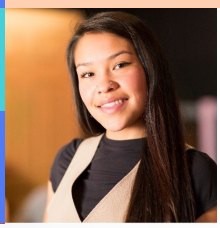
Our District:
A Community Resource for Youth

August 2025



Office of Human Rights
District of Columbia

WE ARE WASHINGTON DC
GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

Introduction

This resource guide was created by the Youth Human Rights Ambassadors (YHRA) through the Youth Bullying Prevention Program (YBPP) at the DC Office of Human Rights (OHR). This resource guide aims to empower youth across the District of Columbia by connecting them with accessible, inclusive, and trauma-informed resources that support their well-being in all areas of life.

Rooted in the YBPP's commitment to creating safe environments and the YHRA's passion for youth-led change, the guide reflects a shared dedication to advancing human rights, preventing bullying, and fostering leadership among young people. It is a tool built by youth, for youth - to help them thrive, find support, and spark positive change in their schools and communities.

To learn more, visit
ohr.dc.gov/page/bullyingprevention.

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Message from the DC Office of Human Rights

In 2024, the DC Office of Human Rights launched its first Youth Human Rights Ambassador Program - a truly inspiring initiative. I had the honor of working with an incredible group of high school students who explored what human rights mean in everyday life and how they impact their communities. These young leaders quickly identified a major challenge: many teenagers are unaware of the resources available to them. In response, they created the DC Youth Resource Guide - a student-led project that connects peers with the support they need to thrive. It's been a privilege to witness their growth, leadership, and unwavering dedication to uplifting other youth across the District.

Ernest Shepard
Program Manager,
Youth Bullying Prevention Program
DC Office of Human Rights

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Letter from 2024-2025 YHRA Leadership Team

This resource guide was created by teens just like you, who've navigated the ups and downs of growing up in DC. This guide is filled with all the things we wish someone had told us when we were figuring out how to navigate DC as young people. We created this because we know that everyone's situation is different – what you're dealing with at home, at school, or in your community is unique to you, and you deserve support that meets you where you are.

We've been through a lot of the same struggles you might be facing. Whether it's feeling unsafe in certain situations, needing mental health support, looking for accepting communities, dealing with family challenges, or just trying to figure out how to make the most of living in this city – we get it.

This isn't meant to be read cover to cover. Think of it as your go-to resource when you need something specific, or when a friend needs help and you want to connect them with real support. We've tried to include everything that we think you may need to build the life you want in DC.

Everyone deserves to feel safe, supported, and like they belong. We want you to know that there are people and places here that will have your back. You don't have to figure everything out alone.

Save this guide and come back to it whenever you need it. You've got this, and we've got you!

Sincerely,
Verenize Tejada, President
Mecca Bey, Vice President
Maia Burkhardt, Secretary

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Education Resources

Why This Matters to You: Your education journey is unique and can be challenging. These resources can help you stay on track, find support when things get tough, and discover opportunities to grow both inside and outside the classroom.

Office of the Student Advocate:
Provides guidance on navigating the public education system in DC.
studentadvocate.dc.gov

DC Public Library – Teen Services:
Offers homework help, tutoring, and educational programs.
dclibrary.org/teens

College and Career Ready DC (via DC Public Schools):
This initiative helps high school students prepare for life after graduation, whether it's college, trade school, or a career.
osse.dc.gov/service/college-and-career-readiness

DC Career and Technical Education:
Connects high school students with career-focused education pathways in fields like IT, healthcare, and engineering, blending academics with hands-on learning.
careertechdc.org

DC High School Internship Program:
The High School Internship Program provides work-readiness skills, project-based learning, life skills, leadership development training, and work opportunities for District youth ages 14 - 21.
does.dc.gov/service/high-school-internship-program

PRO TIPS:

- Don't wait until you're failing to get tutoring – regular support can keep you ahead of the game.
- DC Libraries offer free Wi-Fi, computer access, and quiet study spaces – plus, librarians who can help with research!

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Mental Health & Support Systems

Why This Matters to You: Being a teen can be stressful! Mental health is a vital component of overall well-being. It is part of daily life and should be taken seriously. Whether you're facing stress, anxiety, depression, or simply need someone to talk to, numerous resources in DC are available to support you.

Access HelpLine
(DC Department of Behavioral Health):
Available 24/7, this helpline connects you to mental health services and crisis intervention.

1-888-793-4357
dbh.dc.gov/service/access-helpline

NAMI DC Helpline:
Provides information, referrals, and support for individuals experiencing mental health challenges.

202-466-0972
namidc.org/crisis-info

ChAMPS
(Child and Adolescent Mobile Psychiatric Service):
Offers emergency psychiatric services for children and adolescents in crisis.

