

Talking About Gay and Transgender Issues: Overall Messaging Approaches



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Overview

Effective social advocacy communications frame what issues are about in authentic ways that resonate with people's values. In talking about gay and transgender issues, we recommend basing your public communications on the following messaging frame:

This is about everyday Americans who want the same chance as everyone else to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love.

Notice that the words "gay" and "transgender" don't appear in this messaging frame. That's because this isn't just about gay people. It's not just about transgender people. And it's not just about straight people. It's about all of us.

When conversations about gay issues are rooted in the common ground we share—when we emphasize the values, hopes, and dreams we have in common instead of our differences—it's difficult to see gay people as being "other," "different," or "not like me."

It also makes it more difficult for Americans to dismiss the harms and injustices that gay and transgender people face.

Emphasize Common Ground

Some Americans aren't sure whether to support equality for gay people because they erroneously believe that gay people are very different from straight people. However, despite media stereotypes, gay people live ordinary lives. They are coworkers, neighbors, family

members and friends. They work, pay taxes, do the laundry, celebrate birthdays, and take out the trash. Like straight people, gay people want to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love. Drawing these parallels helps create an emotional connection—and helps Americans understand that the lives and values of straight and gay people aren't that different.

Use the language of common values, beliefs, hopes, and dreams. Family. Hard work. Responsibility. Commitment. Sacrifice. Duty. These are a few of the values gay people share with straight Americans. Research shows that talking about "rights," "benefits," and "what gay people deserve" can alienate the public. Use the language of values to show that gay people understand and prioritize their obligations to others—to their loved ones, their families, their friends, their neighbors, their communities, and their country.

Make your communications about people and storytelling, not policies. Most Americans aren't policy wonks. Complicated legal concepts and policy distinctions make people tune out or retreat into their existing way of thinking. Instead, talk about people. Tell stories that draw attention to committed couples who have taken care of each other in sickness and in health, or show gay and transgender employees providing for their families and loved ones. Focus on changing how Americans *feel* about gay people. Help them see gay people as part of the American fold.

Messaging to Increase Support for Gay Issues

"It's about everyday Americans who want the same chance as everyone else to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love."

Emphasize common ground

- Use the language of common values, beliefs, hopes, and dreams
- Make it about people and their stories, not policies
- Focus on changing how people feel about gay people
- Talk about gay people as neighbors, coworkers, and friends who also walk the dog, mow the lawn, etc.

Illustrate concrete harms

- Avoid abstract "rights" language
- Make it clear that existing laws don't protect gay people
- Focus on a few meaningful injustices
- Illustrate injustices with personal stories

Illustrate Concrete Harms

Most Americans simply don't understand the inequalities gay people face. For example, many Americans believe that gay people wouldn't need to get married if they'd just get a power of attorney. They don't understand that it's still legal to unfairly fire gay and transgender people in most states—despite the fact that Gallup polling shows that 89% of Americans support employment protections for gay people. They don't realize that when gay and transgender Americans are victims of hate violence, they're not covered under federal law. Before more Americans support equality for gay people, they need to understand the extent of the problem.

Avoid abstract “rights” language. Talking generically about the need for “equal rights” doesn't help Americans understand the problems gay and transgender people face. Instead of talking about “equality” and “rights,” focus on explaining the problem.

Make it clear when and how existing laws don't cover gay people. Don't assume the public understands the issues; it's very likely they don't. Be specific. It's legal in 30 states to fire someone just because they're gay, and in 37 states because they're transgender. It's also legal in these states to deny housing to gay and transgender people. Denying marriage for gay couples means they can't pass their social security benefits or pension on to each other in old age, visit each other in the hospital, or take personal leave if their partner becomes ill. *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* means that gay people who put their lives on the line for their country are dishonorably discharged for no other reason than their orientation.

Focus on a few meaningful injustices and illustrate them with personal stories. Focus on concrete injustices that all Americans can relate to and empathize with. For example, rather than talking generically about employment protections, help people understand what it's like to live each day with the fear of being fired because you're gay. For marriage, talk about end-of-life decision making rather than the 1,138 federal benefits of marriage. And offer real-world stories about those who have experienced these injustices.

Effective Communications Principles

Make it about straight people. When discussions start off with straight people being asked to consider a scenario like “Imagine you were gay and you were denied housing,” people get stuck. Why? Because many people simply can't imagine what it's like to be gay. There is an easy way around this. People don't have to imagine they're gay before they can imagine how certain situations make gay people feel. So, instead of asking people to put themselves in a gay person's

ACKNOWLEDGE THE DISCOMFORT, NOT THE ATTITUDES

Be aware of an important distinction! Acknowledging a person's discomfort is important, but don't inadvertently validate anti-gay attitudes. Saying, “I understand how talking about these issues can be stressful,” is different from, “I understand why you're opposed to this issue.” The former lets someone know that you understand how difficult these discussions can be. The latter can be interpreted as affirming the person's harmful attitudes.

People don't empathize with abstract appeals to “equal rights.” They empathize with specific injustices shown to hurt real people.

shoes, ask them how they would feel if they faced some of the specific injustices that gay people face (e.g., “Imagine you were told you couldn't take time off when your loved one got sick or hurt. How would you feel? That's what it feels like for gay people.”).

Focus on persuading your audience. Don't debate anti-gay activists; their intolerance is deeply ingrained and trying to change their minds isn't productive. Instead, focus on persuading everyday Americans. The public is tiring of anti-gay opponents' angry, confrontational approach. Be reasonable and relatable while anti-gay opponents appear shrill and hysterical. Talk about all the great reasons to support gay people; don't get dragged down by those who want to manufacture and then debate their reasons not to.

Be careful about using highly charged language. Research shows that using terms like “bigotry,” “prejudice,” and “hatred” to describe anti-gay attitudes is viewed by many Americans as shrill and confrontational. Attacking anti-gay activists doesn't give Americans a reason to support equality for gay and transgender people. Instead, talk about why gay and transgender people should have the same chance as everyone else to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love.

Meet people where they're at. Despite the fact that many Americans are still ambivalent about issues like marriage, people have made significant strides in terms of understanding gay people and issues. However, expecting Americans to cover that remaining distance on their own won't work. Help take responsibility for closing the distance. Acknowledge the journey people took to get to where they are—and the

progress they've already made. Showing respect for another person's journey encourages them to continue further down that road.

Use messengers that everyday Americans view as credible. While many advocacy organizations focus on putting staff spokespeople or think-tank experts on television, research shows that the most effective messengers are those considered credible and impartial. For example, a 40-something working mom would likely look to doctors, school nurses, child health and social services authorities, teachers, and clergy for leadership and expertise. Advocates often aren't the most effective spokespeople because they're not considered impartial.

Promote inclusion, avoid confusion. Complex descriptions and acronyms (such as LGBT) can pull audiences out of an emotional relationship with the issues and make them feel like the person talking to them speaks an entirely different language. Keep descriptions simple (e.g., "gay couples" or "gay and transgender people").

