

## **Straight Against Hate**

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Being a high school student growing up in our current society is hard enough already, let alone growing up in a society that tells you that you aren't equal to everyone around you, and that you don't deserve the same rights. In a recent nationwide study, researchers found that over 30% of gay and lesbian teens dropped out of high school due to physical or verbal harassment. Due to the ignorance and closed mindedness of the society around them, they are forced out of the lives they want to live. Anti-gay bullying has become a serious problem, leading to over 100 known cases of suicides in the past 18 months, due to pressures from both verbal and physical bullying. Once labeled a 'part of growing up' bullying now takes on a new face, and contributes to the 3rd leading cause of death in 15-19 year-olds. This new form of bullying is only heightened by the pressures of high school and the need to fit in, but can easily be put away with the help of those around the victim.

Anti-gay bullies are seen in every town, every school, and even in every classroom. In an average school, 27% of the gay youth have been physically assaulted while on school grounds. The problem of anti-gay bullies is reaching new heights and the stakes have been pushed to the breaking point. With lives on the line, the message needs to be spread on the severity of this type of bullying. In 75% of homophobic harassment, the bullying is not reported to anyone, yet in most cases there is more than two witnesses of the incident. It's statistics like this that are alarming. In most cases, doing nothing is just as bad as being the actual bully. In order to help this growing

situation, we, as decent humans, need to learn to stand up and speak out against bullies. By simply being there for someone, having their back, and standing up for them, we can easily stop the spread of this trend. Just showing the victim that someone cares, and showing the bully that they are not in control can put an end to most cases of bullying in schools now. Over the last few years, the statistics in relation to gays and suicide has skyrocketed. It was gathered in a recent study that over one-third of the population of teen-gays had attempted suicide at least once in the past year. That statistic alone is alarming, yet it is believed that over one-half of attempted suicides over the past five years could be directly or indirectly attributed to anti-gay bullying, yet the information is hard to gather, due to the fact that most suffered in silence, instead of coming out and subjecting themselves to an even harsher form of hate from their classmates.

One of the biggest arguments against gay teens is by blaming their choices on a 'phase' and attempting to save them from themselves. Thinking about it as a straight member of society, this would be the equivalent of someone coming up to you, stripping you of your rights as a human being, and telling you that everything you are and everything that you stand for is wrong. As a straight person, we can marry who we want, when we want, and where we want, without anyone so much as casting a glance in our direction. Though living as a gay member of society, people you have never and will never meet get the choice to determine your rights through an ignorant, uninformed check mark on a ballot. The system in place now leaves the lives and rights of people you will never meet in your hands, yet people still chose to go in with a prejudice towards an entire group of people. If it was your life in the hands of someone else, you

would be just as outraged. In reality, the entirety of your free rights are taken away due to your sexual preference, and your choice on who to love. Love is love, and people should be able to exist without having to fear for their safety over matters of the heart.

As decent human beings, we should not have even let the issue progress to this level. Now many people and groups are starting to take a stand against bullies, yet students and even teachers turn a blind eye when the matter actually comes into play. In order to overcome the crisis of bullying and discrimination towards gay teens, we have to learn to accept that fact that people are who they are, and nothing should change that. One of the most widely known principles that we teach youth in our country is to 'be who you are' and to 'never change yourself for anyone' yet we turn around and persecute an entire group of people for their lifestyle and being who they are. In all honesty the problem can be easily taken care of, if we educate the youth of our country with ideas of equality and if we, as a people, start to take a stand for what we believe in. No matter your own personal sexual orientation, you can easily make a difference, you don't have to be gay to stand up for gay rights, you just have to be a decent human being with a heart to feel the persecution these people go through in an attempt to convince people that their love is simply that. Love. Not a political statement. Not a phase, but just simply the same love that we feel, and by standing up and speaking out, we can change the lives of the victim, and in the end change an entire country's perspective on an entire group of people.