202-481-1440
catholiccharitiesdc.org

Whitman-Walker Youth Mental Health Services:
Provides trauma-informed individual and group therapy, as well as psychiatric services, to LGBTQ+ youth and young adults aged 10 to 30.

202-745-7000
whitman-walker.org

ActNow for Mental Health:
Offers free virtual therapy for people ages 17–32 in DC, no insurance needed, with quick access to licensed professionals.

844-723-2578
psychologytoday.com

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What Strategies Can You Use to Manage Stress and Anxiety?

- Deep/somatic breathing exercises
- Mindfulness Meditation
- Physical Activity and exercise/sports
- Reframing stress – Change the narrative of the situation
- Find a support system (school club, YHRA, FB Group, etc.)
- Daily journal entries

Emergency Situations: If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call **911** or the **National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** at **988**.

"Am I?" Self-Assessment Questionnaire

- Reflecting on your feelings and behaviors can help you understand your mental health needs. Consider the following questions: Your Mental Health Today Test
  - Do I often feel sad, anxious, or overwhelmed?
  - Have I lost interest in activities I once enjoyed?
  - Do I struggle with sleep, appetite, or concentration?
  - Do I feel isolated or disconnected from others?
  - Have I had thoughts of self-harm or suicide?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, it might be beneficial to speak with a mental health professional.[1]

Remember: Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. You're not alone, and support is available.

1 The above self-assessment questions are adapted from commonly used mental health screening tools such as the PHQ-9 and general clinical practice guidelines (Kroenke et al, 2001). These are for self-reflection only and not intended to diagnose or treat any condition.

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Safety

Why This Matters to You: Feeling safe isn't just about avoiding danger, it's about having the confidence to show up, speak up, and be yourself. When your safety is protected and your voice is heard, you're free to grow, try new things, and chase your goals without fear.

Students in Washington, DC, like many other urban areas, face several challenges related to safety and youth engagement. Some of the following common challenges include:

- Violence and Crime
- Bullying and Harassment
- Lack of Safe Spaces

Safety is one of the biggest concerns for all children and parents. Safety in and out of the classroom leads to a productive learning environment and comfort in and out of school.

How can students report safety concerns anonymously?

1. **Anonymous Reporting Forms:** DCPS provides forms for reporting incidents such as bullying or safety concerns. While these forms can be submitted anonymously, it's important to note that disciplinary actions cannot be based solely on anonymous reports; however, such reports can initiate investigations.

2. **CARE Team:** The Comprehensive Alternative Resolution and Equity (CARE) Team addresses grievances related to student rights and safety. Students can report

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concerns anonymously to the CARE Team via email dcps.care@k12.dc.gov or by phone at (202) 442-5405.

What resources exist for students facing bullying, harassment, or violence?

1. **The DCPS Bullying Prevention Policy:** The DCPS Bullying Prevention Policy is designed to protect students from bullying, harassment, and violence in all forms—whether in person or online. It outlines students' rights, how to report incidents safely, and the steps schools must take to respond. If you are someone you know is being bullied, this policy ensures your voice is heard and your safety is prioritized.

2. **Comprehensive Alternative Resolution & Equity (CARE) Team:** The CARE Team is responsible for receiving claims of discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying, or any unfair treatment encountered by students, parents, or visitors at DC Public Schools.

OHR Youth Bullying Prevention Program:

- The Youth Bullying Prevention Program, housed in the DC Office of Human Rights (OHR), is dedicated to reducing bullying incidents across the District by focusing on prevention, appropriate responses to incidents, and intervention strategies.

🔗 **ohr.dc.gov/page/bullyingprevention**

GLSEN:

- A national organization working to end discrimination, harassment, and bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in K-12 schools.

🔗 **glsen.org**

Stop Sexual Assault in Schools (SSAIS):

- A national nonprofit organization providing resources, education, and advocacy to prevent sexual harassment and assault in K–12 schools, empowering students and families to create safer educational environments.

🔗 **stopsexualassaultinschools.org**

Safe Shores – The DC Children's Advocacy Center:

- Offers trauma-informed services to children and families affected by abuse, including forensic interviews, therapy, and advocacy, aiming to foster healing and prevent future harm.

🔗 **safeshores.org**

Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE):

- Implements community-based strategies to prevent violence and support at-risk youth through mentorship, employment opportunities, and conflict resolution programs.

🔗 **onse.dc.gov**

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Youth Engagement

Why This Matters to You: Your voice matters—big time. Whether you're 8 or 18, you have the power to shape your school, community, and your future. Youth engagement is all about making sure you're not just being heard but also actively involved in creating positive change. This is your city, too—so let's make sure it represents who you are and what you care about.

What programs or organizations help students get involved in their communities?

