



Does representation of LGBTQ+ people hurt children?

In recent years, lawmakers have pushed a wave of policies banning [LGBTQ+*](#) materials and discussion, falsely claiming that children are safer if they never see or hear about queer people. This has led to state policies prohibiting the mention of gay relationships or identities in schools, banning books that depict queer relationships, and forbidding Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) clubs.¹

However, these policies aren't grounded in evidence, and they don't make schools or children safer. In fact, decades of research show the opposite; censoring LGBTQ+ material increases harm to young people while inclusive environments benefit the whole community.^{2 3 4} Unfortunately, lawmakers have not integrated this research into decisions about all states' curricula and policies. Instead, many state policies banning LGBTQ-inclusive material are rooted more in fear and moral discomfort than in data.

Including research in policymaking is important for all public health and safety laws, but especially when these laws affect the development of young people. Currently, the prioritization of morality over data has led to increased danger, exclusion, and rejection for queer people and their communities throughout the country.

Does censoring LGBTQ+ material in schools keep children safe?

No, censoring LGBTQ+ material in school increases risk for queer children. In fact, inclusive material has positive impacts for both queer and straight, cisgender students.^{5 6 7}

The last 5 years have seen a significant rise in proposed laws banning all things LGBTQ+ from any visibility in schools. That includes prohibiting children from mentioning if they have queer parents, removing LGBTQ+ inclusive groups at school, regulating course curricula that mention sexual behavior or gender, and banning books that depict

¹ Sawchuk, 2022

² Saewyc, 2014

³ Lindsay, 2021

⁴ Marshall, 2024

⁵ Russel et al, 2021

⁶ Saewyc, 2014

⁷ Hawkins, 2025

non-heterosexual romance.^{8 9 10} Over the last two decades, students report queer-inclusive depictions in their classroom have decreased, and nearly 15% report hearing negative depictions of LGBTQ+ identities or experiences.¹¹ Recent data suggest that 4 in 5 queer youth ages 13 to 17 feel unsafe in school, with approximately one third of these students skipping school at least once a month as a result.¹² Gender nonconforming and queer students of color report higher levels of victimization.¹³

These bans are generally sold to school boards and legislatures as being about protecting parents' rights, protecting children from being influenced or "recruited" by queer teachers, and ensuring students are not exposed to age-inappropriate material.^{14 15} However, lawmakers have not pointed to any specific examples in which these incidents have occurred.¹⁶

Instead of keeping children safe, these laws pose several risks to children, families, and communities. First, by banning the mention of LGBTQ+ relationships or families, it sends the message to children with queer parents or relatives that their families are less valid than those of their peers. Secondly, these laws remove important sexual health material, especially pertaining to the queer community, which leaves them without factual and accessible health information needed to make safe choices. And thirdly, these laws prevent schools from being inclusive environments, which have continuously proven to be an important site of support and safety for LGBTQ+ students and their peers.¹⁷

In fact, LGBTQ-related resources have been identified as a priority initiative for improving the mental and physical well-being of queer kids.¹⁸ Schools with LGBTQ+ inclusive policies or programs lead to diminished rates of suicide and increased rates of graduation for LGBTQ+ students.¹⁹ School-supported extracurriculars that highlight the queer experience have also been impactful. When schools have GSA clubs, the positive impacts are plentiful; straight, cisgender educators feel more empowered to support students,²⁰ and queer kids have

⁸ GLAAD, 2023

⁹ Choi, 2024

¹⁰ ACLU, 2025

¹¹ Hawkin, 2025

¹² Hawkins, 2025

¹³ Hawkins, 2025

¹⁴ Sawchuk, 2022

¹⁵ Hawkins, 2025

¹⁶ Sawchuck, 2022

¹⁷ Marshall, 2024

¹⁸ Russel et al, 2021

¹⁹ Marshall, 2024

²⁰ Hawkins, 2025

higher GPAs, experience a greater sense of belonging,²¹ increased sense of safety and less bullying,²² more general feelings of hopefulness.²³ Inclusive schools also show decreased suicidal thoughts and actions for queer kids and male straight kids.²⁴ However, since the initial onslaught of these bills, many of these programs have been removed.²⁵

Is seeing LGBTQ+ people represented in schools and media dangerous for children?

