

POLICY 1260
SEXUAL ORIENTATION

APPROVED MARCH 2010
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POLICY

The Board will promote a safe environment, free from harassment and discrimination, by encouraging pro-active strategies and guidelines to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and intersex students, employees and families are welcomed and included in all aspects of education and school life and treated with respect and dignity. Issues of direct harassment may be addressed through Collective Agreements, Policy 1240 Code of Conduct, Policy 1250 Harassment, and Policy 1251 Progressive Discipline.

PROCEDURES

Any language or behaviour that degrades, denigrates, labels, stereotypes, incites hatred, prejudice, discrimination, harassment towards students or employees on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identification will not be acceptable. Accordingly, inappropriate behaviour will be addressed in a rational, educational, and progressive disciplinary manner by each school's administration. Schools are expected to communicate, through their Codes of Conduct, the appropriate expectations regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

- *The District will support the inclusion of LBGTQ issues in professional development*
- *Schools are encouraged to support age appropriate activities that promote an understanding of the LGBTQ community and the impact of discrimination*
- *Schools will ensure resources are allocated to materials that positively reflect the diversity of our community*
- *New Teacher Orientation will include opportunity for new teachers to increase their knowledge and awareness of issues around diversity and discrimination*
- *An advisory committee will be formed of 2 teachers, 2 principals, 1 district Administrator, 1 Trustee, 2 support staff to review this policy and its implementation.*
- *The Advisory Committee will allocate funding to LBGTQ resources and professional development on an annual basis.*
- *[Link to LGBTQ info item]*

Information and helpful tips

A basic method of promoting inclusiveness in any environment is to pay attention to the language used in that space and correct it whenever it fails the test of respect. Language can be a powerful force of inclusion or exclusion and therefore plays an important role in promoting equality.

LGBT individuals are assumed heterosexual over and over again on a daily basis. People assume that their friends and co-workers are interested in the opposite sex only, and will often ask awkward questions such as asking a male, "Why don't you have a girlfriend yet?" These kind of questions might seem harmless but their repetitive nature makes them a constant reminder to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students that they are not fully accepted in the classroom. For students who might be questioning their sexual orientation, the constant assumption of heterosexuality, otherwise known as heterosexism, is a warning that they had better hide their identity or pay the price. This issue is even more complex for a trans person who may be aware at an early age of his trans status but unable to discuss it at school or at home. As trans people grow into young adults, language on forms forces them into the box of gender male or female.

Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment is not just a professional and ethical mandate but a legal one as well. In Canada, provincial human rights legislation prohibits discrimination in a number of areas based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Here are some strategies to use to encourage LGBT youth and young adults to feel safe in their work or learning environment. Before implementing them you may want to spend some time examining your own stereotypes and language so that you can address these pitfalls before stumbling over your own words.

- Use open language when referring to romantic partners of any kind. Try to use the term 'partner' and avoid terms like 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend', 'husband' and 'wife' which still indicate a heterosexual assumption.
- In school, with each new year and new class, begin by laying the groundwork for class dynamics. Let students know that name-calling of any kind is not allowed in the classroom. The 2001 National School Climate Survey found that 84.3% of LGBT students heard homophobic remarks frequently or often. It also found that 81.8% of youth reported that teachers never intervened or intervened only some of the time

when they were present during these comments.¹ These statistics demonstrate what a serious issue this is.

- If you have a discussion in a classroom setting on gay, lesbian and bisexual students, include a discussion of Trans students. This will be a good opportunity to discuss limits based on gender stereotypes.
- Inclusive language is not only about eliminating heterosexist assumptions, but also about creating space for gay, lesbian and bisexual communities. Ensure you make reference to same-sex couples in ordinary discussion. The goal is to actively let people know that as a teacher, counsellor, mentor or employer you are accepting of all people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Do not make jokes about women or men in drag. Sometimes these issues come up in videos, or television shows. The degree of seriousness with which you deal with the issue will demonstrate to those around you that they are in a safe place.
- When talking to an LGBT student, follow their lead. Use whatever term they use to self-identify. If you feel uncomfortable, ask *privately* and respectfully what the person prefers. However, avoid referring to your colleagues or friends by their sexual orientation for fear of inadvertently 'outing' them. Remember that being LGBT is just one aspect of who that person is.
- Take a look around at the physical environment of your workplace, school, or agency. Are the posters representative of all people regardless of sex-and-gender diversity? Are any of the images homophobic or transphobic? Are the books you have inclusive? Are there any that depict homophobic or transphobic storylines? Make sure you have LGBT friendly magazine and notices in waiting rooms and public areas.
- Try not to use the term 'homosexual'. 'Homosexual' was originally coined as an expression to describe a pathology. This term is not specific to the person you are referring to (i.e., gay, lesbian) and is too often used in a negative, rather than positive/celebratory fashion.
- Be aware that stereotypes about the LGBT communities will be different across diverse communities. In a classroom setting, ask your class to discuss and deconstruct these stereotypes, being aware of diversity. For instance, deconstruct the stereotype that people with mental or physical disabilities cannot be LGBT. Alternatively, examine different stereotypes that are seen in various cultures.
- Don't assume that everyone is heterosexual. Assume there are lesbian, gay and bisexual people in all classes, sports, the cafeteria, the staff room, meetings, daily life, etc.²

¹ Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, "The 2001 National School Climate Survey: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students and Their Experiences in Schools" 2002. Available at http://www.glsen.org/binary-date/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/221-.pdf (cited July 21/05)

- Don't assume that someone who looks effeminate is gay, or who looks butch is a lesbian. Don't assume being a macho male or a feminine female means a person is heterosexual.³
- Encourage your workplace, school or agency to make LGBT friendly policies.⁴
- Display a rainbow on your door to indicate that people are entering an LGBT friendly space.

Most likely if you hear a term that sounds like a taunt, then it IS a taunt regardless of what the word is. Make those around you aware that it will be the tone of the comment and that will receive punitive action. If it sounds degrading, and especially if the people on the receiving end feels harassed, it will be seen as degrading. Human rights case law says that discrimination is not determined by the intent of the harasser, but by the effect it has on the victim.⁵

Homophobic and transphobic language is aimed not only at LGBT people, but also at heterosexual people who do not 'fit' in with what is perceived as popular or mainstream. By eliminating taunting language from your workplace, classroom or organization you will not just be protecting LGBT individuals, but all people in that space. You will be protecting people's rights to freely express their gender, whether that means girls playing baseball or boys joining a cooking class. In addition you will be creating an example of respect that is due to all people regardless of their sexual orientation, race, ability, sex, or other perceived difference.

² Education Wife Assault, *Creating Safer Schools for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual youth: A Resource for Educators Concerned with Equity* (Toronto, 1999) at 42 (hereinafter "Creating Safer Schools").

³ *Creating Safer Schools* at 42.

⁴ *Creating Safer Schools* at 42.

⁵ *Ontario Human Rights Commission et al. v. Simpsons-Sears Limited and Canadian Human Rights Commission et al.*, (1985) 2 S.C.R. 536.