



DAY of SILENCE[®]

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Organizing Manual

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Welcome to the Day of Silence Organizing Manual!

GLSEN is the nation's leading education organization working to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. GLSEN has been the official sponsor of the National Day of Silence since 2001. Learn more at GLSEN.org.

Sponsored by **GLSEN**, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, the National Day of Silence is a day of action in which students across the country take some form of a vow of silence to call attention to the silencing effect of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment in schools. Through their activities students can speak out against harassment and organize for change for their schools and communities.

The Day of Silence is a Tool for Change. Organizing a Day of Silence (DOS) activity or event can be a positive tool for change—both personally and community-wide. By taking a vow of silence, you're making a powerful statement about the

important issue of anti-LGBT bullying. When you organize others to join you that message becomes louder and louder. You can use this attention as a building block in your plans for larger action.

This manual is designed to help you plan your own Day of Silence in your school. In it you'll find helpful organizing tips and tools divided into six sections:

Organizing Outline (page 2): Step-by-step guide on how to organize Day of Silence activities in your school.

Activity Guide (page 5): Examples of events and activities you can plan for your Day of Silence.

Breaking the Silence (page 8): Fun and effective activities for bringing the Day of Silence to a close.

Organizing Countdown (page 9): A task list to help you stay on target.

Addressing Resistance (page 12): Guidelines for responding to resistance to your organizing or opposition to your Day of Silence efforts.

Toolkit (page 14): Sample letters, fliers and additional information.

DOS History

Founded in 1996 by students at the University of Virginia, the organizers Maria Pulzetti and Jessie Gilliam work to make Day of Silence a national project. In 2001 GLSEN becomes the official organizational sponsor of the Day of Silence. Today the Day of Silence is one of the largest student-led in-school actions in the world!

No two Day of Silence events look exactly the same. Students everywhere design the day in ways that reflect the specific needs and culture of their school and community. You may participate on your own or organize events with hundreds of people in attendance. **Be creative!**



Follow these steps to help you plan a fun and effective Day of Silence in your school!

Register and get connected

Register your participation by going to DayofSilence.org. You can also download free resources—including speaking cards, sticker templates and more—to make your school's Day of Silence even more of a success!

Get connected on Facebook, Twitter and the DOS Blog to share ideas with other student organizers, get tips from GLSEN staff and hear the latest news about your Day of Silence organizing.



facebook.com/
nationaldayofsilence



twitter.com/
dayofsilence



blog.dayofsilence.org

Find Support

Organizing is easier with more people, so **start by building a team of students** who are willing to help you plan Day of Silence activities at your school. You may want to organize through an established school group like your Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), **but if you don't have a GSA you can organize** with a group of friends or in coalition with other students from other clubs.

It's also good to have adults at the school who support your Day of Silence planning. Talk to your GSA advisor, a supportive teacher or another friendly faculty member and ask if they can help with your organizing. Adults can be liaisons to the school administration and help you access resources and information that you may not be able to get on your own.

Get Permission

Anyone can participate in the Day of Silence! Any student can remain silent between classes and before and after school. To stay silent during classes or to organize an activity or event in school usually requires that you obtain permission from your teachers, principal or other school administrator like an activities director. If you have a GSA your advisor should be able to help you with the process. **Just make sure you plan to ask early enough in advance.**



Please see the **Toolkit** for a sample letter requesting permission that you can send to the administration.

TEACHERS!

Go to bit.ly/doseducators to download the Day of Silence **Educator's Guide** to help you support DOS organizers in your school!

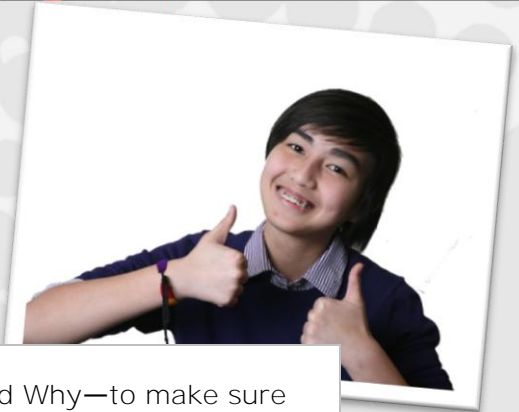
But wait, there's more!

Go to the **Toolkit** to read Lambda Legal's **Freedom To Speak (Or Not)** to learn more about your rights on the Day of Silence.

Set Goals

Work with your Day of Silence team to develop goals for your activities. What do you want to accomplish? What would you like to see change at your school?

Be **SMART!** Establish goals that are **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant & Timely**. This will help you focus and evaluate your Day of Silence activities.



Specific: Answer the five W's—Who, What, When, Where and Why—to make sure that your goal is as specific as possible.

Measurable: Establish a way to measure if you've completed your goal or not. There are lots of ways to measure a goal, such as counting participants or surveying after an activity.

Attainable: Think carefully about goals that are within reach; while bigger, longer-term goals are helpful, you want to focus on immediate goals that you have the capacity to accomplish.

Relevant: Make sure the goals are important for you to be focusing on and relate to the mission of Day of Silence.

