



NSW TEACHERS FEDERATION

Supporting people of diverse sexuality and genders in education

Federation is committed to protecting the industrial, professional and civil rights of its gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) members, as well as the rights of all GLBTI people.

The gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities are diverse. So too are the experiences and understandings of individuals in these communities. There are many different ways in which individuals express their gender identity, sexuality and sense of belonging. The experiences of GLBTI people are also influenced by cultural backgrounds, socio economic status, ethnicity, geographical location, Aboriginality, ability, religious beliefs, families and the communities in which they live.

Attitudes to issues related to people of diverse sexuality and gender have changed significantly in Australia over the past 30 years. Currently, legal equality is recognised in most areas of legislation for GLBTI people. There is also much evidence to suggest that tolerance towards people of diverse sexualities and genders has also improved over this time. However, discrimination, violence and harassment of GLBTI people continue within our communities. Research reports confirm that people who are or are perceived to be same sex attracted or gender-diverse experience disproportionate levels of violence and harassment compared to the general population. Research also tells us that a significant proportion of this harassment and violence occurs in schools (*writing themselves in again: 6 years on: The 2nd national report on the sexual health and well-being of same sex attracted young people in Australia*).

If you are experiencing bullying, harassment or violence at work due to your gender identity or sexuality contact Federation's Communication room on 1300 654 367, or your local Federation Organiser for advice. Alternatively, you may wish to access Federation's Welfare and Information leaflet about homophobia, biphobia or transphobia, online (Members' Area, www.nswtf.org.au).

Language and terms

- *GLBTI* — gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex
- *Sexism* — may also be referred to as sex discrimination, and is a form of discrimination or devaluation based on a person's sex
- *Bias* — is an inclination to present or hold a partial perspective at the expense of (possibly equally valid) alternatives
- *Intersex* — an individual born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia or an internal reproductive system that is not exclusively either male or female
- *Transgender* — people whose gender identity (the sense of gender that every person feels inside) or gender expression is different from the sex that was assigned to them at birth
- *Homophobic* — is a word used to describe irrational fear and/or hatred towards people who are gay, lesbian or same-sex attracted, and often is inclusive of people who are bisexual. It can also be extended to people who are perceived to be same-sex attracted, or those who have family members or friends who are same sex attracted
- *Heterosexist* — the presumption that heterosexuality is universal and/or superior to homosexuality. Prejudice, bias or discrimination is based on such presumptions.

Early childhood

Children come to school from a variety of cultural, racial, religious and family backgrounds. Early childhood teachers are experienced in meeting the individual needs of their students and accepting that this diversity needs to be reflected in their classrooms.

Students at this level of schooling are aware of gender differences. They may also be immersed in heterosexist family, peer group and popular culture values and practices. Research shows that even very young children are

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aware of the power of homophobia to harass and ostracise other children.

Strategies for addressing issues that affect people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender in the early years of schooling include:

- inclusive curriculum to affirm and celebrate the diverse families from which children come, including books, puzzles, games, toys and play that include GLBTI families
- modelling family diversity by displaying GLBTI inclusive materials (photographs, posters, drawings) which will let students know that your classroom or preschool is an inclusive environment and which will also reflect and validate their family
- allowing and encouraging non-gender specific free play (for example boys dressing up and girls using construction materials) and challenging sexist attitudes and behaviour
- encouraging, facilitating and incorporating same-sex parents/caregivers/caregivers in classroom and community activities
- recognising bias or discrimination as it is happening and responding sensitively and appropriately to stop bullying, exclusion, teasing and/or gender stereotyping
- developing plans that manage school organisation in relation to transgender and intersex students and teachers
- accepting and welcoming colleagues who may be sexually or gender diverse
- incorporating discussions about diversity and equality in the classroom but not singling out particular students as an example
- providing accurate and honest information in an age appropriate manner to children to help them work through issues and ideas
- challenging stereotypical/homophobic/heterosexist expressions relating to the appearance or behaviour of children and parents/caregivers from other adults (including staff and/or parents/caregivers)
- role modelling appropriate behaviour, including language
- facilitating a sense of social justice, fairness and empathy in students
- celebrating diversity of all students/families which leads to inclusive practices. One way of sharing about differences can be the way we celebrate — families may come to early childhood programs to share their particular ways of celebrating
- using non-gender specific language when talking to adults about their partners — not assuming their partner is of the opposite sex
- not assuming heterosexuality or gender identity of children
- accepting differences in families so that each child feels a sense of belonging
- engaging in professional development to develop people's knowledge and understanding of GLBTI issues in early childhood settings.

