Online Moderator Resource Guide

Guidlines for Message Answering

The messages that Have A Gay Day receives are our link to our followers and we treat each and every one as a precious thing. Every single message matters. No matter how small or how large, the message and the person behind the message matter. Take your time and give the person the same time and attention you would like if you wrote our page.

We have developed a few rules when it comes to answering messages. These help our admins give the community the best support possible. Please be aware of your own mental state and triggers when answering messages. If you don't feel you can answer them for whatever reason, please refrain and let another of the admins answer until you are able to resume. Also, if you fell you need some time away from the inbox because of other commitments or personal issues please let \_\_\_\_\_\_ know and we will assist you in any way we can.

1. **Quality over quantity.** We get quite a few messages every day and it may seem like they never end. However, we are more concerned with quality responses than we are with keeping the number of unread messages low. There is no set number of messages you need to answer in a day or a week; some people are comfortable answering less than 5, some up to 30. Keep in mind that many people who write us will have an ongoing conversation. Do not overdo yourself. Focus on the humanity and needs of people including yourself.

2. **If you don't know how to answer, don't.** If you are unsure of how to answer a message, please mark it as unread and allow another admin to answer it. If it is an older message (over a week), please notify a senior admin.

3. **Spam**. All messages to buy the page, links to random things, or someone saying they are with Facebook – immediately mark these messages as spam. DO NOT click on links even if someone asks you to look at it and share it on the page.

4. **Don't respond to hate messages**. If someone messages the page in a negative or hateful way, report the user, ban them from the page, and mark the message as spam.

5. **If it's a subject that's sensitive to you, think carefully.** You may encounter a message that deals with a topic that may be a sensitive subject to you. If it is and you don't feel comfortable answering it, mark it unread. If you do answer it, remember that you are representing our organization and please be as professional as possible.

6. **Think before you type.** You are representing Have A Gay Day when you answer messages. Please be as respectful and professional as possible. Try to understand the situation or question as fully as possible before you respond.

7. **Answer older messages first.** We can't answer every message as soon as we get it, but we would like to answer them as soon as possible. To do this, start with the oldest unanswered ones first.

8. **Crisis messages.** Any message that contains suicidal, self-harm, abuse, or any indication that the person contacting us is in danger should be immediately referred to active members of the crisis team.

9. **Read, don't skim.** Make sure you read the entire message and try to understand the situation. Sometimes reading the message, thinking of a response, then re-reading the message is a good strategy to give a quality response.

10. **Sign your name (except when you don't).** When you respond to a message please remember to sign the bottom of the message with your first name or handle. This lets us and the follower know who is responding. If using a handle, clear your handle with \_\_\_\_\_\_ before using it. Never give out your full name or any personal details. Do not send friend requests to people who message us unless cleared first with a Senior Admin.

If a message thread contains a crisis situation or a crisis topic is brought up, do NOT sign your name. First, notify the Crisis Team with a link to the message, the person's name, how old the message is, and when they last responded. Please, if possible, keep the person engaged until the crisis team can respond but do not offer platitudes ("it gets better", etc.). DO NOT sign your name at the end of the message so the Crisis Team can take over seamlessly without the person who messaged knowing. If they think they are just being passed off to someone else it could make the situation worse. Once a Crisis Team member has taken over the message, please do not continue to respond to the person unless directed to do so from the Crisis Team.

11. **Mark messages unread if you don't answer.** If you read a message but can't respond, please be sure that you mark the message unread. This allows the other admins to handle the message and make sure it doesn't fall through the cracks.

12. **If you're unsure about anything, ask.** If you have a question regarding a message or our policies, please ask. We have a lot of experienced admins that can help you with whatever you need.

Common Message Topics:

Below are some common situations and some strategies for answering them.

**Coming out.** Coming out is an issue we deal with quite a bit, both from younger followers and older ones as well. For those messages from minors (people under the age of 18) NEVER advise them that their parents or guardians will love and accept them as this is not always the case. It is better for them to figure out if their adults are are accepting of the LGBTQ+ community first and determine if coming out is something that won't put them in danger of physical or emotionalharm or being thrown out of their house.