Timely: Be certain you can achieve your goals during your Day of Silence activities. Keep this timeframe in mind as you develop your SMART goals!

Brainstorm

Work with your Day of Silence team to brainstorm the possible activities you can do. Think about the activities that can help you reach the goals you set. Make sure to ask your group these questions:

- Does this raise awareness of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment?
- How will this activity support our organizing for the entire year?
- Will this activity make the school safer for students who are LGBT or perceived to be LGBT?

There's an endless list of activities you could do to recognize the Day of Silence; determine what you think will work best for your school or community. Consider partnering with other schools in your area to host community-wide Day of Silence activities. Day of Silence is flexible and adaptable, so you can be creative in your organizing.

But wait, there's more!

The **Activities Guide** portion of this manual has a list of activities that you can use for your Day of Silence organizing.

Action Plan

Your action plan will serve as the how-to guide for your Day of Silence activities. To start, list all the tasks necessary for the activities you decided on.

The word **SCHEMES** can help to make sure you think of everything:

Space: Where will your activities occur?

Cash: Do you have or need money to fund your activities?

Helpers: Who will help achieve your Day of Silence goals?

Equipment: Do you need a projector, speakers or easel?

Materials: Do you need paper, handouts, markers or stickers?

Expertise: Do you need help with any part of your plan? Is there information you need to learn or get from someone else?

Systems: Do you need to develop any system of communication, meeting schedule, reporting system to keep things running smoothly?

Assign a due date for each item on the list and make sure to assign each task to an individual or group of people who will be responsible for that task.

Be Safe

Are you the only one in your school who wants to work on this issue? Is your administration hostile to **doing any activity that addresses LGBT issues? It's important to determine which actions are safe** for you, the student club, and any **others involved in Day of Silence. GLSEN's work is about** ensuring the safety of everyone in K-12 schools, and we don't want you to put yourself or others in any harm. **Therefore, it's always important to know how and to whom to report any bullying or harassment.** If you are unsure about your rights, or feel your rights have not been respected, please contact us at info@dayofsilence.org.

Reaching out to faculty, staff and administration

It can sometimes be difficult to get support from your faculty, staff and administration when planning Day of Silence. One way you can start to build positive relationships with adults at your school is to be open about your plans for your organizing. Providing each member of the faculty, staff and administration with a letter explaining the Day of Silence and what your activities will look like and asking them for their support is a great place to start.

But wait, there's more!

Go to the **Toolkit** for the *Sample Letter to the Administrator* so you can notify the proper people in your school of your Day of Silence plans.

Share your stories

We want to know about your Day of Silence! Send us an email at info@dayofsilence.org and tell us about your Day of Silence organizing successes and challenges. You can also talk with other Day of Silence organizers and participants on Facebook at [Facebook.com/NationalDayofSilence](https://www.facebook.com/NationalDayofSilence).

How to Participate in the Day of Silence

Wear your Support. Red is the official color of the National Day of Silence. If you can, wear red, or better yet, make your own red Day of Silence t-shirt! You can also wear a DOS sticker or button to show your support.

Day of Silence Products

Go to DayofSilence.org to buy a bunch of products for the Day of Silence, including:



Or click on these links to download templates to make your own Day of Silence [Speaking Cards](#), [Stickers](#) and [Posters](#)!

Be silent. There are lots of different ways you can be silent for DOS. Some people go the whole school day, some from 12 AM to 12 midnight and others only outside school time. Some refrain from going online or texting, others Tweet the Silence and post about their experience on Facebook. Either with your fellow participants or on your own, determine how long you will maintain your vow of silence.

Hand out Speaking Cards. Print out the Speaking Cards in the Toolkit of this guide. Cut them apart and hand them out to people throughout the day so they can learn what the Day of Silence is all about.

When can I be silent?

If you didn't get permission from your school or teachers to participate in the Day of Silence, you may not be allowed to stay silent in your classes. You can still observe your silence before and after school, between classes and at lunch! For more info on this check out the *Freedom to Speak (or Not)* document in the [Toolkit](#).

Day of Silence Speaking Cards Text

Please understand my reasons for not speaking today. I am participating in the Day of Silence (DOS), a national youth movement bringing attention to the silence faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their allies. My deliberate silence echoes that silence, which is caused by anti-LGBT bullying, name-calling and harassment. I believe that ending the silence is the first step toward building awareness and making a commitment to address these injustices. Think about the voices you are not hearing today.

Break the Silence! Planning a Breaking the Silence activity or event is an important part of the Day of Silence. This is a time for you and other participants to support each other, start conversations and celebrate your hard work! There are ideas for Breaking the Silence activities on page 9.

Day of Silence Activities

Here are some activities you can organize that can help to support participants, advertise for the Day of Silence or educate students and faculty about the issues.

