

GAY/STRAIGHT ALLIANCES

For many LGBT young peoples and their straight allies, supportive student groups such as Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) can offer critical support for people who often feel completely isolated in school.

GSAs provide a safe space in schools where students can talk about their issues in a non-judgmental or confrontational manner.

These groups can discuss how to address name-calling or harassment within their schools and help heterosexual students to learn about their LGBT peers.

The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) in the United States as part of their National School Climate Survey found that students in schools with a GSA or similar club:

- Reported hearing fewer homophobic remarks
- Experienced less harassment and bullying
- Were more likely to report harassment and bullying
- Were less likely to feel unsafe
- Were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The education equality project is jointly run by Cara-Friend and The Rainbow Project. It works to help schools and teachers build their capacity to create a school environment where everyone is valued and everyone is safe.

To access homophobic bullying prevention training, teachers' guides, lesson plans, information for LGBT young people or any other form of support please contact:

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The Rainbow Project and Cara-Friend are members of



HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING

A TEACHER'S GUIDE



WHAT IS HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING?

Homophobic bullying is any language, conduct or behaviour used to exclude, demean or threaten a person based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation. Not only do LGB&T people face harassment and abuse but anyone who may not conform to a stereotype of their gender can face homophobic abuse. Boys who don't like football are labelled as 'gay' or 'poofs' and girls who are good at sports are called 'dykes' and 'lezzers'.

For young people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGB&T) school is frequently a place where they feel that they don't belong. Traditionally, schools have not been welcoming places for young LGB&T people and the lack of recognition and dignity granted to young LGB&T people has made them an invisible and yet highly vulnerable group within our society, prone to exclusion and bullying.

- 98% of LGB young people hear homophobic language in school
- 30% of LGB young people report that adults are responsible for homophobic incidents in school
- For young LGB people who were bullied, 92% experienced verbal bullying, 41% experienced physical bullying and 17% received death threats
- Of those who were bullied 84.5% considered suicide, 41.2% self-harmed and 35.3% attempted suicide
- Young LGB people are 5 times more likely to be medicated for depression and 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.

WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO?

Respond to homophobic incidents

When a teacher doesn't respond to homophobic language or behaviour, young people feel that teachers are condoning homophobia. Ignoring homophobia teaches that it is acceptable in a way that racism and sectarianism are not. Teachers must always respond when they see or hear homophobia.

Name the behaviour

Teachers should always name behaviour for what it is. If it is homophobic, call it homophobic. If it is racist, call it racist. Naming behaviour shows that teachers and schools take these issues seriously and it also shows support for pupils who might be LGB&T.

Use the moment

When teachers witness a homophobic incident it is frequently brushed under the carpet but when homophobia occurs teachers should use the opportunity to talk about homophobia and prejudice in general. Teachers should use moments like these to talk about why certain groups are discriminated against and how prejudice and homophobia affects people.

Ask for help

If you need help in tackling homophobia then ask your school to access the literature, experience and capacity-building training provided by **The Rainbow Project** and **Cara-Friend**

“THAT’S SO GAY!”

Young LGB&T people regularly hear the term 'gay' used in a negative way in school. Though some may claim that expressions such as 'that's so gay' are not intended to cause harm, most LGB&T young people say that hearing 'gay' or 'queer' or 'bent' used to denote anything bad causes them stress.

Because these phrases are so frequently used, particularly in school, it is important that teachers treat this like all forms of prejudiced or homophobic language. As not all students understand why this language is offensive and unacceptable it is important that teachers educate their students about why it is hurtful and the damage that it causes.

Ask students why they use the word 'gay' to mean something bad or boring. Teach them about how words and names are used to demean and intimidate minority groups. Ask them how they would feel if they were LGB&T and constantly heard slurs about themselves.

Insist that, regardless of intent, homophobic language runs contrary to the values and ethos of the school and, as such, is not allowed in school.

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