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LGBTQ TEACHER'S GUIDE



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FACT SHEET ON BULLYING OF LGBTQ* STUDENTS



**(*LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER,
TRANSSEXUAL, TWO-SPIRIT, QUEER
AND QUESTIONING)**

DEFINITIONS

When dealing with topics related to LGBTQ students, it is important to be familiar with and understand the definitions of commonly used terms (e.g., sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.). Here are some important terms and definitions.

Sex

A person's perceived biological status, typically categorized as male, female or intersex. The sex assigned at birth, based on external genitalia, may or may not correspond to their internal sexual characteristics or to their sense of self. It is important not to make assumptions about someone's gender or sexual orientation based on what their biological sex seems to be.

Gender Identity

A person's internal sense or feeling of being male, female, both or an alternative such as gender-free (neither male nor female) or gender fluid (varying and flexible location on a continuum of masculinity/femininity). Gender identity may or may not align with an individual's biological sex. Note: it is correct to use "male" and "female" to refer to biological sex and social terms such as "transgender," "man," "woman," "masculine" and "feminine" to describe people's gender and gender expression.

Gender Expression

The way that a person shows gender identity through clothing, speech, body language, use of makeup and/or accessories etc. to display masculinity or femininity.

Gender Roles

Societal and cultural expectations of what it means to act appropriately for one's assigned sex (e.g., behaviours that are considered to be "ladylike" or "manly"). These characteristics are driven by traditional notions rather than empirical evidence of any natural connection between assigned sex and gender roles. Gender roles are often associated with gender expression and the display of gendered behaviour.

Sexual Orientation

A person's feelings of emotional and sexual attraction to another person. This attraction may be toward people of the same sex (lesbian or gay), the other sex (heterosexual, straight) or either sex (bisexual). Other sexual orientations include asexual (not experiencing sexual attraction) or pansexual (sexual attraction not restricted by someone's assigned sex, gender, or gender identity).

Sexual Identity

A person's identification as lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual or some other sexual orientation category. Some people who are sexually attracted to the same sex may nonetheless identify as heterosexual. Some people identify as "Queer" because they reject the whole system of socially-imposed sexual orientation and gender categories.



Transgender

A person whose gender identity or gender expression does not align with social conventions associated with their biological sex.

Cisgender

A recent term now widely used to refer to someone whose gender identity matches social conventions for their birth sex; e.g., a masculine male who identifies as a man.

Transsexual

A person who experiences intense personal and emotional discomfort with their assigned sex. Transsexual individuals often report feeling that they were 'born in the wrong sex or body.' Some transsexual individuals undergo various treatments to physically alter their body so that their sexual hormones/anatomy and gender correspond.

Two Spirit

Some Indigenous people identify as Two Spirit rather than as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). The term itself is recent, but points to the historical status of sexual and gender minority people in First Nations prior to European contact. These individuals were often respected as leaders and healers with spiritual strength as they were called to live outside the social conventions of dominant gender roles.

Homophobic Bullying

Any type of bullying directed toward people because they are, or are thought to be, LGBTQ.

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE SITUATION FACING LGBTQ STUDENTS

The following facts are taken from Every Class in Every School, a national Canadian survey of high school students published in 2011.

1. **Part of students' everyday school experience includes hearing language that insults the dignity of LGBTQ people.**
 - Whether or not they are LGBTQ, 70% of students say they hear expressions like "that's so gay" every day in school; 48% of students report hearing words like "faggot," "lesbo," and "dyke" used as insults every day in school.
 - 86% of LGBTQ students and 58% of non-LGBTQ students say they are upset by such language. Students report that teachers often look the other way when they hear homophobic and transphobic comments, and some teachers even make these kinds of comments themselves.
2. **LGBTQ students experience much higher levels of bullying, discrimination, harassment and other abuse than other students do:**



- 21% of LGBTQ students and 8% of non-LGBTQ students are physically harassed or assaulted because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender expression.
- 55% of LGBTQ students and 26% of non-LGBTQ students are verbally harassed about their gender expression.
- 49% of male and 36% of female LGBTQ students report being sexually harassed (compared to 23% of male and 17% of female non-LGBTQ students).

3. Most LGBTQ students do not feel safe at school:

- 53% of LGBTQ students say they feel unsafe at school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (compared to 3% of non-LGBTQ students)

4. Students with LGBTQ parents also suffer high levels of bullying and harassment:

- 27% of students with LGBTQ parents report being physically harassed about the sexual orientation of their parents. They are also more than twice as likely as their peers to be physically harassed or assaulted in connection with their own gender expression, perceived sexual orientation or gender identity and gender. They are three times more likely than their peers to skip school because of feeling unsafe.

5. LGBTQ students are especially vulnerable to bullying and other abuse if they also belong to another group that suffers from systemic discrimination:

- Female sexual minority students were most likely to report feeling unsafe in their school change rooms (59%).
- LGBTQ students of colour were especially likely to say that they do not have even one person they can talk to about LGBTQ matters.