Don't invalidate your audience's feelings. The discomfort many people feel in talking about gay issues is real. Saying, "You shouldn't feel that way" is very likely to alienate them. Acknowledging how a person feels (e.g., "I understand how this can be difficult to talk about") can create a bridge and help gain their trust.

Things to Avoid

1) DON'T repeat or acknowledge anti-gay messages.

Don't say things like "Gay couples aren't destroying marriage" or "This isn't about defending marriage." While it's tempting to argue against the false claims of anti-gay activists, repeating their language and soundbites just makes their concepts "stick" in the minds of Americans. If repeating anti-gay language is unavoidable, think about using the "so-called" qualifier to remind audiences that opponents' terminology is misleading (e.g., "This so-called Defense of Marriage Act is really about hurting committed couples.").

2) DON'T focus on differences in religious beliefs.

Theological arguments with those who aren't comfortable with gay people are rarely effective. Research indicates that many religious people who change their minds on gay issues do so after forming an emotional connection with a gay person, which makes them willing to look at their faith a little differently. Rather than arguing over different interpretations of theology, talk about shared values and beliefs, or help Americans understand how certain attitudes and legislation hurt gay people.

Basic Terminology

LGBT PEOPLE AND ISSUES

- **gay people** (not "homosexuals")
- **gay and transgender people**
- **gay couples** (not "homosexual couples" or "same-sex couples")
- **orientation (sexual orientation** on first reference if necessary)
- **gender identity, gender expression**
- **lesbian, lesbians** (use **gay people** as an umbrella term)
- **advocates for gay equality, advocates for gay and transgender equality** (not "gay activists")

COMMON GROUND VOCABULARY

- **care, caring**
- **commitment**
- **responsibility**
- **security**
- **duty, service, sacrifice, patriotic**
- **loyalty, trust**
- **family**
- **friendship**
- **community, neighbor**
- **together**
- **hard working**

3) DON'T compare—directly or indirectly—the experiences of gay and transgender people with those of African Americans. Likewise, don't make comparisons to the Civil Rights Movement. Research is clear: these comparisons alienate African Americans and they don't actually help people understand the concrete, specific harms that gay and transgender people face.

4) DON'T use the language of conflict. Most Americans don't typically respond well to framing gay and transgender issues as a "war," "battle," or "fight." It can make them feel like they're in the crossfire or, perhaps, watching people throw chairs on a Jerry Springer episode. Avoid war metaphors; simply talk about the harms that gay and transgender people experience.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

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Talking About Marriage and Relationship Recognition for Gay Couples



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Overview

There is no question that marriage¹ and other forms of relationship recognition for gay couples are tough issues for many Americans. The good news is that most Americans genuinely want to do the right thing. They're just not sure what that right thing is when it comes to marriage for gay couples. By resolving the conflict they feel, we can help them move from being undecided on an "issue" to being supportive of loving, committed couples.

Doing this requires three approaches. First, we must create an emotional connection and establish that gay couples want to marry for the same reasons as straight couples—namely, to make a lifelong promise to take care of and be responsible for each other. Second, we must illustrate how shutting committed couples out of marriage causes real harm by making it hard for them to take care of each other. And third, we must remind Americans that good people care about the well-being of others and oppose putting committed couples in harm's way.

Marriage Messages

"Marriage is about commitment. It's about responsibility. And it's about being able to take care of the one you love."

"It's hard to imagine what it would be like to be told that you couldn't visit your husband in the hospital or hold your wife's hand and tell her that you love her before she went into surgery. I think we can all agree that it's wrong to hurt committed couples this way."

"I know not everyone is comfortable with the idea of gay couples marrying. But just because I'm not comfortable with something doesn't mean it should be illegal. Why would we want to make it hard for committed couples to take care of each other?"

"I'm the kind of person who thinks that we should do what we can to help people take care of each other. That's why I support marriage for all committed couples."

Emphasize Common Ground

1) "Marriage is about committed couples who want to make a lifelong promise to take care of and be responsible for each other." Marriage isn't about "rights." It's about love, commitment, and responsibility. It's about the things we give, not the things we get. It's about our responsibility to the ones we love and the promise and commitment we make to take care of each other. Straight and gay couples want to marry for the same reasons. Both straight and gay couples want to build a life with someone. Both want to make a commitment and a lifelong promise. Both straight and gay couples want to take care of and protect the one they love. Both need the security and legal protections of marriage that help make this possible.

Too often, marriage is discussed as if it's some sort of public policy dispute or a set of "rights" or "benefits" that are being "demanded." Americans don't think about marriage this way—and they don't want to. Talk about marriage as people understand and experience it. Help people connect their desire to make a lifelong commitment to someone they love with gay couples who want the same thing.

Messaging to Increase Support for Marriage

"It's about caring, responsibility, and commitment."

Emphasize common ground

1. "Marriage is about committed couples who want to make a lifelong promise to take care of and be responsible for each other."

Illustrate concrete harms

2. Denying committed couples the security and legal protections of marriage hurts them; it's wrong to make it harder for committed couples to take care of and be responsible for each other.

Affirm people's desire to do right

3. Acknowledge people's inner conflict around marriage, but remind them it shouldn't be grounds for hurting committed couples.
4. Talk about the importance of being the type of person who cares about others and who opposes putting committed couples in harm's way.

Illustrate Concrete Harms

2) Denying committed couples the security and legal protections of marriage hurts them; it's wrong to make it harder for committed couples to take care of and be responsible for each other. Marriage confers a set of social and legal protections that helps couples fulfill their lifelong promise to take care of and be responsible for each other—emotionally, financially, in sickness and in health, and even in death. Denying committed couples the ability to marry is wrong because it makes it harder for these couples to take care of each other. We're asking people to stop actively denying or standing in the way of the security and legal protections gay couples need to take care of each other. To do this, we must show exactly how denying marriage (and the important security and protections it provides) puts committed couples in harm's way. Note that Americans who are undecided or against marriage for gay couples aren't just maintaining the status quo—they're taking an active role in hurting gay couples.

Focus on telling detailed, emotionally moving stories that connect straight Americans to gay couples.

Medical and end-of-life issues are especially resonant, including hospital visitation, emergency medical decision making, and leave to take care of an ill partner.

Affirm People's Desire to do Right

3) Acknowledge people's inner conflict around marriage but remind them it shouldn't be grounds for hurting committed couples. When we acknowledge the conflicted feelings of our audience, it helps give them the permission they need to support marriage for gay couples. Why? Because it gives people a

ABOUT THE MESSAGING APPROACHES

This series of documents uses two interconnected approaches for talking about gay and transgender issues. The first approach, **Emphasize Common Ground**, helps reduce the sense of "otherness" that some Americans feel when they think about gay people by focusing on the common values and beliefs that gay and straight Americans share. The second approach, **Illustrate Concrete Harms**, helps people understand the specific and pervasive injustices that gay and transgender Americans face.