Before the Day of Silence:

- Call to Action
- Day of Silence Announcements
- Set up a Booth or Table
- Initiate Class Discussions
- Day of Silence Presentation
- Post a Day of Silence Video

During the Day of Silence:

- Day of Silence Announcements
- Set up a Booth or Table
- Initiate Class Discussions
- Day of Silence Presentation
- Post a Day of Silence Video
- Silent Lunch
- Tweet the Silence

After the Day of Silence:

- Initiate Class Discussions
- Post a Day of Silence Video
- Breaking the Silence Rally
- Breaking the Silence Open Mic
- Breaking the Silence Support Group

Call to Action

If your GSA already participated in Ally Week you may have been able to identify who in your school is an Ally against anti-LGBT bullying and harassment. The Day of Silence is a great opportunity to call these Allies to action! Before DOS, use the email addresses you collected to follow up with your allies and ask them to either support or participate in the Day of Silence!

Day of Silence Announcements

Leading up to the Day of Silence, make announcements in a school assembly, your homeroom or over the PA system. You can explain what the Day of Silence is and how to participate, or have students tell stories about why they think the Day of Silence is important.

Set up a Booth or Table at Your School

Get permission to set up a table in your cafeteria or in a main hallway where you can distribute information and resources such as pamphlets, ribbons, stickers, speaking cards or flyers. This can be done before or during the Day of Silence.

Initiate class discussions

Ask your teachers if you can discuss the Day of Silence, LGBT issues or bullying and harassment in class. This discussion can be led by students or the teacher and can reflect on current events, student experiences, human rights, literature and more!

Host a Day of Silence Presentation

You can draw awareness and boost participation in your Day of Silence activities by hosting a presentation at lunch time or after school in your auditorium, gym, cafeteria or library. Work with other organizers to develop a presentation before the Day of Silence about what DOS means, its history, why it is important, and how students and faculty can support it.

Want to take it to the next level? Present at school's regular teacher and staff meeting. Ask your administration if your group or club can present about the Day of Silence during the meeting. Go to DayofSilence.org to download important resources to hand out during the meeting. Here are some you may find helpful:

- [Day of Silence Educator's Guide](#)
- [ACLU Letter to Principals](#)
- [Speaking Cards](#)

Post a Day of Silence Video

You can spread the word about Day of Silence even if you don't have a supportive school. Take a few minutes and tape a video about why the Day of Silence is important to you. You can talk about why you are participating or why you think this day needs to be recognized in your school. Then post this video on the Day of Silence's Facebook Page and on YouTube!

Day of Silence Display

Get creative by making a visual display in a public place for Day of Silence. Ask the appropriate faculty person where you can feature information about the Day of Silence, colorful participant testimonials, signatures of support, and student art work. Don't forget to include basic information about your GSA including contact info and the date, time and location of the next meeting!

Day of Silence Safe Space

The Day of Silence is exciting and fun, but can sometimes be stressful. Arrange for a space in a classroom, student lounge, counselor's office or other secluded area of the school to be a safe space for Day of Silence participants. A safe space can include:

- A counselor or peer for participants to talk to;
- Tasty snacks or treats;
- A shared notebook to write thoughts and feelings;
- A sheet of paper on the wall to write words of encouragement.

Silent Lunch

Can't be silent during the Day of Silence? Ask your GSA, friends or allied school groups to gather at a table or area for a silent lunch to recognize the Day of Silence. You can use notes to ask and answer questions to the group, or spend the time in quiet reflection. At the end of the lunch period you can start a discussion on how LGBT students and their allies are silenced because of harassment, discrimination and abuse, and brainstorm ways you can help end the silence.

Powerful Feelings

Participating in the Day of Silence can be a powerful, moving and sometimes challenging experience. Take care of Day of Silence participants by keeping them well informed and providing them with opportunities to communicate their feelings about the day.

Tweet the Silence

Help to spread the word on Twitter by tweeting to [@DayofSilence](https://twitter.com/DayofSilence) and by using the #DayofSilence hash tag. **Tweet what you're doing for DOS. Tweet how many students are participating at your school, the responses you're getting, or photos of your Breaking the Silence event.**

Tweeting at School

While you are in school, make sure you only tweet during times that your school permits. Tweet in the morning before school starts, at lunch (if allowed), and especially after school.



What should you tweet about? As long as it's about the Day of Silence and includes the #DayofSilence hashtag, you can tweet about anything! **Tweet what you're doing for DOS. Tweet how many students are participating at your school. Tweet the different ways you're getting support. Tweet if you're holding a Breaking the Silence event. Tweet about how many buttons you're wearing. Tweet about the reactions of your classmates.**

At the end of the day, it's important to Break the Silence! You can plan a Breaking the Silence event to:

- Celebrate the Day of Silence and all your hard work;
- Support Day of Silence participants by offering space to reflect on their experience;
- Dialogue with other school and community members about the important issues of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment;
- Take action to make your school a better place for LGBT youth.

Start by Breaking the Silence together! There are a lot of ways to break your silence, but it's more fun to do it as a group. Plan a Breaking the Silence event where everyone says their first words together! Here are three different models you can use for your event:

New Year's Eve Model:

Silent participants assemble at the end of the day, and an organizer gives a silent countdown. When the designated finish time is reached, everyone screams, yells, sings, rings bells, blow whistles, beats drums, shake noise makers and so on.

Daybreak Model:

Silent participants assemble at the end of the day, there's a silent countdown to the designated finish time and when the clock strikes, people begin slowly to make noise or speak as the feeling comes to them.

