Creating an Inclusive Classroom:
10 steps toward a learning environment that is safe for all

1. Always *intervene* whenever you hear anti-gay language or actions. Set group/organizational rules that include making it clear that racist, homophobic, sexist, and all discriminatory comments are not welcome in your "domain". Whenever you hear something being said, *step in*. If possible use it as a "teachable moment" regardless of what space you are in. Send a clear message that homophobia is not something you will tolerate. In addition, try to link homophobia to other types of oppression- teach others that hate in all of its forms is wrong.

2. *Ask* about a young person's background instead of making assumptions. Create a space where each youth is able to share freely about their identity and families. Use *language that is empowering* to youth who identify as LGBT, or who live with LGBT parents. For example, many youth report that when asked about their families that are headed by two same-sex parents, people will ask, "Which one is your real mom/dad?", a question which marginalizes and devalues that youth's family structure.

3. *Visually* show your support. On your walls include a poster about diverse families and people, or other images that show you are an ally to LGBTQ people and issues. You can also use our Honor & Respect posters which are commonly used by teachers and counselors to make a statement against hate.

4. *Avoid heterosexism* in your paperwork and assignments. For example, what do your registration forms say? Mother/Father vs. Guardians? Married/Single vs. Partner/Spouse? Is there a box that asks about sexual orientation/gender identity? If you assign family origin or family tree projects, allow youth from LGBTQ and other non-traditional families to make their own decisions about how they portray their families whether it is two parents of the same gender, grandparents or multiple guardians who co-parent them, etc. As much as possible, *use gender-neutral language*.

5. Include topics about diversity in your curriculum: ***Display*** different kinds of families, use famous LGBTQ people as examples (or if you have friends who are LGBTQ, mention that). Have speakers, use videos, and reference books to show young people that diversity is something that exists and is okay. Use events such as National Coming Out Day, Pride Day, or a Day of Silence as a reason to incorporate LGBTQ issues positively into your ***discussions*** and ***projects***.

6. ***Never out a young person***. The only person who should make the decision to share about their family or themselves is the youth--when they feel safe and ready to do so.

7. ***Do not make assumptions*** about what youth are dealing with. A young person's LGBTQ identity does not make up all of who they are. Not all youth who identify as LGBTQ will be dealing with negative issues surrounding their LGBTQ identity. Also, you should not expect that a student who has LGBTQ parents will also be gay. Research shows that there is no higher incidence of homosexuality among people raised by LGBTQ parents than by heterosexual parents.

8. Make your organization or classroom ***accessible*** to LGBTQ families. Do not rely on forms, permission slips, or other paperwork that asks for signatures from mother and father. Instead use the terms Parent/Guardian. On family visitation night, or during parent teacher conferences ***expect and welcome*** LGBTQ parents.

9. Work with your administration to make sure your organization or school is ***safe*** for young people who are LGBTQ or who live within LGBTQ families. Suggest that the staff participate in an ***LGBTQ sensitivity training***, or an in-service about LGBTQ people and diverse families. ***Discuss protocols*** for dealing with anti-gay language or harassment on organization-wide or department levels so that all staff is equipped to address homophobia. Kaleidoscope Youth Center provides such trainings free of charge.

10. ***Educate yourself***. Learn more about LGBTQ people, families, and issues. Not only will this allow you to be informed when young people raise questions or need resources, but it will help you be better equipped to address incidents of homophobia in your organization and to include LGBTQ content in your curriculum.