Primary school

Primary teachers are aware of the role both social development and engagement in schooling plays in the ways students understand their gender. Teachers recognise sex-based harassment, including homophobia, knowing that children use it as a powerful way to “police” gender in primary schools.

Students at this level of schooling are experimenting with understandings about gender. These ideas are sometimes used to marginalise, ignore or demean others who are “different”. This occurs both in the classroom and on the playground. Getting your gender “right” is beginning to be important to children of this age and this contributes to a heterosexist culture in primary schools. Many young people realise they are same-sex attracted while they are still in primary school.

Strategies for addressing issues that affect people of diverse sexuality and gender in primary schools include:

- facilitating a sense of social justice, fairness and empathy in students
- encouraging, facilitating and incorporating same-sex parents/caregivers in classroom and community activities
- ensuring libraries in schools contain gender inclusive resources which portray a range of families for teachers and students to access
- developing awareness of classroom strategies and resources to address issues that affect gender and sexually diverse people which can be facilitated through professional development
- fostering inclusive classroom practices that celebrate diversity
- inclusive curriculum to affirm and celebrate the differences between individuals and the diverse families from which children come. Curriculum supporting material can include books, puzzles, audio-visual material and technological resources that include GLBTI families
- modelling family diversity by displaying GLBTI inclusive materials (photographs, posters, drawings) which will let students know that your classroom and/or school is an inclusive environment, and which also serves to reflect and validate their family
- allowing and encouraging non-gender specific free play (for example boys dressing up and girls using construction materials) and challenging sexist attitudes and behaviour
- recognising bias or discrimination as it is happening and responding sensitively and appropriately to stop bullying, exclusion, teasing and/or gender stereotyping
- naming homophobia when it occurs and addressing it explicitly in school policies and plans
- developing plans that manage school organisation in relation to transgender and intersex students and teachers
- accepting and welcoming colleagues who may be sexually or gender diverse

- incorporating discussions about diversity and equality in the classroom but not singling out particular students as an example
- providing accurate and honest information in an age appropriate manner to children to help them work through issues and ideas
- challenging stereotypical/homophobic/heterosexist expressions relating to the appearance and/or behaviour of children and parents/carers from other adults (including staff and/or parents/caregivers)
- role modelling appropriate behaviour, including language
- celebrating diversity of all students/families and engaging in inclusive practices
- using non-gender specific language when talking to adults about their partners, or children about their parents/caregivers.
- not assuming heterosexuality or gender identity of children, or their parents/caregivers
- accepting differences in families and individuals so that each child feels a sense of belonging
- engaging school staff about the topic — including professional development to develop people’s knowledge and understanding of GLBTI issues in schools

Secondary schools

High school teachers recognise the place that peer groups play in influencing understandings of gender and sexuality. They know that many of their students have begun to experiment both socially and sexually, and recognise sex-based harassment, including homophobia, is a powerful way to “police” gender in high schools.

Students at this level of schooling have well-formed ideas about gender. These ideas are often used to marginalise, ignore or demean others who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex, those perceived to be, or those “different” to the accepted gendered behaviour. Much effort is taken by many students to prove they have their gender “right”. This behaviour contributes to a heterosexist culture in high schools.

Strategies for addressing issues that affect people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender in high schools include:

- using resources and teaching practices that acknowledge diverse sexes and genders
- teaching respect, fairness, empathy and social justice
- fostering inclusive classroom practices that celebrate diversity
- recognising bias or discrimination as it is happening and responding sensitively and appropriately to stop bullying, exclusion, teasing and/or gender stereotyping
- naming homophobia when it occurs and addressing it explicitly in school policies and plans
- developing plans that manage school organisation in relation to transgender and intersex students and teachers, not management of the student alone

- accepting and welcoming colleagues who may be sexually or gender diverse
- purchasing and using GLBTI inclusive and representative resources across the curriculum
- making your curriculum inclusive through the use of integrated examples, especially within the context of diversity and human rights
- ensuring material inclusive of same sex attracted and gender diverse young people is incorporated into the teaching of sexual health within the Personal Development/Health/Physical Education curriculum
- incorporating discussions about diversity and equality in the classroom but not singling out particular students as an example
- encouraging and welcoming same sex parents/caregivers to be part of school activities
- being visible as an ally, which can be done through the display of GLBTI inclusive materials such as posters, and role modelling appropriate language and behaviour
- training to ensure that school staff to whom students disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity respond in a positive, non-judgemental and constructive manner
- knowing where and when to refer students for more information or support regarding GLBTI issues
- supporting the development and operation of student clubs such as sexuality and diversity groups
- providing accurate and honest information in an age appropriate manner to children to help them work through issues and ideas
- developing awareness of classroom strategies and resources that address issues that affect gender and sexually diverse people, including resources that address cyber-bullying
- challenging stereotypical/homophobic/heterosexist expressions relating to the appearance and/or behaviour of children and parents/caregivers from other adults (including staff and/or parents/caregivers)
- using non-gender specific language when talking to adults about their partners, or to children about their parents/caregivers — not assuming their partner is of the opposite sex
- not assuming heterosexuality or gender identity of children
- engaging school staff about the topic — including professional development to develop people’s knowledge and understanding of GLBTI issues in schools.