For additional information, see the document entitled **Talking about Gay and Transgender Issues: Overall Messaging Approaches**

chance to support marriage without first having to resolve conflicted feelings or be comfortable with gay couples. For example, say, "We may not all agree on this issue, but that doesn't mean we should make it hard for committed gay couples to take care of each other," or "I understand you may not be comfortable with this, but that doesn't mean it should be illegal."

4) Talk about the importance of being the type of person who cares about others and opposes putting committed couples in harm's way. Many Americans believe we should strive to treat others as we'd like to be treated. Reinforce that people who care about others should support a committed couple's right to visit each other in the hospital and make emergency medical decisions. Caring people should support couples' commitment to be responsible for and take care of each other, in sickness and in health. On the flip side, only an uncaring person would try to bar a loved one from a hospital room or try to prevent a committed couple from making emergency medical decisions for each other.

REJECTING THE TERMINOLOGY OF ANTI-GAY ACTIVISTS

Using the terms of anti-gay activists legitimizes their language. One creative way to avoid parroting opponents' terms is to preface them with "so-called." For example, "so-called threats to marriage" or the "so-called Defense of Marriage Act." Using this qualifier challenges opponents' terminology and can make a real difference.

Another way to avoid repeating opponents' frames is to subtly play with their wording. For example, advocates in Ohio began referring to their DOMA as "the Denial of Marriage Act." This description copied the DOMA acronym, but accurately described the true purpose of the bill (without falling into the trap of name-calling). Similarly, a Marriage Protection Act could be accurately labeled a Marriage Prevention Act.

When we acknowledge the conflicted feelings of our audience, it helps give them the permission they need to help support marriage for gay couples.

¹ This document uses the term marriage, but the messaging guidelines can also be applied to other forms of relationship recognition (e.g., domestic partnerships, civil unions). Note however that only marriage offers committed couples the security and full set of legal protections they need to take care of each other.

CASE STUDY: ARIZONA TOGETHER

Arizona is the first state to defeat a ballot initiative aimed at denying marriage and domestic partnerships for gay couples. While Arizona Together needed to tailor their message for their unique situation and state demographics, they did employ all three of the marriage messaging approaches.

- They emphasized common ground by using a mix of gay and straight couples as spokespeople (including a straight senior couple and a straight firefighter, his girlfriend, and their disabled son; all of whom voters could easily relate to). This, and the name of the campaign, reinforced the message that “We’re all in this together.”
- They illustrated concrete harms by telling vivid, effective stories about ways the amendment would hurt couples (including straight couples). Specifically, the messaging talked about how domestic partners of all types could lose health insurance and hospital visitation rights—harms that the average Arizonan could relate to, remember, and sympathize with. Arizona Together highlighted these harms with a simple yet compelling question: “Why take away benefits?”
- They affirmed people’s desire to do right by positioning the supporters of the amendment as those wanting to take away benefits and, intentionally or not, hurt their neighbors and fellow Americans.

Things to Avoid

- 1) DON'T use “gay marriage” or “same-sex marriage”** (instead, say “marriage,” “marriage for committed couples,” or “marriage for gay couples”).
- 2) DON'T talk about marriage as a “right,” a “civil right” or a package of “benefits”** (instead, talk about the security and legal protections of marriage that committed couples need to take care of each other).
- 3) DON'T talk about marriage using abstract numbers** (instead of talking about the 1,138 federal benefits of marriage, focus on language that reflects how people think about their own marriages).
- 4) DON'T use opponents' language** (e.g., instead of debating the myth that “marriage is under attack,” stick to the key messages about committed couples taking care of each other).
- 5) DON'T talk about “deserving” or “demanding” marriage** (instead, remind Americans that committed couples need to be able to protect themselves when bad things happen, such as death, disability, or losing a job).

Basic Terminology

DISCUSSING THE ISSUE

- **marriage** (without modifiers)
- **marriage for committed couples** (or marriage for gay couples, if clarification is needed)
- **denial of marriage**
- **shutting people out of marriage**
- **“taking away” protections or benefits** (can describe efforts to ban relationship recognition for gay couples)
- **putting committed couples in harm's way**
- **taking care of and being responsible for each other**
- **security, protections, legal protections** (talking about the “protections” or “legal protections” of marriage both test very well)

MARRIAGE VALUES VOCABULARY

- **care, caring**
- **responsibility, shared/mutual responsibility**
- **commitment, lifelong commitment**
- **lifelong relationship**
- **love, loving**
- **courage, courageous couples**

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Talking About Adoption and Gay Parents



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Overview

When considering adoption law, Americans agree that before anything else, we need to do what's in a child's best interest. Each child's case is different, and adoption decisions should be made by experienced child health and social services experts, on a case-by-case basis—based on what's in the best interest of the child.

Blanket adoption bans—laws designed to outlaw all adoptions by gay parents—hurt kids. For example, these laws mean that children might be placed with strangers rather than a gay relative should their parents die unexpectedly. Children in foster and government care can be denied forever homes.

Adoption bans also take decisions out of the hands of experienced child health and social services authorities and put them in the hands of politicians (which even strong conservatives agree is a bad thing).

What many Americans don't know is that child authorities, who are trusted and charged with acting in the best interests of children, support adoption by qualified gay parents. Not only do these experts understand that adoption bans hurt kids, they also understand the conclusive social science research—research which shows that children of gay parents do just as well as the children of straight parents.

Note that these messages can be used both to fight adoption bans and to proactively pass laws that allow gay parents to adopt. For example, adoption bans may prevent a decision that's in the best interest of a child, but so does standing in the way of legislation that would allow gay parents to adopt.

Adoption Messages

Emphasize Common Ground

1) Adoption decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, based on what's in the best interest of the child—not based on a parent's orientation. There are two parts to this message: first, that decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis; and second, that those decisions should be based on what's in the best interest of the child. Even people who are generally uncomfortable with the idea of gay parents can be swayed by examples of the myriad situations where adoption by a gay parent or parents is in a child's best interest (see "Adoption bans hurt children").

2) Experienced child health and social services experts, not politicians, should make adoption decisions. It takes expertise and training to make adoption decisions. Blanket adoption bans (or opposing legislation that allows gay parents to adopt) mean that politicians are taking these decisions out of the hands of the people most qualified to make them. This places politics above the best interests of children and puts children at risk.

3) Mainstream child health and social services authorities unanimously support adoption by qualified gay parents (or unanimously oppose adoption bans). To date, states have been largely successful in keeping adoption bans off the books. This is in no small part due to the unanimous, credible, and vocal support of mainstream national child health and social services authorities who best understand the needs of the half-million children in foster care. Among these respected, supportive experts are the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of

Messaging to Increase Support for Adoption

"It's about what's in the best interest of children."

Emphasize common ground

1. "Adoption decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, based on what's in the best interest of the child."
2. "Experienced child health and social services experts, not politicians, should make adoption decisions."
3. "All mainstream child authorities support adoption by gay parents."

Illustrate concrete harms

4. "Adoption bans hurt children."