One Voice Model:

Silent participants assemble at the end of the day and one by one each participant begins speaking by addressing the entire group. You can ask attendees to talk about their experience, why **they're participating** or say a message of thanks.

Breaking the Silence Rally

Reserve a large public space, like an open area in front of your school or in the auditorium. Plan a program and invite speakers to come and talk to the crowd about the issues. Speakers could include:

- Students talking about their experience with anti-LGBT bullying or harassment;
- Supportive teachers or faculty;
- Leaders of the GSA or other clubs sponsoring the Day of Silence;
- Representatives from local organizations, like your local GLSEN Chapter (GLSEN.org/chapters).

Take action! You can ask attendees to sign a petition to make your school better, like to change the school's anti-bullying policy to include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression or to take a pledge not to use anti-LGBT slurs in school!

Breaking the Silence Open Mic Event

Hosting an open mic event is a great way to invite both Day of Silence participants and public supporters to come together and Break the Silence! The great thing about an open mic is that anyone can participate, just as long as they sign up before the event. Students can share songs, poems, a monologue or skits—anything that connects to the Day of Silence and why it is important. Invite parents, friends and faculty to attend.

Breaking the Silence Support Group

A support group event for Breaking the Silence is often more intimate and allows participants to share experiences they may have had during the Day of Silence that they would not feel comfortable talking about in public. For this event try inviting your Day of Silence participants to a private location and provide snacks and light refreshments.



Use this timeline to help structure your organizing each week leading up to the Day of Silence. We recommend you start preparing for your Day of Silence activities at least six weeks in advance so that you have plenty of time to plan.

Week 6: Getting Started

It's time to get planning for the Day of Silence! For this week focus on laying groundwork for your organizing.

- Register:** Go to DayofSilence.org and register your participation in the Day of Silence.
- Gather Information:** Find resources to help you start your planning on DayofSilence.org
- Find Support:** Discuss your participation with the advisor of your GSA or student club, or another trusted faculty member. **It's a good idea to print out resources from DayofSilence.org** to give to potential supportive faculty.
- Get Permission:** Your Day of Silence is likely to be more successful if the school approves of your activities. Research and follow the proper protocol for approving an activity at your school. Ask your supportive faculty member to help.
- Build a Team:** Find peers who want to contribute. Talk to members of your GSA and/or allies. Tell them about the Day of Silence and ask if they would be interested in getting involved. Make sure to check out the resources about building coalitions at DayofSilence.org.
- Schedule for next week:** Make sure to schedule a Team meeting with your supportive faculty member and interested students for the upcoming week to keep making progress!

Week 5: Holding Your Meeting

It's time to get the ball rolling! Plan a meeting with your DOS Team. This could be your GSA or student club, or a group of interested students and your sponsoring faculty member.

- Be prepared:** Make an agenda so that your meeting goes smoothly and you accomplish everything necessary to take the next steps. And print out some of the materials referenced in the list below to pass out to the Team members.
- Brainstorm:** What will your event look like? Who will be involved? Will you have a Breaking the Silence event? Discuss all the possibilities for your DOS event. And be creative! Check out the [Day of Silence Facebook page](#) to see what other students are planning.
- Decisions:** There are a lot of ways to hold a successful Day of Silence, but you can't do them all! Involve your team in the decision-making process to assure their support as you organize the event.
- Set Goals:** Goals are a great way to determine if your organizing is on the right track. How many people do you want to take a vow of silence? How many cards do you want to pass out? How many people do you want to attend your Breaking the Silence event?
- Delegate:** No one person should do all the work alone. Split up tasks to make the work easier and to get more people involved.
- Register:** Make sure ALL members of your team register for DOS at DayofSilence.org.
- And don't forget to **schedule a Team meeting** for next week!

Week 4: Spread the Word

We're only **ONE MONTH** away from Day of Silence! Now that you know what your DOS event is going to look like, it's time to let everyone know. Split up outreach tasks among your team members so that you can each contribute to getting the word out.

- Posters:** Make posters to put up around school. Be sure to include the name of your GSA or organizing group, the date of the DOS activities and contact info so people can get involved. You can also hold a party to design posters as a group!
- Notify the Press:** How do you tell the local news about your event? With a Press Release! Send a Press Release to your local newspaper, television and radio news channels. Check out the sample Press Release in the *Day of Silence Organizing Manual* to help.
- Fundraising:** Do you need money for supplies, promotional materials, DOS t-shirts? Begin fundraising by this week. Ask family members, businesses or community organizations for donations. You could plan a raffle or a bake sale.
- Follow Up:** Check in with all the members of the team to see if you can support them in accomplishing their tasks.
- And don't forget to **schedule a Team meeting** for next week! Can't meet in person? Connect online via AIM, Yahoo or Skype to keep in touch!

Week 3: Grow your Support

The more support you have, the more effective your event can be. Continue talking with teachers, students and community members about ways they can support your Day of Silence activities.