**Relationships.** Relationships and advice relating to them are tricky. It is hard to advise someone if you have not experienced the situation yourself, and may be difficult to acertain the similarity or difference of the situation to something you've experienced. If you are unsure how to answer, please mark the message unread and let someone else answer it. We will NEVER condone and intimate relationship between a minor and an adult.

**Religion.** Religion is an issue that many struggle with in regards to the LGBTQ+ community. Many people believe that it isn't possible to reconcile religious belief with being something other than a cisgender heterosexual. If you can, direct them to search for a group of LGBTQ+ individuals within their own religion. Here are some potential resources:

-...................................

-.........................................

-...................................

-...................................

-...................................

**Bullying.** Bullying is something a lot of people experience. It can happen at any point in a person's life though most people experience it in school. The first thing a student should do is talk with their parents (if that isn't possible, they need to talk to another adult). They should start a log of what has happened, when it has happened and who is involved, including students who stand by and do nothing (at a minimum they are potential witnesses). When reporting the situation to the school have them keep a log of who they talk to, when they talk to them and what the school official says they are going to do about it.

In addition to the student keeping a log, the parents also need to keep a log of everyone they talk to at the school. Once they have met with the principal (or other school official) they should write a follow-up letter to the person. This follow-up letter should essentially say that this is a follow up to our meeting on [this date and time] where I reported the bullying of my child to the school; from our conversation I understand you are going to do [what they said they were going to do about it] and that you are going to follow up with me to assure me that the situation has been taken care of; and I expect that my child is going to be safe while in school and I appreciate your attention to the matter. Then sign it.

All parties should include as much detail as possible, including the instances of bullying that have been reported and the reactions of school officials. A copy of this letter should be sent to the school official they spoke with, the principal (if this is not the school official they met with), the superintendent of the school district and the members of the school board. The letter should include that they are sending it to all of these people. This will be a huge help for the family should the school not take care of the situation.

Many states now have bullying laws as well (admins can google anti-bullying law and the name of the state the person is in). If at any time the bullying has included physical injury (i.e. if the student has bruises, lacerations, or any evidence of injury) or sexual contact (including but not limited to touching or threats of sexual attack) the local police should be contacted in addition to the incident being reported to the school.

IF the school does not take care of the situation, there are several more steps that may help. First contact the school and request another meeting with the principal. Once they have a date and time, contact the school district office and request that the superintendent attend the meeting as well (they usually won't but they will send someone from their office to represent them). If there is a school police liason, request their presence at the meeting too (DO NOT do this through the school, contact the local police department and request the school police liason/resource officer).

Print any information about the state law (if they have one) about anti-bullying laws (if the state has them). Also, print the information about the federal protections, type and print copies of the written logs about the bullying (the what, when, where, and who of all the bullying instances), and print out copies of who was talked with (take at least 5 copies – one for the parents/guardians, one for the principal, superintendent, the school resource officer, and one extra).

At the meeting, remember to remain as calm as possible. You do not want them to brush you off as an irrational helicopter parent. However, you want to make it very clear that you are not going to give up or go away, that you expect the school to fix the situation. The school resource officer (if there is one) can tell you if there is the possibility of criminal charges against the bully/bullies. You may also be able to get a restraining order against the student(s) doing the bullying. Again, type up a letter about the meeting and send it again to the school administration, the school district (attention to the superintendent), and the school board. Include in this letter that should the bullying not be stopped, you will have no choice but to escalate the matter to a higher authority.

If after the second report the bullying is still happening, fill out the formal complaint form for the US Department of Education and the US Department of Justice (print copies of the complaint before you submit them). Once you have done this, contact the school superintendent's office, the school board members, the county Department of Education, and the state Department of Education. Explain (usually in a letter) that you have reported bullying of your student; include all documents from above (letters about school meetings, logs about the bullying, logs about who you've spoken to when); that you have had meetings with the school and the bullying continued; and that you as a parent feel you had no choice but to escalate the matter to the US Department of Education and the US Department of Justice (include the printed copies of your reports to the Department of Education and the US Department of Justice).

