

# She's Helping All Teens Feel INCLUDED

Brianna wants to make sure LGBTQ students have a supportive community at school.

By ANNA STARECHESKI

## THE INSPIRATION

In fifth grade, Brianna Davis was the new girl at school, so she was thrilled when a group of girls invited her to a sleepover. The night was fun—“we talked and played on the Wii,” Brianna says—until the group got into a petty fight over the game and one girl revealed something Brianna thought would be kept private. “She said, ‘we’re not mad because of the game, we’re mad because you’re gay, and we don’t want you around us,’” Brianna says. She felt hurt and confused. “I didn’t think it was that big a deal,” she recalls. But soon, the whole school was ostracizing her because of her sexual orientation.

Middle school turned out to be worse: Rumors flew and kids bullied Brianna for being gay. “I wanted to say it wasn’t true, but that didn’t feel right,” Brianna, now 17, says. “I am gay. I knew I had to be myself.”

## THE ACTION

Brianna was eager to get to ninth grade because she knew her Vineland, New Jersey, high school had a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), a club where LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) kids and straight kids can come together. But when she got to the school, she was devastated to learn the group had been disbanded. “I made it my mission to get the club started again,” Brianna says.

Brianna made her case for the GSA in front of the entire school board. With her mom watching

proudly from the back of the room, Brianna told the board the club would help change the lives of other teens like her. After she was done speaking, the principal promised to reinstate the GSA.

## THE OUTCOME

Today, Brianna’s president of her school’s GSA, which has about 20 members. “The school feels different,” Brianna says. “Having an active GSA sends a message that LGBTQ kids are accepted here.” She also advocates for acceptance nationwide as a member of the student council for the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). She even spoke at the Respect Awards in Los Angeles, which honor people who have helped LGBTQ youth. Brianna’s advice for other teens struggling because of their sexuality: “Even if you can’t count on your family or friends right now, you’re never alone. There’s always somewhere you can turn for support.”



Go to [choices.scholastic.com](https://www.scholastic.com) for a video of Brianna talking about her cause.

## HOW TO SUPPORT LGBTQ CLASSMATES

LGBTQ teens are twice as likely to be bullied as straight teens. Here’s how to make everyone feel welcome.

**1. AVOID ASSUMPTIONS:** Use gender-neutral language. For example, instead of asking a girl which boys she likes or a boy which girls he likes, ask “Do you have a crush on anyone?”

**2. RESPECT PRIVACY:** Only share someone’s sexual identity with their permission.

**3. CALL OUT BULLYING:** Speak up if a classmate makes homophobic slurs. Tell a teacher if they do it again.

**4. CLUB IT UP:** Join the GSA, or start a GSA if one doesn’t exist. Go to [gsanetwork.org](https://www.gsanetwork.org) to learn how.