

Tips to recognise & minimise homophobic bullying in your school

**One person can
make a difference.**

**LGBT people are up to 14 times more likely to
attempt suicide and perform acts of self-harm
compared to heterosexual individuals.**

- Suicide Prevention Australia

The intention of this booklet is to provide educators with added information and tips regarding the issue of homophobic bullying in schools.

Information in this booklet has been sourced directly from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth who have experienced homophobic bullying at school.

The aim is to promote the health and safety of LGBT students.



Designed by
Big Budda Boom
www.bigbuddaboom.com.au



An initiative of PFLAG Brisbane Inc.
Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
www.pflagbrisbane.org.au



What students want you as an educator to know:

- Be understanding and supportive.
- To not turn a ‘blind eye’ as this just encourages homophobia.
- When a student complains of being bullied, the teacher should state they witnessed the victim being bullied as this can take the pressure off the victim.
- Respect confidentiality for LGBT students who seek help from teachers.
- Being LGBT doesn’t mean people are sexual deviants or pedophiles.
- Homosexuality isn’t a fad, choice or mental illness.
- Silence condones bad behaviour.

The Facts:

- LGBT students may be bullied based on their sexuality but the bullying behaviour may be displayed in ways other than homophobic taunts. It is illegal to discriminate against someone because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Bullying of LGBT youth contributes to drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, high drop-out rates, unemployment, homelessness and prostitution. Homophobia can be present in any school regardless of socioeconomic groups or demographics.
- All students have the right to a supportive learning environment irrespective of sexual orientation.

As a LGBT student I want you to know:

- I’m possibly confused and fearful of what is happening to me and that others won’t understand.
- I’m possibly struggling on the inside and doing my best to get through school.
- I’m not able, nor do I want to coerce any of my school peers to become gay or lesbian.
- I haven’t chosen to be gay or lesbian, just as you haven’t chosen to be heterosexual.
- I’m not experimenting; my sexual orientation isn’t a fad or a phase.
- I am afraid if my family finds out they may reject or abandon me.
- It’s easier to be straight; nobody can know how I’m feeling at this time. There’s so much happening for me at the moment including school education, my sexual orientation, issues at home, homophobic bullying at schools and puberty.
- Sexuality forms only part of my identity. Try to understand or ‘walk in the shoes’ of a young LGBT person to understand what it feels like.
- Use inclusive language. Don’t use terms such as ‘toughen up’ or ‘what do you expect if you flaunt it?’

What educators and schools can do to eliminate homophobia:

- Tackle issues of homophobia immediately & have the courage to do the right thing.
- Familiarise yourself with issues pertaining to LGBT youth and services.
- Have discussions on the negative outcomes of homophobia at school assemblies. This should include both staff and students.
- Utilise programs to combat homophobia and include student input.
- Issues should be raised in school and P&C meetings, curriculum reviews and annual reports. Also include methods to prevent homophobia. Education should be inclusive.
- There should be more inclusion of LGBT information in Health and Sex Education classes. Don’t associate HIV/AIDS with being gay. Anyone can get HIV.
- Don’t assume homosexuality is a passing stage. Understand that the orientation of the young person is not the problem; it’s the reaction of people around him or her.
- Ignoring homophobic bullying should never be condoned.
- There should be consequences for bullying students, however many believe suspension alone doesn’t solve the problem. The perpetrator and a mediator should discuss with the victim how his/her actions have negatively impacted the individual.
- Forward thinking schools have resources on LGBT information available for students plus access to expertise from within the community; e.g Police Liaison Officers.
- Encourage school counsellors to provide appropriate and effective referrals to agencies outside the school that may be useful to LGBT students.

What you can do as an individual:

- Be an advocate for equality and stand up for LGBT students being bullied. Take note around the school to see who is being ostracised.
- Be informed and examine your own biases. Maintain a balanced perspective.
- Be aware that not all students, staff and parents are heterosexual. Use gender neutral terms such as ‘partner’ as opposed to ‘husband’, ‘wife’, ‘girlfriend’ and ‘boyfriend’.
- Avoid derogatory comments or language in relation to sexual orientation in the classroom or school ground. Never permit the phrase ‘that’s so gay’ as it is offensive and hurtful to LGBT youth.
- Understand all bullying is unacceptable and there is no need for homophobic taunts.
- Avoid stereotyping LGBT youth as this only exacerbates homophobia.
- Discuss current events that positively reflect the LGBT community.

Signs of Bullying:

- Boys are likely to be physically bullied where as girls are more likely to have rumours spread about them.
- Ripped or torn clothing or missing articles of clothing or school books etc. Unexplained cuts and bruises.
- Students appear lonely, sad, depressed, irritated, moody and exhibit poor self-esteem. Have few friends, if any.

Useful Websites and Phone Numbers:

- Gay and Lesbian Welfare Association (GLWA)
Telephone counselling, support and information
Phone 1800 184 527 or visit www.glwa.org.au
- Open Doors – LGBT Youth Counselling
Phone (07) 3257 7660 or visit www.opendoors.net.au
- Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Brisbane
Support for Parents and Friends
Phone (07) 3017 1739 or visit www.pflagbrisbane.org.au
- Queensland Association of Healthy Communities (QAHC)
General information regarding LGBT issues
Phone (07) 3017 1777 or visit www.qahc.org.au
- Queensland Gender Clinic - Transgender support
Phone (07) 3355 6163
- Suicide Prevention Australia
Phone (02) 9568 351 or visit www.suicidepreventionaust.org

Thank you to those who provided information:

- LGBT staff and youth at Open Doors.
- The Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s ‘Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools’ information booklet.
- PFLAG information booklet ‘Assisting those coming into regular contact with young lesbians and gay males’ by Shelley Argent.
- Suicide Prevention Australia.