- Educate:** There are a lot of ways that your teachers can support the Day of Silence. Print out the Educators' Guide and give it to teachers you think would be interested.
- Find Community Support:** It's good to notify supportive local community groups of your events, especially if you're holding a rally, training, or social to Break the Silence. Notify and, if applicable, invite community groups. Also, there are over 30 local GLSEN Chapters across the country. Go to GLSEN.org to find out if one is near you!
- Cross it Off:** It's possible that there are a few items on your task list that didn't get completed in the past few weeks. Take some time to make sure that everyone is taking care of their tasks.
- Show Appreciation:** It's important to let your Team members know that you and others appreciate their work. Take some time during your weekly meeting to let everyone express their appreciation of their fellow teammates.
- Schedule a Participant Meeting:** This is for everyone who intends to participate in Day of Silence. This may be the same group as your Team of organizers, but if not, schedule a second meeting for next week so you can prepare students for DOS.
- And don't forget to **schedule a Team meeting** for next week!

Week 2: Ramp it Up!

Day of Silence is almost here! It's time to pump up the excitement and to make sure everyone is prepared!

- Notify Faculty:** You've already connected with supportive teachers; now it's time to let all staff know. Give each staff member a letter explaining what to expect on the Day of Silence. Include the contact people for the event, including the supportive staff member on your Team. Remember to be open and available to questions and concerns about the day.
- Hold the Participant Meeting:** This meeting is for everyone who intends on participating in the Day of Silence. Talk with the group about their expectations, goals, fears, and hopes for the event. **Staying silent for the day isn't easy, so it's good to allow students to practice how to respond** to questions or resistance from students and faculty. Try using the Concentric Circles Activity in Jump-Start Guide #1
- Back to the Press:** Send your Press Release to local news media AGAIN now that Day of Silence is around the corner.
- Make new posters:** If you put up a new set of fliers and posters around the school it will cause people to take notice a second time.
- And don't forget to **schedule your LAST Team meeting** for next week!

Week 1: Here at Last!

You've been planning for weeks, and the Day of Silence is almost here! There's still much to do, and a lot of ways to participate!

- Spread the word:** You've worked for weeks to get the word out about the Day of Silence, so keep it going! Make sure students, teachers and administrators in your school know that the Day of Silence is happening and what to expect from participants. Notifying people early is the key to a successful and effective Day of Silence!
- Be Visible:** Red is the official Day of Silence color, so if everyone participating wears red you'll be sure to stand out. **And don't forget t-shirts, buttons, stickers, face-paint;** these are all ways you can help draw attention to your action.
- Be respectful:** The Day of Silence is about ending anti-LGBT bullying and harassment in school. To do this, it's important to **treat people with respect. There are likely people at your school who will try** to challenge your silence, your activities or your beliefs. Treat these people not as they treat you but with the same respect you hope to be treated with. Remember, the Day of Silence is a peaceful action!
- Know your rights:** Remember, you DO have the right to remain silent between classes and before/after school. You do NOT have the right to ignore your teacher's requests during instructional time. If a teacher asks for you to speak during class, do it! Please don't put your education at risk. Review Lambda Legal's document, which outlines some of your rights during the Day of Silence, in the [Toolkit](#).
- And don't forget to **schedule a reflection and follow up meeting** for next week!

As you plan for your Day of Silence you may face resistance in your school or opposition from your community. Here are some tips that will help you organize a peaceful and effective Day of Silence.

When the School Administration says No

As we mentioned in the General Outline, getting permission is an important part of organizing an in-school activity. But what do you do when the administration at your school says No?

You already sent a letter, right? Did it include:

- A description of the Day of Silence?
- Info about supportive clubs and/or staff?
- Date of your Day of Silence events?
- Where they can find out more information?
- A note of thanks for their support and understanding?

There's a sample letter requesting permission available in the [Toolkit](#).

Request a meeting. If you sent a letter and the administration still said no, ask to schedule a meeting with the principal, activity director or other appropriate staff. Invite your GSA advisor, supportive faculty and/or other members of your GSA to join your meeting. Be calm and respectful during your conversation; **don't accuse or yell. Instead, ask them to explain their concerns about the Day of Silence.** Listen carefully to what they say. Take notes—if you don't have an answer, it's okay to tell them you'll follow up later.

If you haven't already, give your principal [this letter from the ACLU](#).



Remember, staying silent is not the only way to participate in the Day of Silence. Download the Vocal Ally stickers on the website and check out some of the activities in the Activity Guide for other ways to participate!

But wait, there's more!

If your administration is resistant to your Day of Silence activities, the ACLU has a letter that can help. Go to bit.ly/dosaclu to download.

TEACHERS!

Go to bit.ly/doseducators to print out a *Sample Day of Silence Letter to School Staff* that you can deliver to your colleagues.