No, seeing LGBTQ+ people represented is not dangerous. Instead, this representation often has positive impacts on queer youth, families, and their communities.

There are several reasons that people believe exposure to LGBTQ+ content is harmful for children, including the fear that learning about this content could influence young people to become queer, moral or religious objections to LGBTQ+ identities, and/or beliefs that gender or sexuality are inappropriate content for children to learn about.²⁶ However, research does not support these concerns and instead suggests that lack of exposure can be harmful to both individuals and communities.

Firstly, research continues to show that being gay or bisexual is not a choice but rather inherent from birth. Studies continue to show there is a range of innate, unchangeable factors that contribute to one's sexuality.^{27 28 29 30 31 32}

While it is important for parents to have a say over how their children are raised, a family's religion or moral code will not impact whether a child is queer or not. However, raising a child to believe that who they are is bad or wrong leads to feelings of shame, low self-worth, and a lack of safety.^{33 34}

²¹ Toomey & Russel, 2015

²² Ioverno et al, 2017

²³ Poteat, 2021

²⁴ Saewyc, 2014

²⁵ Marshall, 2024

²⁶ Harris et al, 2025

²⁷ Alagha et al., 2025

²⁸ Hu et al., 2021

²⁹ Kendler et al, 2000

³⁰ Cook, 2021

³¹ Rinaldi, 2022

³² Roselli, 2018

³³ Ryan et al, 2009

³⁴ Newcomb et al, 2019

Exposure to and acceptance of queer identities can actually positively impact young LGBTQ+ individuals into adulthood, including their mental and physical health.³⁵ Lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults whose families and caregivers rejected their identities experienced higher rates of suicide, illegal drug use, incidents of unprotected sex,³⁶ and homelessness.³⁷

Lastly, the argument that information about sexual orientation is not age-appropriate for school children is often rooted in exaggerated or biased misunderstandings of LGBTQ+-inclusive material, seemingly believing all inclusive material is overtly sexual.³⁸ However, the child's maturity and age should absolutely be considered when determining the safety of different LGBTQ+ materials, just as they are for other similarly complex content areas, such as personal hygiene or safety. Tailoring lessons based on age is not the same as banning such material altogether. For example, no one would say a 1st grader shouldn't learn about safety; they might be taught to hold an adult's hand crossing the street or not to talk to strangers, but they would not be exposed to overly complicated or scary information about safe practices. The same is true when it comes to LGBTQ+ materials. For example, kindergarten-aged children already talk about relationships within the family structure, including mommies and daddies. As such, a story about a family with two dads or two moms would therefore be age-appropriate, easy to digest for the child, and LGBTQ+-inclusive. Unfortunately, storybooks with queer characters are being banned from school libraries across the country.³⁹

Not only does research suggest that age-appropriate LGBTQ+ material is safe, but the data also shows that exposure to such content can promote stronger communities, increased open-mindedness, and positive feelings towards queer people and other minority groups.⁴⁰ ⁴¹ In schools, LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum is associated with overall safer environments in the school setting, including lower levels of bullying and increased feelings of safety for all students.⁴²

³⁵ Ryan et al, 2009

³⁶ Ryan et al, 2009

³⁷ Newcomb et al, 2019

³⁸ Ball, 2026

³⁹ Ball, 2026

⁴⁰ Lindsay, 2021

⁴¹ DellaPosta, 2018

⁴² Snapp et al, 2015

Policy Suggestions:

- **Protect inclusive curriculum mandates.** Currently, only 7 states require LGBTQ-inclusive material in schools, and 12 states have bans⁴³ on queer material despite research showing that inclusive, age-appropriate curricula reduce bullying, improve open-mindedness, and decrease poor mental health and educational outcomes for queer students.
- **Prioritize evidence-based child safety laws.** Laws should utilize proven protections like anti-bullying programs and mental health supports to ensure the safety of children and communities. Currently, many LGBTQ-related policies are driven by moral preference or opinion instead of science.

You may have noticed this article excludes the "T" from LGBTQ+." This is intentional. Gender and sexual orientation are different. This article focuses on sexual orientation. For more information about gender identity please see our [Fact Checked section on myths regarding the transgender and gender nonconforming community](#).

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⁴³ Movement Advancement Project, 2026

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