IF at ANY point the bullying has become physical (and your child has marks from this) OR the bullying has any type of sexual touching or threatening of sex acts contact your local police immediately, then report it to the school. The student should this happens during school hours go directly to the office and ask that their parents be called (if the school won't contact the parents the student should ask to use the restroom and use their cell phone to contact their parents). When the parents arrive at the school they should speak with their child separate from a school official, if there was physical contact or threat of sexual violence the parents should ask that the police be called (if the school refuses, call them yourself on your cell phone).

In some cases, bullying overlaps with discriminatory harassment which is covered under federal civil rights laws enforced by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). No matter what label is used (e.g., bullying, hazing, teasing), schools are obligated by these laws to address this conduct.

* A school that fails to respond appropriately to harassment of students based on a protected class may be violating one or more civil rights laws enforced by the Department of Education and the Department of Justice, including:
  + Title IV and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
  + Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
  + Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
  + Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act
  + Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
* When a school receives a complaint they must take certain steps to investigate and resolve the situation.
  + Immediate and appropriate action to investigate or otherwise determine what happened.
  + Inquiry must be prompt, thorough, and impartial.
  + Interview targeted students, offending students, and witnesses, and maintain written documentation of investigation.
  + Communicate with targeted students regarding steps taken to end harassment
  + Check in with targeted students to ensure that harassment has ceased.
  + When an investigation reveals that harassment has occurred, a school should take steps reasonably calculated to:
    - End the harassment,
    - Eliminate any hostile environment,
    - Prevent harassment from recurring, and
    - Prevent retaliation against the targeted student(s) or complainant(s)

If harassment persists, consider filing a formal grievance with the district and contacting the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and from the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. (I highly recommend this to parents or others if the school does not fix the situation. In most cases, the parents only need threaten to report it and the school will cave. Web addresses for both will be in the "Useful Links" section.)

**Useful Links**

Below are a few useful links for you as a volunteer to look at and give to followers if you feel they are appropriate for them. Some of them are for countries other than the U.S.A. and they  
will be marked but please make sure you're giving out the correct information.

* U.S. Dept. of Education: Office of Civil Rights

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>

* U.S. Dept. of Justice: Civil Rights Division

<http://www.justice.gov/crt/complaint/#three>

* National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

800-273-TALK (8255)

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

* The Trevor Lifeline (U.S. only)

866-4-U-TREVOR (488-7386)

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week <http://www.thetrevorproject.org>

* National Suicide Hotline

800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

800-442-HOPE (4673)

` Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week <http://www.hopeline.com>

* The STOMP Out BullyingTM Live Help Chat Line: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

<http://www.stompoutbullying.org/livechat_portal.php>

* Your Life Iowa: Bullying Support and Suicide Prevention  
  (855) 581-8111 (24/7) or text TALK to 85511 (4-8 PM every day)

Chat is available Mondays-Thursdays from 7:30 PM-12:00 AM <http://www.yourlifeiowa.org>

* Crisis Call Center (Suicide Prevention and Crisis Prevention) 800-273-8255 or text ANSWER to 839863

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week

<http://crisiscallcenter.org/crisisservices.html>

* Thursday's Child National Youth Advocacy Hotline

800-USA-KIDS (800-872-5437)

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week

<http://www.thursdayschild.org>

* CyberTipline (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children)

800-843-5678

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week  
 http://www.cybertipline.com

* Bullying UK (UK only 0808-800-2222)  
  Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week http://www.bullying.co.uk
* Kids Helpline (Australia only) 1800-55-1800  
  Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week <http://www.kidshelp.com.au>
* Kids Help Phone (Canada only) 800-668-6868  
  Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week http://www.kidshelpphone.ca

Community Resources:

LGBTQ+ centers: <https://www.lgbtqcenters.org/LGBTCenters>

...................................

...................................

...................................