Post-compulsory education

Teachers of students in the post-compulsory years recognise that these students, generally, are mature, independent and resourceful and provide teaching and learning experiences to cater for this.

Students at this level of education have a complex understanding of gender. Most recognise that dominant forms of masculinities and femininities are valued in our culture, including

in educational institutions, and that differences are marginalised, ignored or demeaned. Homophobia remains a powerful way students “police” their masculinities and femininities.

Strategies for addressing issues that affect people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender in post-compulsory education include:

- ensuring that student work placements are free from harassment and providing appropriate policies and work practices that support issues that affect gender and sexually diverse people
- including sexuality and gender diversity in resources that support the teaching of courses related to health, welfare and social work related professions
- fostering inclusive practices that celebrate diversity
- engendering respect, fairness, empathy and social justice
- ensuring that course resources and content is GLBTI inclusive
- recognising bias or discrimination as it is happening and responding sensitively and appropriately to stop bullying, exclusion, teasing and/or gender stereotyping
- naming homophobia when it occurs and addressing it explicitly in workplace policies and plans
- developing plans that manage workplace organisation in relation to transgender and intersex students, not management of the student alone
- accepting and welcoming colleagues who may be sexually or gender diverse
- being visible as an ally, which can be done through the display of GLBTI inclusive materials such as posters, and role modelling appropriate language and behaviour
- knowing where and when to refer students for more information or support regarding GLBTI issues
- supporting the development and operation of student clubs such as sexuality and diversity groups
- providing accurate and honest information to students to help them work through issues and ideas
- developing awareness of classroom strategies and resources that address issues that affect gender and sexually diverse people, including resources that address cyber-bullying
- challenging stereotypical/homophobic/heterosexist expressions relating to the appearance and/or behaviour of others
- not assuming heterosexuality or gender identity of students
- engaging colleagues about the topic — including professional development to develop people’s knowledge and understanding of GLBTI issues in educational institutions/ the workforce; role modelling appropriate behaviour and language; discuss GLBTI issues as they arise; distribute appropriate information.

Resources that may be useful

Federal and state laws

- NSW Anti-Discrimination Act (1977)
 - Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act (1984)
- Australian Education Union
- *Policy on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex People* (2006)

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- *Gender, sexuality and identity policy* (2011)
- *TR14 Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia*
- *GLBTI Resources for Teacher Reference* Federation library resource guide
- *GLBTI Resources for Classroom Use* Federation library resource guide

Department of Education and Communities policies and procedures.

<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au>

- *Boys’ and Girls’ Education Strategy*
- *Bullying: Preventing and Responding to Students Bullying in Schools Policy*
- *Bias based bullying*
- *Complaints Handling Policy*
- *Complaint Handling Policy Guidelines*
- *Code of Conduct: Fairness, respect, integrity and responsibility*
- *Core Rules: Student Discipline in NSW Government Schools*
- *Dignity and Respect in the Workplace Charter*
- *Homophobia in Schools Memo 97/281*
- *National Safe Schools framework*
- *Student Welfare Policy*
- *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students Procedures*
- *Values in NSW public schools*

Safe Schools Coalition Victoria

- *Stand Out* (http://safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au/sites/default/files/Stand%20Out_0.pdf)
- *Gender Questioning* (<http://safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au/sites/default/files/GQ%20July%202011.pdf>)

GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) — USA

<http://www.glsen.org>

- *Safe Space kit*
- www.ThinkB4YouSpeak.com

Relevant federal and state bodies

- Australian Human Rights Commission (http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/lgbti/index.html)
- The Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW (Enquires) (02) 9268 5544 or 1800 670 812 or <http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/ADB>

Other agencies that may be of assistance

- Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service (02) 8594 9596 or 1800 184 527
- Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (02) 9571 5501
- Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project (02) 9206 2116 or 1800 063 060
- The Gender Centre (02) 9569 2366 or 1800 069 115
- AIDS Council Of NSW (ACON) 1800 063 060 or www.acon.org.au