

Tips for Teachers

Ten things you can do to make your classroom a space of belonging

Students do their best learning when they feel safe and seen. Educators can have a tremendous impact on the students in their classrooms. And we often don't know how our words or actions are received by our students. What we say and do can have as much of an impact as what we don't say or do. As you are setting up your classroom and planning your lessons for this school year, here are some quick and easy things to think about:

1 Use inclusive language:

Avoid making assumptions about how your students should be addressed - rather than using gendered terms like "boys and girls," try more inclusive terms like learners, scientists, or friends. Use the more inclusive "y'all" or "folks" instead of "you guys." When students share what pronouns they use, use those pronouns consistently and without fuss. Create invitations for students to share their pronouns, and/or model this process by sharing your own pronouns when you introduce yourself or on your nameplate and printed and virtual materials. Make sure that you are pronouncing your students first and last names correctly.

2 Have books and posters showing a broad diversity of people and families:

People and families come in all shapes, sizes, and variations. A space of belonging is where a student can see themselves reflected back at them. For a list of great books visit: [Keshet's Inclusive Book List for Children and Families](#). Make sure that LGBTQ+ families are normalized. A book about a family with two dads is a family, not a "special type" of family.

- ▲ Make sure books that represent different families and identities are available even if you don't read them as a whole class.
- ▲ If you are strictly not allowed to have LGBTQ+ representation in the classroom you could create an out of school reading list for your students.
- ▲ Hold firm to the importance of representing all of the ways families can look so that all students feel seen and that they belong.

3 Display Pride symbols in your classroom:

Hang a Progress Pride, Transgender Pride, or other LGBTQ+ flag in your classroom. Place a Safe Zones sticker on your door or include Pride-inspired classroom decor. Visit Keshet's website to find printable LGBTQ+ Safe Zone or Trans Jews Belong here stickers: Printable Signs and Stickers Archives – Keshet (keshetonline.org)

- ▲ If flags are not allowed in the classroom, using other symbols that signal inclusivity and belonging can go a long way. For example: rainbows, people of different identities and expressions in classroom visuals, messaging with affirmations like “everyone belongs here,” “be yourself,” or “celebrate differences.”

4 Include LGBTQ+ identity and history in your curriculum:

- ▲ **Civics:** Discuss recent legislation in your state or the long battle to pass the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, or include significant LGBTQ Supreme Court Cases like Oberfell v Hodges or Bostock v. Clayton County when you study the courts.
- ▲ **History:** Teach about important LGBTQ+ historical events like the Compton Cafeteria Riots, the AIDS quilt, the founding of The Society for Human Rights.
- ▲ **Jewish Studies:** utilize [Keshet's LGBTQ+ Jewish Heroes Curriculum](#) or [Torah Queeries](#).
- ▲ **English Language Arts:** when you study significant poets, authors and playwrights don't omit sharing that James Baldwin or Virginia Woolf or Lorraine Hansberry hold LGBTQ+ identities. Or, for younger students check out [Keshet's Inclusive Book List for Children and Families](#).
- ▲ **Visit the [Welcoming Schools Website](#)** to access lesson plans, a back-to-school toolkit, and other resources.
 - If you are strictly not allowed to teach LGBTQ+ curriculum, you may still be able to include lessons on changemakers and historic events where people happen to be LGBTQ+. In this case, when learning about those historic figures and events, their identities can give more information about who they are and how they navigated the world.
 - In some states with “don't say gay” bills, there has been a case for using material where characters are LGBTQ+, but it is not a focal point to the story or lesson. Again, representing people of different identities is a way to make sure all students know they belong, and diversity is a fact.

5 Stay Current on LGBTQ+ Issues:

There are many different aspects of LGBTQ+ identity to stay current with: popular culture, legislative wins and setbacks, evolving terminology, great new books to read or podcasts to listen to. It is important to stay updated so that teachers are aware of what students might be experiencing and because young folks might be looking to see if their teachers respond to current events affecting the LGBTQ+ community. As with all news, it is best to use reputable sources and to check more than one. LGBTQ+ owned, operated and managed sources are likely to provide the least biased and most up to date information.

- ✦ Make yourself available to your students as a resource or place to decompress, especially if you are in an area with high targeting of trans and nonbinary youth. Knowing that there is an adult who respects and celebrates can be life-saving.

6 Access:

Ensure that every student has access to a safe and appropriate restroom. Ideally, a single stall all gender bathroom should be available to any student who needs it, and it should be labeled accordingly. A student who does not have access to a safe bathroom will not be present and ready to learn in your classroom.

- ✦ When advocating for an all gender restroom, make sure it is clear that all students regardless of gender would benefit from having access to a private single stall restroom.

7 Dress Code:

Remove gender from dress code expectations or guidelines. People have all kinds of bodies and identities, so ensure that all students can dress in a way that affirms their identity and is comfortable for them. Clothing requirements should focus on safety and functionality rather than assumptions about modesty or sexuality.



8 Address any bullying promptly:

Educate your students about bullying. Begin with the definition of bullying: Repeated and purposeful acts of aggression including name calling, physical violence and exclusion that can occur in person or online. Include tools to handle bullying situations: Consider your safety first; tell a trusted adult; when peers are behaving in ways that make you uncomfortable, you can remove yourself from that situation; make sure to check in with the target and, when safe, the aggressor too; when necessary remind folks that we never use identity terms as insults; doing nothing will never make the problem go away. Ensure that your students feel equipped to at least inform a teacher or administrator when they experience bullying situations.

- 📌 In addition to the policies your school might have around bullying and harassment, you can also create classroom norms for your students and ask them to agree or adjust as needed. Here you can include norms like respecting how others dress, respecting names and pronouns that classmates share, not to comment on someone else's family, etc.

9 Privacy:

It is important for students to have non-parental trusted adults to talk to and often those people are students' teachers. It is a true honor if a student chooses you to confide in and we encourage you to be there to support that student. Just a reminder to be transparent about your boundaries and to honor students' privacy. Unless a student is at risk of harm, what they share with you should be kept confidential.

- 📌 Make sure you are aware of any legislation in your area that involves privacy. If you are mandated to report identity based information in your area make sure the student is aware of that before they share with you.

10 Teacher training:

Identity and the language we use to talk about it are ever evolving. We recommend that teachers regularly engage in learning about the terminology and landscape of LGBTQ+ identity and best practices. Learn about local LGBTQ+ organizations and their programs as well. Follow Keshet on social media for information on upcoming events and trainings.

Click on each icon to follow us on social media!



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We hope that you will not utilize this list as a checklist and consider each item completed as you work through them. Rather, we hope that you will consider this work to be perpetually ongoing. Creating an inclusive classroom requires continual reflection on our beliefs and practices and the evolving needs of our students and community. This is just the start of ensuring that each person who walks into your classroom experiences a true sense of belonging.