—OR—

"Opposing adoption by qualified parents hurts children."

Family Physicians, the National Association of Social Workers, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, and the Child Welfare League of America.

NOTE: Don't be confused by the so-called American College of Pediatricians—a tiny anti-gay fringe group that was formed to oppose adoption by gay parents.

Illustrate Concrete Harms

4) Adoption bans hurt children —OR— Opposing adoption by qualified parents hurts children. Adoption bans hurt children—as does opposing legislation that would allow qualified gay parents to adopt. All children deserve loving homes. Adoption bans mean children are denied a loving, safe, permanent (or forever) home simply because their parents are gay. Below, we've outlined the three major ways in which adoption bans hurt children. For specific and vivid examples, see the ACLU's *Too High a Price* publication (www.aclu.org/toohighaprice).

- **Adoption bans mean children might be placed with strangers rather than gay relatives.** Parents should have the ability to designate their child's legal guardian, should they die unexpectedly (e.g., a mother should be able to designate her lesbian sister to raise her child). Adoption bans mean that children might be placed with strangers rather than a close family member who happens to be gay. This hurts kids and is definitely not in their best interest. Americans find this the most compelling potential harm of adoption bans.
- **Adoption bans hurt kids in foster and government care waiting for a forever home.** Adoption bans deny children in foster and government care permanent, stable, loving, forever homes. Research clearly

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shows that children with permanent homes do far better than children in foster or state care. However, there are more than 500,000 children in our foster care system—and in 2005, more than 119,000 of them weren't able to be placed in permanent, loving homes. Systematically excluding a group of qualified and loving people from a limited pool of prospective parents deprives children of the permanent homes they so desperately need. This hurts kids—and may mean years of state care, frequent relocation to different foster homes, and the absence of love and stability.

- **Adoption bans hurt kids with gay parents.** Second-parent adoption occurs when a parent adopts his or her partner's biological or adopted child, giving that child the financial, legal, and emotional security that comes with having two legally connected parents. Denying a child the chance to be adopted by their other parent hurts them. If something happens to their legally connected parent, the child can be ripped away from the only other parent they've ever known. Children can also be denied health insurance because a non-adoptive parent can't include them in their coverage. Note that very few Americans understand the issue of second-parent adoption, and even when explained, the other examples garner stronger support.

FINDING THE BEST POSSIBLE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

"All potential parents are put through a rigorous screening process to determine which are capable of providing a safe, stable, nurturing family life for a particular child. The responsibility to match a waiting child with the best possible adoptive setting rests with trained placement caseworkers. The task of finding a good family for each waiting child can be extremely difficult."

- American Civil Liberties Union, *Too High a Price: The Case Against Restricting Gay Parenting*, 2006.

THE FINANCIAL COST OF ADOPTION BANS

Adoption bans create an extra burden for taxpayers who must shoulder the burden of growing state and foster care costs. For example, the ACLU estimated that the 2002 proposed Texas ban would have cost \$16 million in the first year alone, and more than \$75 million over the following five years.

Studies show that children raised by gay parents are just as happy and well-adjusted as children raised by heterosexual parents. So why do anti-gay opponents often say the opposite? Here's what you need to know. Generally speaking, the social science research on parenting shows two things.

- 1. The research that studies gay parents shows that children of gay parents do just fine.** There's a large and growing body of research that examines outcomes for children raised by gay parents. All of this research consistently concludes that being raised by gay parents has no adverse effects on children. Kids of gay parents are just as healthy and well-adjusted as other children. Also, nearly every credible authority on child health and social services (including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Child Welfare League of America) has determined that a parent's sexual orientation has nothing to do with the ability to be a good parent.
- 2. Children do better with two parents than with one parent.** Research does indicate that, all other things being equal, children do better with two parents than with only one parent. But anti-gay opponents have twisted this finding to claim that studies show "children do best with a mother and a father" as opposed to gay parents. In truth, the research they cite does not even study gay parents—it ONLY compares straight single parents with straight two-parent households.

Things to Avoid

1) DON'T talk about "rights," or "gay rights," or use other advocacy language. Instead, use child-centered language. Adoption isn't about securing "rights" for adults; it's about providing protection, security, and forever homes for children. Always use language that makes children the focus (e.g., "No child should be denied a parent ..." "All children deserve ...").

2) DON'T mix the adoption discussion with the marriage discussion. They are separate issues legally and legislatively. Research shows that talking about them together creates confusion and erodes support.

3) DON'T talk about how few families "measure up" to the nuclear family ideal. Reminding Americans of the increase in single parenthood and divorce doesn't give them a reason to support adoption by gay parents. Stay focused on the importance of meeting each child's needs on a case-by-case basis, based on what's in that child's best interests.

4) DON'T get sidetracked when talking about parenting research. Correct the record if the parenting research is used in a misleading way, but keep it simple: "Those studies didn't look at gay parents; they only examined outcomes for children raised in two-parent vs. single-parent households." Also, focus on what makes a good parent (love, stability, and patience; taking care of and providing for children; keeping them safe and secure).

Basic Terminology

Discussing the issue

- **adoption by gay parents** (instead of "gay adoption")
- **gay parents/loving committed parents** (instead of "gay couples")
- **decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis**
- **child authorities/experts** (not politicians) should make these decisions

Use child-centered language, rather than the language of "rights" or politics

- **the best interests of children**
- **all children deserve loving homes**
- **stable/stability**
- **security**
- **permanent/permanency**
- **forever home/permanent home**
- **love/loving**
- **take care of/provide for**

Gay parents, like straight parents:

- **read bedtime stories**
- **drive their kids to soccer practice**
- **put a Band-Aid on a skinned knee**
- **help their kids with homework**

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Talking About Employment Protections for Gay and Transgender Americans



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Overview

The vast majority of Americans (89% according to a May 2007 Gallup poll) believe that gay people should be protected from being unfairly fired. However, most Americans simply don't realize that in most of the U.S., employers are still able to fire people simply for being gay or transgender. Many Americans also don't understand how often gay and transgender people face unfair work practices, nor do they consider the ways that gay and transgender people must actively hide and lie about who they are to avoid being unjustly fired.

The support for employment protections is clear. Therefore, messages should emphasize the need for these protections and how the lack of existing workplace protections hurts gay and transgender people.

Employment Protections Messages

"What a lot of people don't realize is that right now, it's legal in 30 states to fire someone just because they're gay, and in 37 states if they're transgender. All hardworking Americans should have the chance to earn a living and provide for their families without fear of being unfairly fired for reasons that have nothing to do with their job performance."

Emphasize Common Ground

The idea that everyone should be judged solely on their capabilities and job performance is a very strong American value. Very few people believe that it's okay to fire hardworking and high-performing employees just because they're gay.

1) Hardworking, high-performing employees shouldn't be fired just because they're gay or transgender.

Americans almost universally believe that workers should be judged by their job performance—and that this principle also applies to gay people in the workplace. This makes it very easy to talk about this issue in a way that resonates with common values. Gay and transgender people can and do lose their jobs just for being gay or transgender—and Americans believe that's wrong.