Facing Opposition

Some people may want to actively detract from the message of your Day of Silence activities. Here are a couple of tips for you if you find yourself facing this type of opposition:

- **Stay cool:** It's difficult to be challenged, and some that oppose the Day of Silence may say hurtful things. Relax. Breathe. Remember that you're participating in DOS to make a difference, not to start fights.
- **Step away:** The Day of Silence is about starting conversations, but often those strongly opposing DOS are not truly interested in genuine conversation. Some are only interested in provoking you. In these cases it's best to walk away and not respond. Don't let anyone detract from the purpose!
- **Be respectful:** The Day of Silence is about ending anti-LGBT bullying and harassment in school. To do this, it's important to treat people with respect. Treat people who oppose the DOS not as they treat you but with the same respect you hope to be treated with. Remember, the Day of Silence is a peaceful demonstration!
- **Share The Four Truths:** Often people make decisions about the Day of Silence without getting accurate information about the action. [This document](#) highlights four often misunderstood elements of the Day of Silence. Print it out and provide it to those who may be confused as to the purpose of DOS is.
- **Report it:** If there are people who are bullying or harassing you as part of their opposition, you should report it—to school officials, online authorities, your parents—immediately. In school, make sure to notify a supportive staff member, and ask for their assistance as you follow up on the status of your report.
- **Share your story:** Stay connected with other organizers about your experience. Talk to your student club or tell your story on the Facebook Day of Silence Page and Twitter.
- **Contact us:** If you experience extreme amounts of opposition, face bullying and harassment, or feel your rights have been violated, please contact us at info@dayofsilence.org and let us know right away! We can put you in touch with the appropriate legal support.
- **Spread the word:** Share this post with other organizers so that we can all work together to focus our attention on the things that matter to make change.



Frequently Asked Questions

Can a teacher tell me to speak during class? What are my rights when I participate in the Day of Silence?

According to [Lambda Legal](#), “Under the Constitution, public schools must respect students’ right to free speech. The right to speak includes the right not to speak, as well as the right to wear buttons or T-shirts expressing support for a cause...”

However, this right to free speech doesn’t extend to classroom time. “If a teacher tells a student to answer a question during class, the student generally doesn’t have a constitutional right to refuse to answer.” **We remind participants that students who talk with their teachers ahead of time are more likely to be able to remain silent during class.**

Check the Lambda Legal document in this Toolkit for more legal questions about the Day of Silence. If you feel your rights to participate in or organize for Day of Silence are not being respected, go to DayofSilence.org/legalhelp to report your situation and request assistance.

Why silence? Aren’t we trying to fight against silence?

A silent protest can be a peaceful way to bring urgent attention to an important issue. Silence as a method of organizing is much different than silence that is coerced or forced through oppressive bullying, harassment and intimidation. A silent protest is active, rather than passive, and causes people to pay attention. Silent demonstrations can:

- Bring attention to an issue and encourage reflection on the issue;
- Simulate the how others are silenced;
- Focus the attention on the issue or cause and not the protestor;
- Demonstrate that the demonstrators desire peaceful resolution;
- Spark discussion and dialogue.

Through your active silence on the Day of Silence you will send a message that bullying and harassment faced by LGBT and ally youth affects you, your school and community.

And remember, the Day of Silence is a moment to open the conversation on this issue. Follow up your participation with a Breaking the Silence event. You can plan a rally at your school, facilitate a workshop for students and teachers about LGBT issues, throw a party with your GSA or host a discussion group with DOS participants—the sky’s the limit!

I want to do Day of Silence at my school. Should I talk to teachers or the principal beforehand? How do I get permission from my school?

We recommend that students, GSAs and other student groups try to work with their school to obtain the proper permission to hold Day of Silence activities. Participation supported by the school has more impact and makes for a more fun Day of Silence for everyone. Talk early with your school’s administration. Offer the organizing materials from DayofSilence.org so they know more about the event. Provide them with your group’s ideas or plan for DOS. This can go a long way to assuring a fun and effective Day of Silence!

We don't have school on the Day of Silence. Does that mean I can't participate?

Your school district may not have classes on the Day of Silence, but that doesn't mean you can't participate. We encourage everyone to organize their Day of Silence events on a day that works best for them. Schedule your DOS activities on another day or week. You can also collaborate with other schools, GSAs and students in your area to hold your DOS on the same day so you can generate local interest.

Do we have to be silent the whole day? Can we text or post online?

We encourage each person to participate in the way they are most comfortable. Some will be silent all day long. Others will hold a silent lunch. Still others will be vocal supporters. The key is that you call attention to the silencing effect of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment.

During the Day of Silence many will be communicating online to show their support of the Day of Silence. **It's definitely okay to use Facebook, Twitter, texting and other forms of online communication** during the Day of Silence, especially if you're spreading the word about DOS! Here are some places people will be communicating about their experiences:



facebook.com/
nationaldayofsilence



twitter.com/
dayofsilence



blog.dayofsilence.org

Am I supposed to wear duct tape on my mouth? Won't that hurt?

We've received reports from a number of organizers who have suffered problems after wearing duct tape on their mouths. As a consequence we feel it is important to address this safety issue. While we have never encouraged nor endorsed wearing duct tape for the Day of Silence, we recognize that the symbolism of putting duct tape over the mouth has become quite popular amongst some DOS organizers.

Duct tape uses a very strong, water-resistant adhesive. When students attempt to take off the tape we have heard about a range of problems. In some instances there have been minor issues such as having difficulty removing the tape's glue from skin. In other more severe cases, students have experienced hair removal, rashes and skin irritation, and torn or ripped skin. Because of this risk, we do not recommend using duct tape on your skin during the Day of Silence. Your silence will be powerful without it.

