. While we are fully supportive of peaceful walkouts, we cannot endorse walkouts that involve the initiation of violence or destruction of property, as the effects can be detrimental to students and educators alike.

We encourage anyone organizing and/or participating in a school wide walkout to organize with a safety and security plan in place to prevent any potentially hazardous situations from occurring. Look out for one another, watch for signs of distress, de-escalate any distressful situation peacefully, and keep the peace going. Overall, we ask that you walk out safely, peacefully, and loudly. Together, we will take back queer youth autonomy, one walkout at a time.



WHY A WALKOUT?

Walkouts allow students to engage in political action. Youth cannot vote and do not have much economic sway, but walking out, especially out of school, can be very powerful.

Walkouts are impactful. They let many people who recognize an issue come together and express their thoughts and emotions, raising awareness among other students, staff, and their wider community.

Walkouts can get media attention. If you are able to get many people to walk out with you, local media and newspapers may get involved, and can help spread your message and raise awareness of your issue at an even broader scale.



WALKOUT SAFETY

Carefully consider safety—are you likely to experience backlash? From your school/peers/police/parents? Will this backlash put you at physical or emotional risk? It's no secret that supporting a cause takes some sacrifice, however, there are many ways to support and be involved without the heightened risks.

In order to reduce the risks of a walkout:

- **Walk peacefully.** Queer Youth Assemble does not endorse walkouts that involve violence or destruction of property.
- **Walk with a group of friends.** This is especially helpful if you are nervous about walking in large crowds, or are nervous about retaliation.
- **Stay in the back.** If you would like to stay anonymous due to your safety being at risk, stay in the back of the walkout, and cover any identifying features. Wearing a face mask for Covid safety can also help protect your identity, especially if photos or videos are being recorded for social media or news outlets.



WALKOUT ALTERNATIVES 1/2

While we encourage all students to participate in a peaceful walkout, some schools may not allow it, and will threaten discipline or use other intimidation tactics. The logistics of organizing a walkout can also be too much to handle sometimes.

If your school falls into any of the above circumstances, you may want to consider the following alternatives.

- **Have a day of action** where students wear a certain color to show solidarity. This way, students do not need to leave the school building.
- **Host an event after school.** While this is not always an option, some schools will allow it instead of a demonstration during school.
- **Host an event** that isn't on school property and doesn't occur during school hours.



WALKOUT ALTERNATIVES 2/2

Walkouts can be inaccessible for some individuals. Having alternative ways to support can help get a broader community involved in the issue and extend action beyond the walkout.

- **Develop email templates/phone call scripts** for students to send out. This can involve researching specific bills in specific state legislatures, compiling emails/phone numbers of state legislators, and having an email/phone banking session before, during, or after your walkout.
- **Put flyers up** in your community with QR codes or distribute pamphlets that spread awareness about the issue you're protesting or bringing awareness to.
- **Gather petitions** people can sign, **organizations** to donate to, **and mutual aid funds** so people can provide direct support to those impacted by the issue.



ORGANIZING WALKOUTS 1/2

From [National Youth Rights Association](#)

Walkouts are more effective when connected to a larger movement, such as the queer youth movement being built by QYA.

Publicity is key. Make flyers and posters to advertise the walkout. To raise awareness of the issue itself, create pamphlets and hand them out in your town or school, or as part of an event with a school club. Use social media, and school and local news to get more people involved. Be sure to prepare statements if there is interview interest from news outlets.

Creating more permanent or visual content is very beneficial. **Use flyers and pamphlets to raise awareness** of the issue, actions to take against it, and the walkout itself. You can also experiment with art, such as chalking on public sidewalks or distributing zines.



ORGANIZING WALKOUTS 2/2

From [National Youth Rights Association](#)

Record your walkout, and use social media or local/school news to spread your message.

Potential issues to prepare for:

- Check your schools policies on unexcused absences, so you are prepared if you are punished for participating in the walkout. You should be given the same punishment as missing class for any other reason, and more extensive punishments may be an indication of the school's negative opinions of your engagement in free speech.
- You can also be punished for disrupting education. This is subjective, but could include class interruptions, threatening behavior or words, preventing school events from occurring, or even parental backlash. Ensure your walkout is peaceful to avoid any potential punishments in this regard.



CONTACTING THE SCHOOL

Identify supportive adults, such as GSA advisors or guidance counselors, who may be able to help you approach your school's administration.

Communicate your intentions and motivations clearly. Explain the issue, why it's harmful, and how your walkout is part of a larger movement.

Be open to negotiation. Your school may not want to support your walkout or threaten you with punishment. In this situation, carefully evaluate what other options besides walkouts you have, and do your research on your school's actual policies to know if they're being distorted. This is also when connection to larger movements or news and social media is helpful. Public oversight can be very effective in pressuring schools.



HANDLING PROBLEMS 1/2

From [ACLU](#)

The First Amendment protects your right to free speech, even if your points are controversial. You are allowed to engage in free speech protests/walkouts in public forums, including local streets, sidewalks, and parks.

If police become involved:

- Do not argue with the officer. Request to speak to a supervisor and explain how your actions are protected under the First Amendment and you are not disrupting others. Obey the officer to avoid potential arrest or further issues.

Counterdemonstrators are permitted to be present and voice opposing opinions to your walkout. They should not attempt to stop your action or cause harm to anyone involved. If counterdemonstrators are present and the situation escalates, police may become involved.



HANDLING PROBLEMS 2/2

From [ACLU](#)

During your walkout, you may want to distribute pamphlets or flyers with information about your cause. You are permitted to approach people on public sidewalks with information or petitions without a permit.

Best practices to avoid issues:

- Remain peaceful and non-disruptive
- Contact your school's administration prior to walking out
- Try to gain as much support from students and student groups as possible
- Make people engaging in your walkout aware of the potential risks (unexcused absence, administrative action, legal punishment)
- Have a plan for each of these scenarios, and a list of organizations or adults that can assist you if you need it



ACCESSIBILITY

A school walkout is far more limited in typical accessibility measures due to lack of budget and little control over venue and available resources.

Offer multiple ways to be involved without attending in person, and be aware and sensitive of individuals needs (such people leaving early or midway, not participating, using headphones to reduce noise, needing to move around, or needing information communicated alternatively or more slowly).

Ensure all distributed content is accessible: use [high contrast colors](#), [dyslexia friendly fonts](#), avoid unnecessarily bright/busy/complex imagery, provide image descriptions of visual content, and offer multiple ways to access resources



COVID SAFETY

From [UW Medicine](#)

Wear a mask, preferably a medical-grade surgical mask or N95, that covers your nose and mouth at all times. Avoid those not wearing masks. Aim to **be outside or maintain distance** with other people in attendance.

Self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms afterwards. Have a plan to make attendees of your walkout aware if someone tests positive for COVID-19. This could be through your social media, or through the school if you are able to get administrative support.

Remember, there are many people who are still at risk from COVID-19. Reasonable precautions must be taken to protect all in attendance, particularly those who are disabled, live with elderly or immunocompromised people, and those who cannot afford or access healthcare.



ABOUT QYA

Queer Youth Assemble is a queer youth-led nonprofit serving queer and trans youth under 25 in the United States.

To find more resources like this one, learn more about our work, or get involved yourself, go to our website queeryouthassemble.org or visit our Instagram [@queeryouthassemble](https://www.instagram.com/queeryouthassemble).