2) Emphasize values like hard work, earning a living, and providing for our families.

Americans tend to have a patriotic view of hard work. Gay and transgender people share this value, and are simply seeking the same chance to contribute and provide for their families. Research shows that it's effective to use messages such as, "If you work hard and do your job, you shouldn't be fired just because you're gay." When talking about employment protections, talk about the importance of hard work, productivity, and contributing to the economic health of the nation.

Remember, it's about having the ability to *earn* a living (not about being "entitled" to work). And, it's about work as a way to provide for and be responsible for our families.

3) Make it clear that America (and corporate America) supports employment protections.

Employment protections are a mainstream issue. Since Gallup started measuring public opinion on workplace protections for gay people, support has risen from 56% in the 1970s to 89% today. However, research suggests that some who

Messaging to Increase Support for Employment Protections

"It's about protecting hardworking Americans from being unjustly fired."

Emphasize common ground

1. "Hardworking, high-performing employees shouldn't be fired just because they're gay or transgender."
2. Emphasize values like hard work, earning a living, and providing for our families.
3. Make it clear that America (and corporate America) supports employment protections.

Illustrate concrete harms

4. "It's legal in 30 states to fire someone just because they're gay, and in 37 states because they're transgender."
5. Tell vivid stories of how gay and transgender employees have been hurt.
6. Show the prevalence of unfair employment practices against gay and transgender people.

support workplace protections mistakenly believe that their friends and neighbors wouldn't be supportive. It's helpful to remind them of the near-universal support for employment protections. In fact, very few issues command this level of public support.

Also, more private corporations are extending employment protections to gay and transgender employees. Of the 519 Fortune 1000 companies surveyed by the Human Rights Campaign, 98% prohibit unfair employment practices for gay employees, and 58% for transgender employees. However, many other businesses that employ millions of Americans don't do the same. Employment protection legislation would bring these remaining businesses, and the government, in line with the successful employment practices of corporate America.

Illustrate Concrete Harms

Americans simply don't know that it's still legal to unfairly fire gay and transgender workers. Overcoming this requires a two-pronged approach. First, establish that gay and transgender people aren't protected under the law. Second, use personal stories and real-life examples to clearly illustrate the harms that gay and transgender people experience in the workplace.

4) Talk about how, contrary to popular belief, it's legal in 30 states to fire someone simply because they're gay, and in 37 states because of a person's gender identity. Explain that across the U.S., companies can and do legally fire gay and transgender people for reasons that have nothing to do with job performance.

5) Tell vivid stories about how gay and transgender people have been hurt. Personal stories about the unfair treatment of gay and transgender employees

ABOUT THE MESSAGING APPROACHES

This series of documents uses two interconnected approaches for talking about gay and transgender issues. The first approach, **Emphasize Common Ground**, helps reduce the sense of "otherness" that some Americans feel when they think about gay people by focusing on the common values and beliefs that gay and straight Americans share. The second approach, **Illustrate Concrete Harms**, helps people understand the specific and pervasive injustices that gay and transgender Americans face.

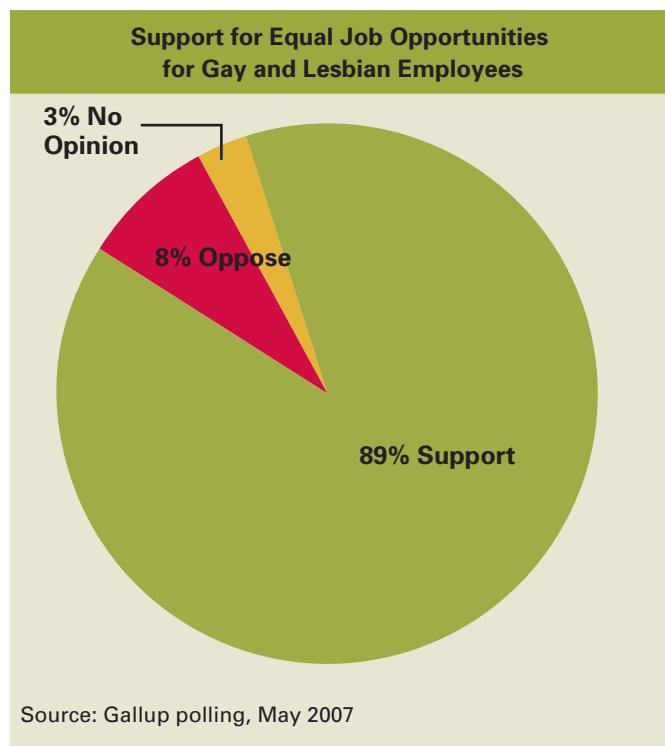
For additional information, see the document entitled ***Talking about Gay and Transgender Issues: Overall Messaging Approaches***

can dispel commonly held misperceptions about employment protections. The ACLU report *Working in the Shadows*, available on the ACLU website, contains many short, vivid case studies of workplace harassment and unjust firings of gay and transgender employees.

Help people understand what gay and transgender people face in the workplace. Even simple watercooler conversations about weekend plans or bringing someone to the company picnic can force gay and transgender people to choose between lying to their colleagues or potentially losing their ability to earn a living, pay the rent, buy groceries, and provide for their families.

6) Explain the prevalence of unfair employment

practices against gay and transgender people. The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law recently reported that between 15% to 43% percent of lesbian, gay and bisexual people (or between 2.25 million and 6.5 million Americans) surveyed since the mid-1990s reported experiencing unfair employment practices based on their orientation. For transgender people, 20% to 57% of respondents reported having experienced unfair employment practices based on their gender identity.



Americans almost universally believe that workers should be judged solely on their job performance.

Basic Terminology

The solution is about:

- employment/workplace protections
- protections for gay and transgender employees

The people it helps are:

- hardworking people/gay and transgender people/Americans
- gay workers/employees, gay and transgender employees

Who want to:

- earn a living
- provide for their families

The unfair practices we want to address include people being:

- unfairly fired/unfairly treated
- fired for reasons that have nothing to do with job performance
- fired "solely" or "just because" a person is gay
- refused jobs solely because a person is gay
- harassed; hurt

TALKING ABOUT EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION LEGISLATION

Remind people that this legislation doesn't create brand new laws. It simply makes an adjustment to existing state or federal employment statutes that already protect people from being fired for reasons other than job performance. Talk about the legislation as a common-sense, incremental solution for protecting hardworking Americans: "This law simply adjusts existing employment law to protect gay and transgender people, just as it currently protects people based on race, sex, religion, national origin, and disability."

Keep messaging about any "religious exemption" simple and brief. The federal ENDA (and some state legislation) has a clause that safeguards religious liberty even as it protects gay and transgender people in the workplace. One sentence explaining that the legislation exempts churches and other religious organizations will help assuage people's concerns. However, keep the overall discussion focused on protecting hardworking Americans from being unfairly fired.