Sample Letter to the Administrator



[DATE]

Dear [INSERT NAME OF PRINCIPAL/ADMINISTRATOR],

I am writing to request a meeting with you to discuss your support of students' participation in the Day of Silence.

The Day of Silence is one of the largest student-led actions in the country. The purpose is to raise awareness around anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) bullying, harassment, and name-calling. On **April 15, 2011** students will be taking a vow of silence to represent the silence faced by LGBT people and their allies everyday. On the Day of Silence, rather than speaking, participants hand out Speaking Cards explaining their reasons for remaining silent throughout the day. At the end of the Day, participants will gather for [INSERT BREAKING-THE-SILENCE ACTIVITY/EVENT].

The Day of Silence at our school is particularly relevant because [INSERT BRIEF EXPLANATION WHY YOU THINK DOS IS IMPORTANT IN YOUR SCHOOL]. We hope that you and the rest of the administration will join the following groups in supporting the event: [INSERT NAMES OF OTHER SUPPORTING CLUBS OR ORGANIZATIONS]. The Day of Silence is an opportunity for students to take the initiative to teach one another about diversity, respect and safety for all students. Students gain leadership skills, provide a valuable service to the school community and empower themselves by realizing their ability to make a difference in their school.

There are numerous ways in which Day of Silence participants can meet their academic responsibilities without speaking. With the support of teachers, students could lead or take part in a silent lesson or complete a written assignment.

I look forward to speaking with you soon, and will call you within the week to confirm your receipt of my meeting request. Should you wish to contact me sooner, I may be reached at [INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION].

[You may also want to request that the school host a follow-up activity or event.]

Thank you,

[INSERT YOUR NAME]

[INSERT SPONSORING CLUB/ORGANIZATION]

[INSERT YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION]

Key resources and links

- **DayofSilence.org**: For a downloadable version of this manual and for more resources including:
 - Sticker templates
 - Tips for the Last Minute Organizer
 - ACLU Letter to Principal or Educator
 - Educators' Guide to The Day of Silence
- **[Facebook.com/NationalDayofSilence](https://www.facebook.com/NationalDayofSilence)**: Like the Day of Silence Facebook Page to connect with other student organizers, ask questions, discuss Day of Silence ideas and get up-to-date news from Day of Silence GLSEN staff! Just go to [Facebook.com/NationalDayofSilence](https://www.facebook.com/NationalDayofSilence) and hit the Like button.
- **[Facebook.com/GayStraightAlliances](https://www.facebook.com/GayStraightAlliances)**: For year-round organizing and to connect with other GSA organizers, go to www.facebook.com/GayStraightAlliances and hit the Like button.
- **GLSEN.org**: is the supporting organization for the National Day of Silence, Ally Week and other Days of Action. Find a GLSEN Chapter near you, read important education news or learn new facts about the experiences of LGBT students at www.GLSEN.org.
- **[AllyWeek.org](http://www.AllyWeek.org)**: Ally Week is a week for student organizers to plan events that serve to identify, support and celebrate Allies against anti-LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) language, bullying and harassment in America's schools. From running Ally pledge drives to facilitating Ally Week workshops for peers and faculty, students across the country plan a week of activities for Ally Week in schools and communities nationwide. Learn more at www.AllyWeek.org.
- **[GLSEN.org/research](http://www.GLSEN.org/research)**: **The 2009 National School Climate Survey**, the most comprehensive report ever on the experiences of LGBT students, shows that nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students experienced harassment at school in the previous year. Find more research statistics to support your organizing by going to www.GLSEN.org/research.



National Day of Silence: The Freedom to Speak (Or Not)

Frequently Asked Questions, Answered by Lambda Legal

March 2011

April 15, 2011 is the National Day of Silence, a student-led action sponsored by Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) in which thousands of students around the country will remain silent for all or part of the school day to call attention to the harassment and discrimination faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth.

Over the years, GLSEN and Lambda Legal have heard from hundreds of students, parents and allies who have encountered resistance from their schools and school officials in response to their efforts to participate in Day of Silence activities. Whether a school's actions are based on school officials' misunderstanding of the law, a desire to avoid controversy, or intended to blatantly discriminate against LGBT-supportive speech, they may be violating your rights even though they are less obvious forms of discrimination and censorship.

Do students have the right to participate in and advocate for the Day of Silence?

In most circumstances, yes. Under the Constitution, public schools must respect students' right to free speech.¹ The right to speak includes the right not to speak, as well as the right to wear buttons or T-shirts expressing support for a cause. This does not mean students can say—or not say—anything they want at all times. There are some limits on free speech rights at school.

For example, schools have some control over students' speech in the classroom or during other supervised, school-sponsored activities.² If a teacher tells a student to answer a question during class, the student generally doesn't have a constitutional right to refuse to answer. Students who want to remain silent during class on the Day of Silence are less likely to encounter problems if they seek permission from their teachers beforehand.

