

# ★ YOU ★ HAVE THE RIGHT — to — BE YOURSELF



## Everyday dress codes

- Public schools can have dress codes, but federal law says dress codes can't treat boys and girls differently, force students to conform to sex stereotypes, or censor particular viewpoints.
- That means that schools can't create a dress code based on the stereotype that only girls can wear some types of clothes and only boys can wear other types of clothes. For example, your school can require that skirts must be a certain length, but not that some students can wear skirts and others can't based on the students' sex or gender expression. That also applies to pants, ties, or any other clothing associated with traditional gender roles.
- Dress codes should not only be gender neutral on paper – they must be enforced equally. For example, rules against “revealing” clothing, such as bans on tank tops or leggings, shouldn't be enforced only or disproportionately against girls. Nor should they be enforced more harshly against certain groups of girls, like transgender girls or girls of color.

## Prom, homecoming, graduation, and other school events

- Schools shouldn't require different types of clothing for special events such as prom or graduation based on students' sex or gender identity—for example, requiring tuxedos for boys and prom dresses for girls. All students should be allowed to wear clothing consistent with their gender identity and expression, no matter whether they identify as transgender or cisgender.

## Speaking out with your clothing

- If your school allows students to wear t-shirts, buttons, wristbands, or other garments or accessories that express their views, then all views are protected by the First Amendment. Schools shouldn't ban rainbows, Pride symbols or slogans, or messages about LGBT, feminist, or political issues or identity.

## Grooming

- Courts haven't been consistent in their views about jewelry, ear piercings, and hair length. These situations must be considered on a case-by-case basis. If you have questions about school rules on grooming please contact the ACLU.

## If your school says the way you dress is disruptive

- School officials often try to justify censoring student expression by claiming it's disruptive, when what they're really worried about is that other students or their parents might not like it. But courts have consistently ruled that a school's concern about other students' reactions to an LGBT or political message or image doesn't justify censoring it.

## How to get help

- If you're punished or told you have to change out of something you've already worn to school, remain calm and polite. Complying with an order from a school official doesn't affect your right to challenge it later on. But arguing or not cooperating might make it harder to fight for your rights later. Keep copies of any paperwork the school gives you and contact the ACLU as soon as you can.
- Contacting the ACLU is confidential – any communication between you and the ACLU will be kept private.

## Take action

### Advocacy and Legal Assistance:

American Civil Liberties Union LGBT Project  
[ACLU.org/safeschools](http://ACLU.org/safeschools)  
212-549-2627

### Student and GSA Resources:

GLSEN  
[GLSEN.org/students](http://GLSEN.org/students)  
212-727-0135

*This information is not intended as legal advice.  
Current as of September 2016.*

**ACLU**