Emphasize the limited scope of the legislation. Most legislation in this area expressly prohibits quotas or other employment practices that could result in preferential treatment based on orientation or gender identity. Remind people of this when necessary.

Things to Avoid

1) Avoid talking about "discrimination." While it's tempting to use this language, research indicates that using the term "discrimination" when talking about employment protections leads to major drops in public support. The term "discrimination" has been used across such a broad range of issues that it now leads to polarized, partisan reactions.

2) Avoid talking about "equal rights," "equal employment opportunity" or "employment non-discrimination." Instead, talk about legislation that prevents companies from firing hardworking, high-performing employees just because they're gay or transgender.

3) Don't talk about "what people do in their private lives." This legislation is about ensuring hardworking Americans aren't unfairly fired for reasons that have nothing to do with their job performance.

4) Avoid anti-gay activists' red herrings. They may want to stir up unfounded fears, such as those about gay people as teachers. Remind your audience that 20



states have already successfully implemented legislation that is inclusive of gay educators, then bridge back to the key talking points.

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Talking About Don't Ask, Don't Tell



Authors

Contributing Editors

Overview

A solid majority of Americans (79% according to a 2007 CNN poll) support allowing gay service members to serve openly in the military, a number that has increased steadily since 1994 when the issue of military service by gay Americans first rose to national prominence. Americans are concerned that our military is being stretched too thin and they believe that whoever can serve should be allowed to serve.

DADT Messages

"This is about national security. Nobody wants to put America at risk, and discharging essential service members just because they're gay does just that."

Emphasize Common Ground

Focus on the need for a strong military and emphasize the overwhelming support—among the public, high-ranking military officials, and our military allies—for lifting the ban on gay service members.

1) Focus on the vital need for a strong military. Most Americans support a strong military and national defense. But it's clear that our military is currently stretched too thin. There's a shortage of troops in general and a need for some critical skills in particular (e.g., translators, engineers, and pilots).

Our military strength is compromised when we can't fill critical positions because we're rejecting or discharging qualified, capable, and highly skilled service members (such as the dismissals of 60 Arabic linguists) just because they're gay. Gay service members bring essential skills and experience to the military. Discharging these critical service members compromises our national security and puts us at risk.

2) Emphasize the support for lifting the ban. In addition to overwhelming public support for service by openly gay troops, the repeal of DADT is supported by military experts and the experience of some of our strongest international allies. In recent years, a growing number of respected, high-ranking military officials and retired military officers have publicly stated their opposition to banning and discharging openly gay service members.

Also, strong military allies including Great Britain, Israel, Canada, and Australia have lifted their respective bans on openly gay military personnel. These military forces, especially those of Great Britain and Israel, are considered some of the best-trained, toughest militaries in the world. In each case, lifting the ban and allowing gay personnel to serve strengthened, or had no visible impact on, military effectiveness, unit cohesion, and morale. In fact, Britain's integration of gay soldiers is described by the country's Defense Ministry as an "unqualified success."

3) Talk about common values. Talk about the ideas and ideals that people associate with our nation's armed forces—service, duty, loyalty, patriotism, sacrifice, being brave and courageous, and fighting to protect our democracy and our country.

Illustrate Concrete Harms

Educate people about the unacceptable costs of DADT. It compromises national security, puts troops at risk, increases military costs, and takes a substantial personal toll on gay service members.

4) Focus on the costs of DADT. The military has discharged many highly skilled and essential personnel simply for being gay. The high-profile discharges of essential Arabic linguists highlight the heavy toll of the

Messaging to Increase Support for Repealing DADT

"It puts our country at risk to discharge essential service members just because they're gay."

Emphasize common ground

1. Focus on the vital need for a strong military and how dismissing critical gay service members compromises this.
2. Use the language of common values (e.g., service, duty, sacrifice).
3. Emphasize the overwhelming support for repealing DADT (from military experts, the general public, and the experience of allies).

Illustrate concrete harms

4. Focus on the costs of DADT (e.g., the loss of vital personnel, monetary costs).
5. Illustrate the harms to gay service members (thousands have been unfairly discharged after putting their lives on the line).

military's ban on openly gay service members. DADT creates dangerous gaps in our military's ability to defend our nation. At the time of writing, the military has fired over 11,000 qualified personnel, including 325 translators and 60 Arabic linguists.

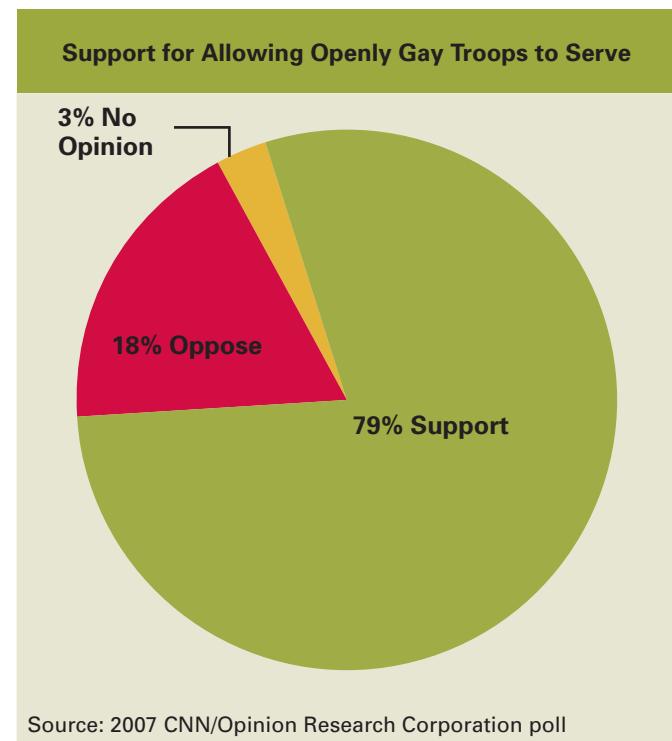
At a time when the military is facing a recruiting crisis, it's senseless and irresponsible to discharge or turn away skilled personnel. Unwarranted discharges also exact a high financial cost. A 2006 Blue Ribbon Commission report estimated that dismissals under DADT have already cost over \$363 million.

5) Illustrate the harms to courageous gay service members.

In 2004, the Urban Institute estimated that almost 65,000 gay service members were serving their nation in active, guard or reserve duty. Over the course of the ban, more than 11,000 patriotic gay Americans have been unfairly discharged after putting their lives on the line for their country. The sacrifices of gay service members are acknowledged only on the condition that they lie about who they are. Many times, gay service members have come home only to be cut off from the basic financial security that our veterans deserve. Not only that, but there have been cases where discharged gay service members have been forced to reimburse the military for education costs associated with their service.

HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICIALS SUPPORT REPEALING DADT

- General John Shalikashvili, retired chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: "I now believe that if gay men and lesbians served openly in the United States military, they would not undermine the efficacy of the armed forces. Our military has been stretched thin by our deployments in the Middle East, and we must welcome the service of any American who is willing and able to do the job."
- Admiral John Hutson, retired, now dean of Franklin Pierce Law School, recently wrote "... it would be a great tragedy if we didn't take advantage of (the) chance to correct a flawed policy."
- Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy, retired, the first female three-star officer in Army history, called the law "... a hollow policy that serves no useful purpose."
- Lieutenant General Daniel W. Christman, former superintendent of West Point: "It is clear that national attitudes toward this issue have evolved considerably in the last decade."

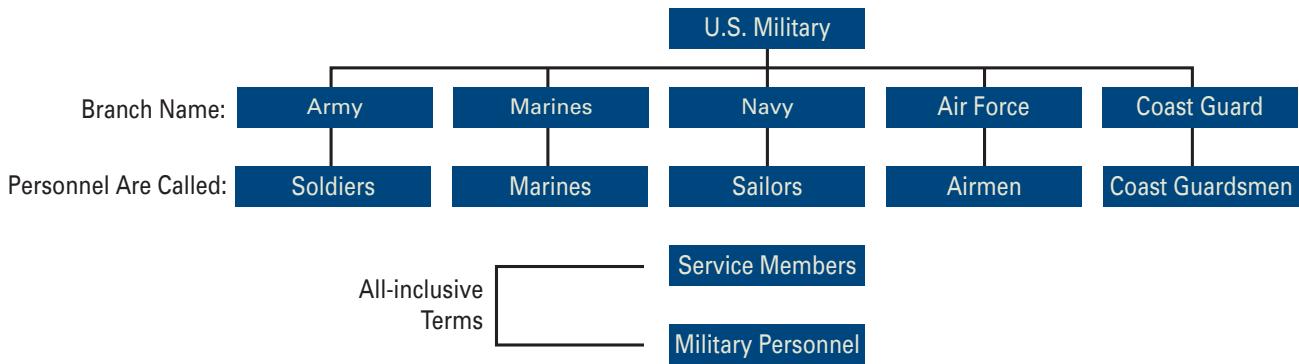


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Understanding U.S. Military Branches and Personnel



The term “soldiers,” in formal usage, only describes Army personnel (not Marine personnel or other branches of the military). Use this chart for accurate terms. Never use the term “gays in the military” (see Basic Terminology).

DADT's PERSONNEL AND FINANCIAL COSTS

More than 11,000 men and women have been dismissed under Don't Ask, Don't Tell. According to the Government Accountability Office, more than 800 of those service members had skills deemed critical by the Department of Defense, including linguistic training, medical skills, and expertise in combat engineering.

- As of January 2006, the military had discharged 244 medical specialists under DADT, including physicians, nurses, biomedical laboratory technicians, and other highly trained medical specialists.
- Between 1998 and 2003, the military discharged gay personnel serving in 161 different and critical occupational specialties, including 49 nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare specialists; 90 nuclear power engineers; 52 missile guidance and control operators; 150 rocket, missile, and other artillery specialists; and 340 infantrymen.

The Pentagon has lost at least \$363.8 million enforcing the ban over the past decade.

Basic Terminology

TALKING ABOUT THE BAN

- **the military's ban on openly gay service members**
- **the ban on openly gay military personnel**
- **lift the ban**
- **repeal the military's ban**

TALKING ABOUT THE TROOPS

- **service members**
- **personnel**
- **military personnel**
- **troops**
- **gay service members**
- **gay military personnel**

admiration for our nation's troops remains very high. Ensure that messages on ending the ban—which would strengthen our military and enhance our nation's security—don't run counter to these views.

2) Don't use the term “gays in the military.”

Instead, talk about gay service members, gay military personnel, or gay troops. See “Basic Terminology” for more information.

3) Don't use terms like “the military's anti-gay ban” or “gay ban.”

Instead, use “the military's ban on gay service members” or “the ban on gay military personnel.”

Things to Avoid

1) Don't criticize the military, the war, or other military policies while advocating for lifting the ban.

While public opinion on the war in Iraq (and other conflicts abroad) is mixed at best, support, respect, and

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Talking About Inclusive Hate Crimes Laws



Authors



Contributing Editors



Overview

Hate crimes occur when a perpetrator targets a victim because of his or her membership in a certain social group, usually defined by race, religion, national origin (or ethnicity), disability, sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity. Hate crimes are different because they're not directed simply at an individual but are meant to cause fear and intimidation in an entire group or class of people.

Despite the claims of anti-gay activists, hate crimes laws are a mainstream issue. Hate crimes laws already exist, and Gallup reports that 78% of Americans support the existing federal hate crimes law. And according to a 2007 CNN poll, 68% of Americans favor expanding the existing federal hate crimes law to include sexual orientation, gender and gender identity.

Hate Crimes Messaging

Hate crimes laws lend themselves to a straightforward messaging approach. Expanding hate crimes laws to include sexual orientation and gender identity is about sending a message that violence against gay and transgender people isn't okay. Opposing an inclusive law sends a message that gay and transgender people are still legitimate targets for violence—something very few Americans would agree with.

Emphasize Common Ground

Americans support this issue. They agree that hate crimes against gay and transgender people aren't okay, and they support a strengthened national hate crimes law that includes sexual orientation and gender identity.

1) This issue has been decided—hate crimes laws are necessary. Hate crimes aren't a new category of laws. They already exist federally and in over 45 states. They're supported by law enforcement and the American public. While hate crimes against any group are wrong, the issue is that the current federal law (and many state laws) protects other groups, but doesn't protect gay and transgender people.

2) There's overwhelming public support for gay and transgender-inclusive hate crimes laws. Americans agree that hate crimes against gay and transgender people aren't okay. Gallup polling shows that nearly 70% of Americans favor a strengthened national hate crimes law that includes gay and transgender people. Expanding the existing federal hate crimes law to cover gay and transgender people is a mainstream issue.

3) There's strong law enforcement support for a strengthened federal hate crimes law. Efforts to strengthen the existing federal hate crimes law are supported by 26 State Attorneys General and some of the most respected law enforcement organizations in the nation, including the National Sheriffs' Association, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and local groups like the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

Illustrate Concrete Harms

Establish that violent hate crimes against gay and transgender people are a pervasive problem that hurts many people. Failing to protect gay and transgender people under existing laws sends a message that violence against them is okay.

Messaging to Increase Support for Inclusive Hate Crimes Laws

"It's about saying violence against gay and transgender people is not okay."

Emphasize common ground

1. This issue has been decided—hate crimes laws are necessary.
2. There's overwhelming public support for gay and transgender-inclusive hate crimes laws.
3. There's strong law enforcement support for a strengthened federal hate crimes law.

Illustrate concrete harms

4. Violent hate crimes against gay and transgender people are a pervasive issue.
5. Tell vivid stories to illustrate how hate crimes hurt gay and transgender people.
6. Excluding gay and transgender people from hate crimes laws sends a message that violence against them is okay.

4) Violent hate crimes against gay and transgender people are a pervasive problem. FBI statistics tell a powerful story about hate crimes targeting gay people. Anti-gay hate crimes are the third most frequent kind of hate crimes in America after race and religion. The FBI's 2006 reporting on hate crimes found that, out of 7,722 incidents, 52% were based on the victim's race, 19% on religion, 16% on sexual orientation, and 13% on ethnicity or national origin.

5) Use vivid stories to illustrate how hate crimes hurt gay and transgender people. Hate crimes are real—and often involve the kind of extreme violence and overkill that is terrifyingly brutal. Share the stories of hate crime victims. For example, in 2002, Gwen Araujo, a 17-year-old transgender student, was brutally murdered by four men after they discovered she was transgender. The men beat her with a shovel, a barbell, and a frying pan, partially strangled her, then buried her alive in the desert.

Talk about the fact that hate crimes are intended to send a message that a person, and others like them, won't be tolerated. As a result, hate crimes usually leave the victim (and others in the community) feeling vulnerable, unsafe, and afraid. Hate crimes can make gay and transgender people afraid to walk home at night, or afraid to go to the supermarket or the gas station alone (even if they weren't the victims of the attacker).

6) Systematically excluding gay and transgender people from existing hate crimes laws sends a message that violence against them is okay. Hate crimes laws send a societal message that it's not okay to target, intimidate, harass, or commit acts of violence

against people based on who they are. Existing federal law already covers hate crimes based on a person's race, religion, and national origin. Supporting the expansion of this law to include gay and transgender people sends a message that violence against gay and transgender people isn't okay. By contrast, when we systematically exclude gay and transgender people from the protection of those laws, it sends an implicit message that harassment, abuse, and violence toward gay and transgender people is acceptable.

Talking About Hate Crimes Legislation

Talking about freedom of religious expression. Hate crimes laws don't affect the freedom of religious expression. No hate crimes law can criminalize or penalize a pastor (or anyone else) for preaching or speaking out against gay people. The proposed federal hate crimes law only applies when a violent physical act (not speech) is combined with an intention to hurt or intimidate a certain group of people. In fact, the proposed federal hate crime law contains an explicit provision clarifying that the act doesn't interfere with anyone's First Amendment rights to free speech.

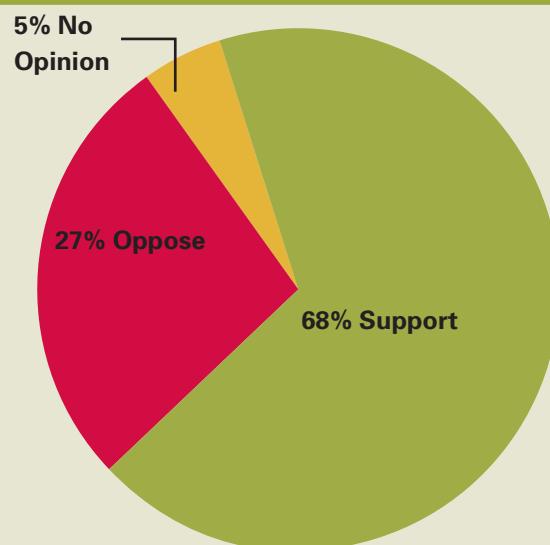
Talking about penalty enhancements. There's mixed public support for penalty enhancements, a concept that is frequently and deceptively exploited by anti-gay activists. However, the Matthew Shepard Act, and most state legislation, simply strengthens existing hate crimes laws by adding sexual orientation and gender identity to the hate crimes laws already on the books. In other words, inclusive hate crimes

ABOUT THE MESSAGING APPROACHES

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Support for Expanding Federal Hate Crimes Law to Include Sexual Orientation, Gender and Gender Identity
Percent of Americans



Source: 2007 CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll

legislation doesn't generally create penalty enhancements where there were none—it simply adds gay and transgender people to whatever law is already in place. The Matthew Shepard Act didn't include penalty enhancements at all. Rather than getting off track with this discussion, stay focused on the fact that excluding sexual orientation and gender identity from existing hate crime laws sends a message that violence against gay and transgender people is okay.

Talking about law enforcement resources. Americans are supportive of law enforcement and believe that law enforcement personnel should have the necessary resources to do their jobs well. The Mathew Shepard Act expands law enforcement resources for investigating and prosecuting hate crimes. It also extends the Justice Department's ability to provide assistance to local law enforcement and provides funding to help state and local agencies pay for investigating and prosecuting hate crimes.

Addressing enumerated categories (i.e., who's covered by these laws). Federal hate crimes law currently addresses violent crimes committed based on a victim's race, religion, color, or national origin. States that enumerate categories of victims also include at least these same four classifications. This is an important message—particularly when speaking with religious audiences. Adding sexual orientation and gender identity simply ensures that the same laws that address crimes based on race, religion, ethnicity, and national origin, also cover crimes against gay and transgender people.

Things to Avoid

1) DON'T get caught up in the language of anti-gay activists. Don't repeat misleading terms like "thought crimes," "special protections," "special rights," "some victims are more equal than others," or "muzzling pastors." Instead, focus on the key message that hate crimes laws already exist—and opposing expansion of these laws to make them inclusive sends a message that violence against gay and transgender people is acceptable. If anti-gay activists make inaccurate claims, briefly correct the record (e.g., "No hate crimes law in this country can penalize a pastor for what he preaches") and then move back to the core messages.

2) DON'T link everyday anti-gay rhetoric to violent hate crimes. While anti-gay rhetoric can feed hate

SHARING THE STORIES OF HATE CRIME VICTIMS

Bottom line: The terrible reality of hate crimes can never be fully captured or illustrated with statistics. We help Americans connect with the issue of hate crimes most clearly when we share the names and stories of those who've been murdered because they were gay or transgender: Matthew Shepard, Brandon Teena, Gwen Araujo, Sakia Gunn, Michael Sandy, F.C. Martinez, PFC Barry Winchell, Rita Hester, Scotty Joe Weaver, Eddie Garzon, Tyra Hunter, and Billy Jack Gaither, among countless others. The Human Rights Campaign's *A Chronology of Hate Crimes: 1998-2002* contains a comprehensive list of violent hate crimes against gay and transgender people and provides detailed descriptions that may be helpful when offering examples.

Basic Terminology

Discussing the issue

- **hate crimes**
- **hate violence**
- **violence**
- **violent crimes**
- **hate crimes are a pervasive problem**
- **expanding existing hate crime laws**
- **strengthening existing hate crime laws**
- **strengthening the ability of law enforcement to respond to violent crimes**

violence, there is no legal connection between this rhetoric and hate crimes laws. Linking these two issues encourages false arguments by anti-gay activists that they'll "be muzzled" and that hate crimes laws target speech, not violent criminal acts.

3) DON'T make comparisons to other countries' hate crimes laws. Foreign countries' hate crimes laws aren't subject to America's First Amendment and therefore aren't really relevant comparisons. Also, Americans are unmoved by the positive experiences of other countries—but may be moved by anti-gay activists' negative foreign examples.

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