OHR Youth Human Rights Ambassador (YHRA) Program:
The YHRA Program enables DC youth to engage in discussions on laws, civil rights, and issues related to youth. Housed in the Office of Human Rights, the YHRA Program enhances leadership skills to address community challenges and develop a deeper sense of civic responsibility.
ohr.dc.gov/page/ohr-youthhumanrightsambassadorprogram

The Washington, DC Youth Advisory Council (YAC):
The YAC advises local government on issues affecting young people in the District of Columbia. The council gives students a platform to voice their concerns and collaborate with city leaders on matters within the District.
dchealth.dc.gov

Black Swan Academy:
Focused on Black youth, this organization offers civic leadership training, advocacy workshops, and community service projects to develop socially conscious leaders.
blackswanacademy.org

Mikva Challenge DC:
Empowers youth to become active citizens through programs like Project Soapbox and Youth-Led Mayoral Forums, providing platforms for young voices in policymaking.
mikvachallenge.org

Serve DC:
Serve DC connects youth with volunteer opportunities, service days, and emergency preparedness training, fostering civic responsibility and community engagement.
communityaffairs.dc.gov/servedc

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Transportation

Why This Matters to You: Getting around DC safely and affordably is essential — whether you're heading to school, a job, a doctor's appointment, or a drop-in center. Washington, DC offers several youth-focused transportation options to help you move confidently across the city.

Kids Ride Free Program
Allows eligible DC students to ride Metrorail and the Metrobus at no cost. It's part of the DC initiative to remove barriers to education and opportunity. Students between the ages of 5 and 21 who are enrolled in a DC public, public charter, or any participating private school are eligible.

How to get started:

- Request a KRF SmarTrip card from your school.
- Activate the card by tapping it on any fare gate or card reader.
- Use it only for school-related transportation.

ddot.dc.gov/page/kids-ride-free-program

Metrobus:
Covers wider areas including connections to neighboring Maryland and Virginia.

Pro tip: Use the **WMATA Trip Planner** to map your route.

www.wmata.com/schedules/Capital Bikeshare for All

- Offers discounted memberships to low-income residents, including those receiving SNAP, TANF, TNF, WIC, LITAP, or Medicaid.
- Annual membership cost is $5, promoting equitable access to biking.

godcgo.com/cabi-for-hs

HopSkipDrive

- A ride-share service tailored for students, especially those with Individualized Education Programs, in foster care, or experiencing home insecurity.

hopskipdrive.com

Neighborhood Connect

- An on-demand shared-ride shuttle service operating in parts of Wards 1, 4, 5, 6, and 8, offering rides for $3

Download **DC Neighborhood Connect** on the App Store

Transportation Tips for First Timers

- Use Google Maps or Transit App: Turn on location, plug in where you're going, and select the transit option.
- Charge your phone before heading out so you can access schedules and maps.
- Dress for the weather — you might wait outside for the bus.
- Plan extra time to catch buses and trains, especially during rush hours

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Food & Nutrition

Why This Matters to You: What you eat fuels how you feel, think, and grow—whether you're crushing it in school, on the field, or just getting through the day. In Washington, DC, there are resources to help you access fresh, healthy food—no matter your Ward or budget. Learning about nutrition now can set you up for a lifetime of strong bodies, sharp minds, and good vibes. Your health is your superpower.

DC Youth Meals Program:

- The DC Youth Meals Program provides no-cost nutritious meals and snacks to children 18 and younger, especially during the summer months when school is out.

osse.dc.gov/dcyouthmeals

DC Food Project - Pantry Program:

- In partnership with DC Central Kitchen, the Pantry Program offers students easy access to non-perishable food and toiletries as needed.

dcfoodproject.org

FRESHFARM Summer Meals:

- Children aged 5 to 18 can participate in FRESHFARM farm stands or farmer's markets to pick up a free meal. No ID or application is required.

Freshfarm.org

Capital Area Food Bank – Kids Meals:

- Distributes free meals to families through various programs, including after-school and summer meal initiatives, ensuring access to nutritious food year-round.

capitalareafoodbank.org

Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) – Food & Nutrition:

- Provides hands-on cooking, nutrition, and gardening classes to youth aged 6 to 24, aiming to support food security and promote healthy lifestyles

layc-dc.org/food-and-nutrition

TIPS:

- **Stay Informed:** Check with local community centers or schools for meal distribution schedules. Aim for balanced meals with fruits, vegetables, proteins, and whole grains.
- **Timing is everything:** Visit food pantries and meal programs early in the day when they have the most variety and fresh options.
- **Hit multiple locations:** Different food programs operate on different days, so you can often access several throughout the week.

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LGBTQ+ Resources

Why This Matters to You: Every teen deserves spaces where they can be their authentic self. These resources are here to uplift and support LGBTQ+ youth, offering community, connection, and services designed with you in mind.

