

Minimising Bullying of Sexual and Gender Diverse Students at Schools “Silence Condones Bad Behaviour”

Introduction:

The intention of this booklet is to provide educators with additional information regarding bullying of LGBTIQ+ students in high schools. The majority of the information has been sourced from affected students and their parents.

Parents encourage you, the teachers and staff to be supportive of our children while they are at school, in your care receiving their education.

It is now considered illegal to discriminate against LGBTIQ+ students. It doesn't matter if educators agree with sexual or gender diversity or not. It is our children's right to expect the same privileges and respect all students in this country.

It's Important Educators keep in mind:

- children who identify as sexually or gender diverse are not going through a phase, experimenting, or attention seeking
- many are confused and frightened
- they may be concerned about being LGBTIQ+ because they've heard the myths about LGBTIQ people being deviants, pedophiles or morally wrong
- many are frightened peers will find out
- many who have not disclosed to family are fearful and will accept bullying rather than complain
- our children may have their own self loathing, they don't need yours as well
- some have known from a very early age, they're different, some just don't know what the difference is
- some are just discovering their diversity as puberty takes hold

- many are hesitant to seek assistance if being bullied or physically attacked
- suicide is highest between of age 12 and 14 years old is (25% higher than heterosexual teens) because they are fearful of being rejected or because they have been rejected
- some LGBTIQ+ youth have very low self esteem – due to the constant messages sent by society, telling they must be bad, weak, etc because of being trivialized in humour, sneered at, discriminated against and beaten up (just for the sake of it)
- some are confused because they don't see themselves as bad or deviants, but they're frightened that if they're LGBTIQ+ they must be
- in rural and regional areas they may not confide in people because they are fearful of negative repercussions
- regardless of city or country, LGBTIQ+ people may have self loathing because they don't want to be different. They may worry about disappointing their family or being rejected and abandoned by them

What students want you as an Educator to know:

- Please be understanding and supportive
- Please do not turn a blind eye as this encourages bullying by other students
- Please respect confidentiality if students seek support from you
- Sexual and gender diversity is neither a fad, phase or experimenting
- Silence condones bad behavior
- I am not able, nor do I want to co-erce my peers to be LGBTIQ+
- I haven't chose to be sexually or gender diverse. Just like you haven't chosen to be heterosexual
- My sexual or gender diversity is only part of my identity. If you could walk in my shoes, you would understand the many difficulties I live with on a daily basis
- Please use inclusive language and pronouns. Please note, I can't toughen up and I am not flaunting.

LGBTIQ+ youth can go either way:

- Sometimes young people become promiscuous with opposite sex partners to (a) get rid of their bad feelings (b) or to try and be seen the same as their peers.
- Others will become very studious and work twice as hard as peers trying to be perfect/while others because of stress drop marks.
- While others seem to be the worst homophobes or transphobes because (a) it distracts attention from them (b) while others hope it will make their feelings go away.

What teachers can do:

- have a zero tolerance policy regarding homophobic and transphobic talk and actions
- take action against homophobic and transphobic bullying – children have the right to feel safe while receiving their education
- when you hear “you’re so gay” it’s intended as a put down, silence condones
- encourage acceptance of difference and diversity – lead by example
- develop a policy of acceptance and support - make sure it’s enforced or upheld
- bring LGBTIQ+ workers into school to give talks
- if need be suspend or discipline bullies - don’t punish the victim
- consider if this was your child being bullied what would you want done to rectify the problem at the school
- monitor student behaviour and have a plan and policy which will minimise the problem
- if a child makes a complaint – take note – stay alert – and when confronting the bully don’t say “the child complained” say “you saw them bullying the other student”
- telling a boy to toughen up, play football – is not character building, the old adage “boys will be boys” – is wrong and not helpful for anyone
- bullying should never be seen as a part of growing up

- let the bullied child know he/she can always talk to you about any concerns they may have
- make yourself comfortable understanding LGBTIQ+ issues so you can talk to the young person when opportunities arise
- examine your biases - think of yourself being straight in an LGBTIQ+ world imagine how it could be lonely, isolating, scary and you would hate being seen as different
- have the courage to do the right thing by student and accept ownership
- don't accept homophobic or transphobic humour or comments, silence condones bad behaviour
- don't judge the student or their family- LGBTIQ+ youth come from all walks of life – societal status and economics are inconsequential
- be supportive of the student - let them know they aren't alone
- Never make negative comments because you can be sure an LGBTIQ+ student will hear you – if you do make negative comments, ask yourself are you homophobic or transphobic?
- Plus jokes or put downs about LGBTIQ+ are never harmless or just fun. Words can be very hurtful!

If you suspect a student may be LGBTIQ+

- (a) Never believe – rough sport, insults and put downs will make a male child heterosexual, and (b) never believe insisting girls – wear dresses and do “girl” things will feminize and make them heterosexual.
- We are born with our sexuality in place. Just like eye colour neither can be changed.
- Make sure you never tell or condone tasteless jokes, homophobic/transphobic behavior or comments.

Recommendations for Parents of Bullied Children:

If a Parent comes to PFLAG+ concerned about their child being bullied at school, we suggest first the parent talk with the child's teacher or principal, then:

- if no luck we encourage parents (a) to strongly encourage staff and teachers to ensure their child is protected while at school (if this is unsuccessful)
- if there are bruises etc take child to the doctor for documentation
- contact the Education Department and complain, if the parent is still not satisfied that the child is being protected
- Finally, if all else fails, we recommend parents seek legal advice

Every school should have a bullying program or policy and implemented properly because student's safety should always be a high priority.

In any school regardless of region or socio economic group condoning bullying is permitting negative behavior from children who may either know no difference because of the home environment. Or, be condoning bad behaviour from a child who may be quite popular and due to the fact they have an audience believe they are impressing their friends with their power.

Very rarely, does anyone, regardless of age bully another person without an audience.

Signs of Bullying:

- Boys are more likely to be physically bullied
- Girls are more likely to have rumours spread about them
- Ripped and/or torn clothing, missing clothing or school books
- Unexplained cuts and bruises
- Signs of loneliness and depression, moody, poor self esteem
- Few friends

The Facts about Bullying:

- Bullying can displayed in a variety of ways, not just taunts
- Bullying contributes to drug and substance abuse
- Truancy from school
- Poor grades
- Depression and suicidal ideation

- Homelessness - 1 in 5 youth sleeping rough identify as LGBTIQ+ and are homeless because of fear of rejection by family, or they have been rejected.

In Conclusion:

Never feel as an educator you are expected to be an expert regarding sexual and/or gender diversity. But, if unsure about how to handle certain situations always call LGBTIQ+ organizations and ask.

The main goal is to be respectful of the child. Listen to their concerns and never force them to “out” themselves. Do your best to support them, never break a confidence and if you are unsure about how to respond, depending on the question, ask the student what they would like eg correct pronouns or just listen and then do some research when able.