However, school officials are NOT allowed to discriminate against you based on your message.³ In other words, school officials may not censor a student just because they disapprove of the student's ideas, because the student's speech makes them uncomfortable or because they want to avoid controversy.⁴ Outside of the classroom, in areas like hallways and cafeterias, students have a much broader right to free speech. Schools can't censor students unless they use lewd or foul language, promote illegal drug use, harass other students or substantially disrupt the school environment.⁵

If you believe your right to freedom of expression has been violated, Lambda Legal may be able to help or advise you.
www.dayofsilence.org/legalhelp

Do students have a right to display posters and make announcements about the Day of Silence?

In many circumstances, yes. If a public school generally allows students or student organizations to display posters or make announcements on the public address system—the school may not deny or otherwise restrict your right to display posters or use the PA system based on your message or viewpoint (so long as you do not use lewd or foul language, promote illegal drug use, harass other students or substantially disrupt the school environment).⁶ So if students are generally allowed to announce events and put up posters on school property, Day of Silence participants must be allowed to announce events and put up posters too.

If you believe your school is unlawfully restricting or censoring your right to freedom of expression, Lambda Legal may be able to help or advise you.

www.dayofsilence.org/legalhelp

Can a school justify banning speech by claiming it will be disruptive?

In most circumstances, no. If a public school wants to restrict student expression because it fears disruption, school officials have to show facts that reasonably lead them to believe that the speech will cause a substantial disruption to the school.⁷ A school can't just assume that the Day of Silence or speech related to it will disrupt the school. And schools can't censor students just because other students might respond in a disruptive way. If students who disagree with a speaker's ideas create a disruption, the school can punish the disruptive students but can't punish the speaker.⁸ So, for example, if a Day of

Silence participant puts up a poster and another student responds with name-calling and harassment, the solution must be to discipline the harasser and to protect, not censor, the Day of Silence participant.

If you believe you have been unfairly punished or censored based on the school's claim of "disruption," Lambda Legal may be able to help or advise you.
www.dayofsilence.org/legalhelp

What if a school says it has to restrict Day of Silence activities so community members won't think the school is endorsing the event?

Schools have more control over student speech if other students or community members would reasonably believe the speech represents the school's own speech or viewpoint. For example, if a student helps write an official school publication, like a school newsletter, the school has some control over what the student says because people reading the publication may think the school endorsed the student's expression. But this doesn't give the school the right to control what students express on their own, or what they express through means generally open for independent student expression at school, like posters and morning announcements. Schools cannot discriminate against students based on their ideas in those situations because nobody could reasonably think that the student speech represents the school's speech. In the words of former Supreme Court Justice O'Connor, "[t]he proposition that schools do not endorse everything they fail to censor is not complicated."⁹

If you believe your right to freedom of expression has been violated or that you are being unfairly censored based on your school's claim of "endorsing" Day of Silence, Lambda Legal may be able to help or advise you.
www.dayofsilence.org/legalhelp

Can a school restrict student speech because it offends other students or parents?

No. So long as student expression isn't lewd or profane, advocate violence or illegal activity and doesn't harass others, schools can't restrict it just because some students or parents find it offensive. "If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable."¹⁰

If you believe your right to freedom of expression has been violated, Lambda Legal may be able to help or advise you.
www.dayofsilence.org/legalhelp

Are there other ways in which schools might interfere with Day of Silence activities - aside from blatantly denying students the right to participate?

Yes. Although your school may allow you to participate in some DOS activities, they may also restrict or infringe on your ability to do so in a way that violates your rights. Examples from past years include:

- Not providing students with an opportunity to meet with the Principal, or otherwise attempting to avoid giving students permission to participate in Day of Silence activities and then telling students that "it is too late";
- Telling students that they cannot individually participate without a club to sponsor DOS;
- Attempting to rename the DOS "Diversity Day" or otherwise co-opt students' messages;
- Allowing students to use the PA system, but rewriting what the students want to say or providing a script;
- Providing students who do not want to be exposed to DOS messages an excused absence (a get-out-of-school-free pass);
- Allowing students to have a table to distribute materials, but requiring the table to be in a location or at a time where students rarely pass by.

If you feel that your school is unfairly restricting your ability to participate meaningfully in Day of Silence, Lambda Legal may be able to help.
www.dayofsilence.org/legalhelp

More questions?

For more information about students' legal rights, contact one of Lambda Legal's regional Help Desks. Phone numbers and additional information are available at:
www.lambdalegal.org/help.

For more information about the Day of Silence, including tips on how to organize your own Day of Silence at your school, visit www.dayofsilence.org.

Citations to footnotes are available in the online version of this document, which is available at http://www.dayofsilence.org/downloads/DOS_2011_Lambda_Legal.pdf

DAY of SILENCE[®]

www.dayofsilence.org

Please understand my reasons for not speaking today. I am participating in the Day of Silence (DOS), a national youth movement bringing attention to the silence faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their allies. My deliberate silence echoes that silence, which is caused by anti-LGBT bullying, name-calling and harassment. I believe that ending the silence is the first step toward building awareness and making a commitment to address these injustices. Think about the voices you are not hearing today.

What are you going to do to end the Silence?



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