

# *Stand Up for* **YOUR RIGHT TO BE SAFE**

**IF YOU'VE BEEN A VICTIM OF VIOLENCE OR HARASSED AT SCHOOL, OR IF YOU FEAR FOR YOUR SAFETY, HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF:**

#### **TALK TO SOMEONE YOU CAN TRUST**

Ask for help.

#### **HAVE A SAFETY PLAN**

This might mean, for example, finding a different way to walk home from school, arranging for a ride home, or carrying a cell phone or money to make an emergency phone call.

#### **KEEP A WRITTEN RECORD ABOUT THE PROBLEMS YOU ARE FACING AT SCHOOL**

Be sure to include details about what happened, the people who were involved, where and when the incident took place and whether there were any witnesses.

#### **REPORT ALL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

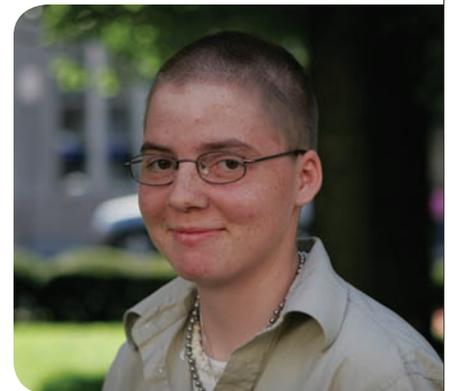
Counselors and teachers can be helpful, too, but they are not always legally required to take action to the same extent as the principal. Reporting to the school principal is the key. Put your reports and complaints in writing, and keep a file with copies of all documents you send and receive.

#### **FILE A COMPLAINT**

Follow school complaint procedures. Schools that receive federal financial assistance are required by federal law to have complaint procedures. If you experience serious threats or physical assault, you may make reports to local police, as well.

#### **REPORT "UP THE LADDER"**

Give the school principal a reasonable amount of time to address your complaint, but if no helpful action is taken, then take your complaint to the superintendent or school board.



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Nancy Wadington Took Action

TAKING ACTION:

## Nancy Wadington

Nancy Wadington endured antigay abuse at her high school in southern New Jersey until the middle of 11th grade, when she had to leave school to protect her safety. In a lawsuit Lambda Legal filed on her behalf against school officials, Nancy asserted that she suffered verbal and physical attacks from other students over a two and a half year period. And in an effort to avoid the attacks, she stayed out of the hallways, walked around the outside of the school building to get to her next class, and stopped using the school bathrooms, which led to abdominal pain during class. Under New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination, school officials that know or should know about discriminatory abuse must take effective remedial action. After a mediation, school officials agreed to mandatory training for administrators, faculty, and staff, and to pay Nancy an amount as long as she kept it confidential.

### **IF NECESSARY, CONSIDER ANONYMOUS REPORTS**

Generally, it is important to identify yourself when you make a complaint, because you are more likely to receive protection and because the school is more likely to have a legal obligation to protect you if administrators know you have been mistreated. But if you feel strongly that you can't identify yourself, send an anonymous report of harassment to the principal. The report could identify particular harassers at your school or describe your school's harassment problem more generally. You might also ask a trusted adult, like a counselor, to tell the principal without using your name that harassment is a problem at the school. Many schools have procedures for anonymous reporting. Always keep copies of your reports or reports filed on your behalf.

### **REPORT HARASSMENT EVEN IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHO THE HARASSERS ARE**

It is important to make the principal aware that harassment is taking place, even if you are unable to identify the harassers. As always, report incidents in writing, and keep a copy of the report for yourself.

### **SPEAK UP IF THE HELP ISN'T ACTUALLY HELPFUL**

If your school attempts to stop the harassment but fails, don't give up. Talk to the principal and other adults at school about other ways the school could respond. At a minimum, report to the principal that the school's efforts are not working.

### **BE READY WITH SOLUTIONS, IF YOU CAN**

Talk with Lambda Legal or other supportive organizations for resources and ideas. Then share these ideas each time you make a complaint.

### **CONTACT ORGANIZATIONS THAT TRAIN STAFF, FACULTY AND STUDENTS ABOUT HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA AND VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS**

These organizations may have information and materials that can help you make a complaint or advocate for training around these issues at your school.

### **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS**

See our "Protections Against Discrimination and Harassment" insert for general information about students' rights. For more detailed information, visit Lambda Legal's website or call Lambda Legal's Help Desk. If your school does not respond in a helpful way to your reports of harassment, contact Lambda Legal's Help Desk at 1-866-542-8336 or email [legalhelpdesk@lambdalegal.org](mailto:legalhelpdesk@lambdalegal.org).