6. The situation is especially bad for trans (transgender and transsexual) students. Trans youth are a small but highly visible group of students. They are frequent targets of harassment and discrimination, even from LGBTQ youth. To make matters worse, transphobia is not commonly discussed and is frequently overlooked even among the LGBTQ community. Trans youth are particularly vulnerable to bullying and in need of adult support at school.

- 90% of trans youth hear transphobic comments daily or weekly from other students.
- 23% of trans students hear teachers use transphobic language daily or weekly.
- 74% of trans students are verbally harassed about their gender expression.
- 78% of trans students feel unsafe in some way at school.
- 44% of trans students report skipping school because of feeling unsafe.
- 15% of trans students have skipped more than 10 days because of feeling unsafe.



HOW CAN TEACHERS REDUCE VICTIMIZATION OF LGBTQ STUDENTS?

1. Make your classroom a safe and respectful space.

- Promoting more inclusive language in your classroom is an effective way to help everyone feel welcome and safe. Make it clear that you're an ally to LGBTQ students by using inclusive language (e.g., "parents", rather than "mother and father") and examples, in every subject area (e.g., transgender figures in history and popular culture).
- Remind students that everyone is entitled to full respect, safety and acceptance in your classroom; spell out that "everyone" includes LGBTQ students. If you have a Classroom Code of Conduct, students will already have "signed on" to this commitment.
- Avoid unintentionally divisive procedures like assigning students to teams based on biological sex. (One alternative is "born in the first half or second half of the year").
- Explain to students that it is very important not to make assumptions about individuals' sexual orientation, gender, or gender expression based on dominant beliefs about their biological sex. Emphasize that sexual orientation and gender are fluid, and fall on a continuum rather than being fixed by birth sex. Heterosexual cisgender identities may fit the majority of people, but that doesn't make them right for everyone.
- Discuss various forms of gender and sexual orientation at relevant parts of the curriculum in subjects like English Language Arts (e.g., LGBTQ writers and characters, writers and characters who challenge gender restrictions), history (treatment of LGBTQ individuals in Nazi Europe or, more positively, pre-contact North America), social studies (the Charter of Rights and same-sex marriage) and health (healthy same-sex relationships).
- Challenge normative ideas of gender and gender roles. Deconstruct gender categories and ask students to question gender stereotypes. Promote an ongoing respectful, open discussion.

2. Address homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic language.

- Teachers and students can address homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic language by referring back to the Classroom Code of Conduct
- If you hear such language being used, address it immediately. Be respectful, consistent and patient in reminding students that this type of language is disrespectful and hurtful to anyone who is LGBTQ or has LGBTQ loved ones. Be careful not to single out any particular students as victims.
- Make use of the learning opportunities provided by current events and classroom incidents. Deconstruct comments such as "that's so gay" by asking students what they think it means, what it implies and how they would feel if they heard someone using their sexual orientation as an insult.



3. **Support the efforts of students to build a more LGBTQ- inclusive school environment.**
 - One consequence of homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying is that LGBTQ students feel isolated from the rest of the school community. While teachers can be an important source of support and become someone that LGBTQ students feel they can talk to, young people also need to build sustaining relationships with peers. Although the majority of students do not find bullying of LGBTQ students acceptable and want it to stop, they remain a largely untapped resource when it comes to social support. They may not stand up for LGBTQ students because they don't know what to do, or fear becoming targets of bullying themselves.
 - Teachers can counteract these tendencies by setting a strong positive example and consistently maintaining a safe environment. They can also directly promote the development of friendships and connections that help LGBTQ students find social support and inclusion among their peers.
 - One way to do this is to get involved with LGBT-inclusive activities, events, and groups such as GSAs ("Gay-Straight Alliances" or "Gender and Sexuality Alliances").
4. **Encourage your school to implement school-wide policies and inclusive initiatives that will prevent homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic behavior.**
 - It is important for the whole school to implement and publicize policies that specifically address harassment based on sexuality and gender, and promote respectful inclusion of LGBTQ students, staff, and families. When such policies are in place, LGBTQ students feel safer at school and are less likely to be bullied. They are exposed to fewer anti-LGBTQ comments, and their teachers are more likely to intervene when such comments are made. Students who are harassed or assaulted are more likely to report it. They more often feel they can talk to teachers, principals, counselors, coaches and classmates. Notably, 80% of LGBTQ students from schools with specific policies to prevent homophobia reported that they have never been physically harassed.
5. **Know your rights as a teacher and become aware of LGBTQ-inclusive legislation and school district policies.**
 - Teacher organizations throughout the publicly-funded school systems of Canada are strong supporters of LGBTQ-inclusive education. They can provide you with relevant information and resources.



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⁵ Taylor, C., Peter, T., Campbell, C., Meyer, E., Ristock, J., & Short, D. (2015). The Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-inclusive education in Canada's K-12 schools: Final report, Winnipeg MB: Manitoba Teacher's Society.

⁶ See Taylor et al, above.

⁷ See Taylor et al (2011) and Taylor et al.(2015) above.