

Acknowledgments

When I was four years old, I put "write a book" on my life goals list. That four-year-old (and all the incarnations and transformations of her that followed) fought through so, so much to get from there to here, and I must begin by acknowledging and thanking her for never giving up. I honor her and I hope that she inspires the dreams and goals of the readers and subjects of this book to continue to fight and persevere to reach their goals too, even when they seem too far off to ever happen.

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tie dye, no matter how focused I was on writing this book, too often to the exclusion of self-care.

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How Big of a Problem Is This?

Too often, people fear trying to start a conversation or intervene against negativity. This is not because they do not care or because they do not see the value in improving education and knowledge; it is because they fear saying or doing the wrong thing. However, doing and saying nothing implies agreement or consent with anti-LGBT+ behaviors and policies.

What is life currently like for most LGBT+ youth? According to studies from 2017–2019:¹

- LGBT+ students are twice as likely to be bullied, both online and on school property.
- Almost 30 percent had attempted suicide—more than four times the rate for non-LGBT+ students.
- 77 percent of LGBT+ teens report feeling depressed within the past week.
- 95 percent of LGBT+ youth report having trouble sleeping.
- 89 percent of LGBT+ youth of color report that their racial or ethnic group is regarded negatively at school.
- Only 26 percent say they always feel safe at school.

¹ These statistics include information gathered and verified by the consistent results of surveys and questionnaires completed by American LGBT+ youth via studies through the following organizations: The Trevor Project; Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN); Human Rights Campaign (HRC); Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD); the National LGBTQ Task Force; and the American Government's Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

- Nearly 18 percent of LGBT+ students reported having been raped at some point in their lives—more than three times the rate of non-LGBT+ students.
- About two-thirds of LGBT+ students reported having been sexually harassed (e.g. sexual remarks made, being touched inappropriately) in school in the past year.
- LGBT+ youth are more than twice as likely to stay home from school to avoid violence they feel might befall them on the way there, or on school grounds.
- Only 5 percent say that their school's staff are fully supportive of LGBT+ people.

Now that we see the impact of what happens when silence prevails, it is clear that speaking up is necessary to protect LGBT+ people in school settings. As for knowing what to do, this book will guide you through the process so that you will feel confident in ascertaining problematic situations and policies, knowing who to speak with to make corrections, and knowing how to speak up in support of LGBT+ safety, security, and inclusion in your school setting.

Preface

This book was not created to push a political agenda, to turn current school systems on their heads, or to undermine learning experiences currently being provided throughout America. Instead, this book aims to enlighten the reader and encourage them to consider the ways that small additions or changes to existing lesson plans and school policies may further benefit their students academically, socially, and emotionally.

Your personal beliefs about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT+) community are your own. While I cannot guarantee you won't reconsider them by the time you've completed this book, please know that it is not my goal to focus on those beliefs. In your personal lives, it is, of course, your prerogative to make choices that best align with your personal beliefs. However, this book focuses on choices, behaviors, and actions taken within the school environment while in the role of an educator.

Some question whether the idea of gay students is new. It can seem as if people are constantly inventing new words to identify their sexuality and gender, making it easy to wonder if this is just some silly way that some adolescents are attempting to make themselves seem more exciting and unique. It stands to reason then that these attempts should not lead to any alterations within the school situation. Some believe that even acknowledging any of these terms only feeds an adolescent's desire to create new terms and new words to stand out more and more from their peers. Others question why there seem to be so many transgender people all of a sudden. Many talk about how no one identified as such in past decades or in previous generations. In both situations, the answer is twofold. There were not many opportunities for people to live as openly as

Foreword contributed by PostSecret

Although many books offer a foreword with insights from one person about why the book's topic matters, there was simply no way that any one person could speak on behalf of the estimated two million American LGBT+ youth, their families, and LGBT+ educators. Instead, the author chose to seek out voices that represent these experiences and their stories. What follows is a contribution from PostSecret, with each postcard representing countless individuals with identical or near-identical experiences and stories.

PostSecret is an ongoing community mail art project. In the 15 years since Frank Warren created PostSecret, he has received more than one million secrets, mailed to him from all over the globe. The PostSecret website is the most popular ad-free website in the world, having had more than 900 million views to date. Thousands of secrets have been on tour at museums throughout the world, including at America's Smithsonian Museum.

This project has become such a phenomenon largely because of how one person's secret has been found to be the secret of many. As such, to see the secret of one is to have the opportunity to identify that this one secret speaks for countless others who hold that same secret or that same experience inside of their hearts.

The following secrets have been personally chosen and graciously contributed to this book by Frank Warren, as he continues to support the mental health, suicide prevention, and acceptance of all people through PostSecret, a goal this book shares with the entire PostSecret community of contributors.



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Our family of 5 used to have so
much fun together. I have driven
a wedge in my family by the way
I treat our gay son. At times I
treat him with no respect and unloved.
I feel like he screwed things up.
I must change my feelings +
attitude..

NB-003

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New Braunfels, Texas 78130
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