

## Title: It Gets Better

**Grade:** 9-12

### OVERVIEW

Using selected stories from the It Gets Better book, students will explore how to combat anti-LGBT bullying and harassment in school.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Explore the reasons that can contribute to bullying behaviors
- Develop techniques to address anti-LGBT/gender non-conforming bullying
- Strategize how to make a more welcoming and safer school for all students

### TIME

- One session of 50 minutes

### STANDARDS

#### California Health Education Content Standards

- Standard 1 – All students will comprehend essential concepts related to enhancing health
- Standard 2 - All students will demonstrate the ability to analyze internal and external influences that affect health
- Standard 4 – All students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health
- Standard 5 – All students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health
- Standard 6 – All students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health
- Standard 8 – All students will demonstrate the ability to promote and support personal, family and community health.

#### Reading

#### Written and Oral English Conventions

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Select readings from the It Gets Better book
  - Copy the following two stories from the It Gets Better book, ensuring there are enough copies for students:
    - “The Person Worth Fighting For is You” by Alex R. Orue, Pg. 35-37
    - “My Own Worst Enemy” by Jessica Leshnoff, Pg. 248-253
- White board/chart paper and marker
- Paper and pencils/pen

## VOCABULARY

- **Anti-Gay Bullying:** Harassment or bullying based on perceived sexual orientation, or gender non-conforming behavior.
- **Bullying (from *It's Elementary*):** Threatening or trying to scare someone with words or actions even though that person did nothing to provoke this behavior.
- **Empathy (from *It's Elementary*):** A feeling of knowing and appreciating what another person is feeling
- **Gay:** A term that can apply to either men or women who are physically and emotionally attracted to persons of the same sex. However, it is usually used to describe men (e.g., "gay men").
- **Gender Non-Conforming (from *It's Elementary*):** A person who has or is perceived to have gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations. Gender non-conforming people may or may not identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- **Gender Role (from *Let's Get Real*):** Societal or cultural expectations about what it means to be a man or a woman.
- **Gender Stereotype (from *Let's Get Real*):** An idea about the way men or women are "supposed" to act, dress, or appear; an assumption about how all girls or boys "should" be.
- **Harass (from *It's Elementary*):** To bother or upset someone repeatedly through words and actions
- **Heterosexual:** A person who is physically and emotionally attracted to a person of the opposite sex.
- **Homophobia:** A fear or hatred of homosexuality, especially in others, but also in oneself.
- **Homosexual:** A person who is physically and emotionally attracted to a person of the same sex.
- **Lesbian:** A term used to describe a woman who is emotionally and physically attracted to another woman.
- **Stereotype:** A generalization, usually negative, about persons based on some characteristic. The generalization is then attributed to everyone who may fit into the group.
- **Transgender:** People whose gender identity is different from their birth or biological sex. Sometimes they may hormonally and or/surgically change their bodies to more fully match their gender identity

## CLASSROOM PROCEDURE

Introduce the It Gets Better book to the students.

Briefly explain the development of the It Gets Better project.

As a response to anti-LGBT harassment in school that resulted in suicides of students who were the targets of this bullying, the project intends to send a message to any student experiencing a hard time in school to let them know that life can get better. Individuals have posted videos on youtube.com and written messages to let students know that services, resources, and networks exist to support them. No matter how hostile a school environment may feel, a community exists beyond high school to welcome, love, and accept them. This book is a collection of the some of these “It Gets Better” messages.

Explain that the class will read a couple of these stories and discuss them.

### **Part One: Reading the Story**

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- Pass out the selected stories from the It Gets Better book
  - “The Person Worth Fighting for is You” by Alex R. Orue, Pg. 35 - 37
  - “My Own Worst Enemy” by Jessica Leshnoff Pg. 248 - 253
- Give students 15 minutes to read the stories.

### **Part Two: Reflections/Discussion**

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#### 1. Individual Writing Exercise (5 minutes)

Have students write the answers to the following questions:

- List ways that you feel different from others?
- Do you have responses similar to Alex or Jessica’s when you discover you feel different from your friends or classmates?

#### 2. Think/Pair/Share (10 minutes)

Have students form pairs and share their thoughts on the following questions:

- What “differences” do you imagine that people made fun of Alex for in elementary school?
- In this story, the author went from being bullied to participating in bullying behavior. Why do you think he became a bully?
- Jessica talks about self-bullying. What does this mean, and what do you think might have contributed to her worries and self-bullying?
- Do you see or hear negative messages about being gay?
- Are students in your school bullied because they either are, or people think they are gay or lesbian? If so, what can you do to make it better?

#### 3. Group Discussion (8 minutes)

Bring the class together for a group discussion of the following questions:

- What changed for Alex when he moved to Canada?
- What helped him let go of the “fears” and “taboos”?
- What about the move helped him be more comfortable? Should people have to move away from their homes for life to get better?
- In what ways can we improve our school environment to provide a safe space for all students right now?

### Part Three: Closure/Wrap up

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#### 1. Safer School Chart (12 minutes):

Using the suggestions from the group discussion as a starting point, the class will brainstorm ways to make this school a safer, more welcoming place for all students.

Ask the following questions, and fill in the chart below with the responses. For each challenge, have students try to think of ways the school community/student body could address it, and ways an individual student may handle the challenge if they were bullied.

- What are some challenges our school faces in combating anti-gay bullying and creating a safer school? List these in the chart below.
- In what ways can we improve our school environment to provide a safe space for all students right now? Address the challenges suggested earlier.
- How can we help students who are being bullied or harassed?

For this activity, use the chart below:

Challenges to combating bullying:	Ways to improve our school:	How can I help/be an ally to someone who is bullied: