

## Ugly Ducklings: scary fairy tale with a happy ending



Okay, here are some sobering statistics for ya. They may not be surprising, but the numbers sure scare *me*.

According to Sexual Information Council of the United States:

41.7% of LGBTQ youth do not feel safe in their school.

28% of queer teens drop out of school annually. That's three times the national average.

And according to 2005 report from Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

95% of school counseling services have few or no gay, lesbian or bisexual resources. And...

99% of school counseling services have little or no transgender resources.

Thank goodness there are national campaigns like [Ugly Ducklings](#), run by [Hardy Girls Healthy Women](#), out there actually *doing* something about this quiet horror.

A great number of educators and activists agree that the bullying and harrassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning students is a systemic issue. It seems to be built right into our schools, because it's the rare school that welcomes queer students and deals effectively with students, faculty and administration who bully or harrass them. I recently received in the mail an Ugly Ducklings Community Action Kit. The kit contains not only a frightening effective collection of statistics, gathered from reliable sources; but there are also recommended solutions, gathered from an equal number of trustworthy sources as varied as The National Mental Health Association; The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network; and ReligiousTolerance.org.

[Hardy Girls Healthy Women](#) is an organization based in the town of Waterville, Maine. But they're reaching out across the United States with their Ugly Ducklings program. The name of the program comes from the title of a play by Carolyn Gage. The play is set in a summer camp in Maine, where a group of young girls, their older counselors, and the camp director deal with homophobia, bullying and harrassment.



I've not seen the full production of Ugly Ducklings, but the DVD packaged with the Ugly Ducklings Community Action Kit, contains a documentary about the making of the play. There are scenes from the play, and interviews with the cast and crew. This is good political theater, way beyond politically correct diatribe. It's emotionally charged, unrelenting, and smart, smart, smart. The young multi-racial cast is excellent. You can see a [trailer of the documentary](#) online.

The [campaign Ugly Ducklings](#), according to their mission statement, is "a national campaign to reduce bullying and harrassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth." And there's something for everyone in the Community Action Kit. To mention just a few of the many helpful resources:

- [A Safe Schools Checklist](#)

- An excellent list of definitions
- Ten easy-to-implement practical things educators can do
- Discussion questions for students, educators, and parents
- Advice on coming out
- An in-depth section on youth suicide: causes and ways to help those who are considering suicide
- Youth and adult workshops, as well as workshops for actors
- A satisfyingly rich resource guide
- An interactive DVD with the complete documentary

*None of us* has enough information on the subject of bullying and harrassment, and most of us feel helpless when confronted with the reality of doing something about it. Please **contact the fine folks of Hardy Girls Healthy Women**. These folks are on the front line, they know what they're talking about, and they deserve our support. **Contribute what you can to their great good work. Buy yourself a copy of the Community Action Kit**, and get copies into the hands of schools near you. The Ugly Duckling Community Action Kit belongs in the hands of every educator and parent in this country. I can't think of a more appropriate action to take for the holiday season, or for any season you feel like saving lives.