OHR LGBTQIA+ Resource Portal:

- Offers resources, legal assistance, and support groups for the LGBTQIA+ community.

ohr.dc.gov/page/lgbtqia-resource-portal

SMYAL (Supporting and Mentoring Youth Advocates and Leaders):

- Provides services for LGBTQ+ youth, including support groups and advocacy.

SYMAL.org

The DC Center:

- A hub for the LGBTQ+ community offering various programs, including mental health support and community events.

thedccenter.org

Wanda Alston Foundation:

- Provides transitional housing and support services to homeless or at-risk LGBTQ youth aged 18–24, focusing on life skills and stability.

wandaalstonfoundation.org

Latin American Youth Center:

- Offers comprehensive programs including housing, education, and health services tailored to LGBTQ+ youth, with a focus on multicultural support.

layc-dc.org

TIPS:

- SMYAL hosts free weekend social events for LGBTQ+ teens which is a great way to meet friends in a safe space.
- Need gender-affirming clothes? SMYAL and Casa Ruby both have free clothing closets.
- If you're experiencing bullying or discrimination at school, you have rights – contact the OHR Youth Bullying Prevention Program at (202) 519-3333.
- Participate in local LGBTQ+ events to build a support network.
- Know Your Rights: Check the OHR website and familiarize yourself with local laws and protections for LGBTQ+ individuals.

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Staying on Track: Truancy & Attendance

Why This Matters to You: Showing up matters – not just for grades, but for your future. Being in school every day helps you:

- Stay connected with teachers and friends
- Keep up with your classes (so you can graduate!)
- Get access to cool opportunities like internships, after-school activities and jobs

What is Truancy in DC?
A student is considered **truant** if they have more than 10 unexcused absences. DCPS enforces these steps:

5 unexcused absences -
School will reach out to you and your guardian

10 unexcused absences -
School will notify the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)

15+ unexcused absences -
Your school may involve the Office of the Attorney General (OAG)

What Counts as an Excused Absence?

- Being sick (with a doctor's/guardian's note)
- Family emergency
- Practicing a religious holiday
- Attending a court date

To learn more, visit **dcps.dc.gov/attendance**

Why should you care?
Missing school can also affect you in the following ways:

- Loss of credit: If a student accumulates 30+ unexcused absences in a class, they automatically fail the course
- Unable to graduate on time
- Loss of work permits/driving privileges

Tips to Stay on Top of Attendance:

- Set a daily routine: Getting ready at the same time every day helps!
- Ask for help early: If you're facing problems (transportation, mental health, or bullying), tell a trusted adult!

Need Help with Attendance?

- Talk to your school's counselor or attendance counselor to get the conversation started.

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Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) ReEngagement Center:

- Serves as a centralized hub for out-of-school youth aged 16–24 to reconnect with educational opportunities and essential services, aiming to support their attainment of a high school diploma or equivalent.

osse.dc.gov

Show Up, Stand Out (SUSO):

- Collaborates with families to improve student attendance through personalized support and engagement strategies.

thelabprojects.dc.gov

Office of the Student Advocate:

- Provides guidance and resources to students and families navigating attendance issues, offering support in understanding rights and accessing appropriate educational services.

studentadvocate.dc.gov

DC Department of Human Services – Youth Services Division:

- Provides comprehensive support to youth experiencing attendance issues, including case management, counseling, and connections to educational and employment opportunities.

dhs.dc.gov/page/truancy-reduction-program

DC Courts – Juvenile Truancy Court:

- Handles cases involving chronic truancy, working with families and schools to develop attendance improvement plans and connect youth with supportive services.

dccourts.gov/services/juvenile-matters/truancy

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Other Resources

Free Internet & Tech Access:

DC Public Library
26 Locations with free internet, public computers, books for check out and more. Valid identification and proof you are living (or staying) locally is required to get a library card.
dclibrary.org

Connect.DC – Tech Together DC
Free public Wi-Fi hotspots, discounted devices, and digital literacy training.
connect.dc.gov

Career & Job Readiness (Non-Education Specific):

Department of Employment Services (DOES) Youth Programs
- Ages 14–24
- Offers resume help, paid internships, workforce training, and job placement through programs like Marion Barry Youth Leadership Institute (MBYLI) and LEAP (Learning together to Advance our Practice).

does.dc.gov

Arts & Culture:

Sitar Arts Center
- Ages 6–24
- Free or low-cost classes in music, dance, visual arts, digital media, and theater—after school and in the summer.

sitarartscenter.org

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Recreation & Sports:

DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) – Teen & Youth Programs
Free sports leagues, e-sports, fitness centers, and creative workshops across the city.
dpr.dc.gov

Legal Help:

Children's Law Center – Help for Youth & Families
Free legal help related to housing, healthcare access, and family needs, especially for youth involved in the child welfare system.
childrenslawcenter.org

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