

# Why?

Tens of thousands of Québec children are living with homosexual parents<sup>1</sup>. Their identity and self-esteem are intimately tied to their families. It is, therefore, essential that these children feel that their families are not only accepted but respected.

Homophobic remarks, beliefs and actions obviously create stress for children living in homoparental families. But the impact of homophobia goes beyond these children. Tolerance of homophobic insults can hurt a child with a gay uncle or lesbian cousin, for example, as well as children who will eventually become homosexual themselves. Homophobia also touches children whose prefer-

ences or interests are commonly associated with the opposite gender, such as artistic boys or athletic girls. So long as adults tolerate homophobia, children wrongly conclude that being different justifies teasing and bullying.

According to a number of studies, there is an important link between students' perception of support from their school and family and their academic success. Preschool and school environments have an essential role in fighting against homophobia and properly including children from families with gay and lesbian parents. Schools can thus contribute to the transformation of our society.



# Getting started

First and foremost, it is important to be conscious of your own values and knowledge with regards to family diversity, homoparental families, and homosexuality, in order to communicate suitable information to children. Some may not be sure about what approach to take, while others worry about what questions children or their parents might ask. This resource guide is intended to help you deal with those questions.

# Understanding...

Terms like *faggot*, *homo*, *dyke* and expressions like "*That's so gay*" are so common in daily talk that we barely realize their homophobic connotation. Anti-gay comments often go unnoticed. We mistakenly consider them to be harmless. How can we help children to understand the harmful affect of these hurtful words? How do we help them to respond appropriately? We suggest a **learning activity** on homophobic insults in the **coral** pages of this guide.

1 Estimate by Daveluy et al. (2000) based on a social and health survey of the Institut de la Statistique du Québec, 1998.

# Respecting...

# loving relationships between people of the same gender.

School is not only a place for academic learning, but also of citizenship education. As part of its mission to train the citizens of tomorrow, the school promotes social values such as equality for all and the acceptance of differences. How can we

help students to understand loving relationships between persons of the same gender and undo the most common stereotypes and prejudices about homosexuality? We suggest a **learning activity** on stereotypes in the **lilac** pages of this guide.

# Responding...

# to questions from children in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles of elementary school.

Children are naturally curious. Their questions will vary depending on their age and development. It is important that the adult clearly understands the nature of the child's questioning and responds in a manner appropriate to his / her stage of develop-

ment. In the **tangerine** pages of this guide, we propose a list of the **questions** most commonly asked by children of elementary cycles 2 and 3, along with **answers** that can be adapted as required.

# Reacting...

# to children's homophobic words and actions.

At a very early age, sometimes without even knowing their exact meaning, children use words like "queer", "fag" or even "gay" as insults. Educators and support staff often don't know how to respond to the insults that children throw at each other, especially when insults are homophobic in nature. However, the sim-

plest gestures or words from an adult can make an enormous difference. How can we intervene systematically to affirm the basic principle that intolerance has no place in the school or in the classroom? We suggest a number of questions, comments and possible responses in the **lime** pages of this guide.

# Acting... to combat homophobia.

The activities suggested in this guide should help you to prevent or handle homophobic incidents whose impact is all too often trivialised. Keep in mind that the preschool and elementary schools can play an important role in the fight against homophobia and thereby contribute to a positive transformation of our society.



# Finding more information.

The resources below will be useful in exploring some of the themes in *Ulysse et Alice*. You can also find numerous books and videos about gay, lesbian, single parent, multiethnic, blended, adoptive and other kinds of families. Information about homophobia and heterosexism can also be found in the resources listed.

# Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF) www.ctf-fce.ca

A number of interesting resources promoting diversity can be found within the CTF's publication catalogue. Amongst these, "Challenging Silence, Challenging Censorship," is a book designed as a professional and practical resource to help educational leaders and policy-makers within K-12 teaching (teachers, administrators, counsellors and teacher librarians), together with public librarians and other community stake-holders, to learn more about how they can take action to challenge and positively change the educational conditions and social climate for LGBT youth and for children from homoparental families.

# Gai Écoute and the Fondation Émergence

www.gaiecoute.org • aide@gaiecoute.org • 514 866-0103 (Montréal) 1 888 505-1010 (elsewhere in Québec)

Help, counselling and information service for those interested in questions of sexual orientation. *Gai Écoute* and the *Fondation Émergence* offer a collection of free posters, stickers and pamphlets to organisations requesting them. The order form provides an indication of the range of materials produced by the two organisations. *Gai Écoute*'s telephone help-line services are available at no cost across Quebec every day from 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.

# Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sociale (GRIS), Montréal www.gris.ca

The teaching guide Démystifier l'homosexualité, ça commence à l'école is intended to help school personnel instil objective knowledge about homosexuality and to combat the destructive effects of homophobia on young victims, particularly boys. Along with a comprehensive list of community resources, Internet sites, videos, books and films dealing with homosexuality, this teaching guide provides teachers with invaluable insights that enable them to feel more comfortable talking about homosexuality. This document includes a series of learning activities for the elementary and secondary levels, as well as lesson plans on family diversity for younger children. Volunteers are available to carry out activities in elementary (Cycle 3) and secondary schools, in both English and French.

### **LGBT Family Coalition**

www.familleshomoparentales.org • info@familleshomoparentales.org • 514 846-1543

Founded in 1998, this bilingual group of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) parents and parents-to-be encourages community, the sharing of information and resources, as well as family activities. The Coalition was responsible for the book *Ulysse et Alice* as well as this resource and activity guide. A list of books and videos, along with interesting links about LGBT-parent families is available on the web site. The Coalition provides free workshop in English and French, for professionals working in Quebec's schools, to promote diversity and combat homophobia.

# Pride Education Network www.pridenet.ca

A valuable list of resources, videos, books and links regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) youth and homophobia in the schools. Pride Education Network (formerly GALE-BC) also has an excellent teaching guide that includes lesson plans for different age groups.

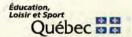
# Tolerance Foundation www.fondationtolerance.com

The Tolerance Foundation's mission is to prevent, inform and raise awareness about the dangers inherent in intolerance, prejudice, exclusion, racism and discrimination in all its forms. Their workshops for students use interactive activities, group discussions, simulations, videos and role-playing.

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Email: info@familleshomoparentales.org — Web site: www.familleshomoparentales.org





# UNDERSTANDING...

# what lies behind the words

+OLDER kids

This activity is also suitable at any time when questions of peer relations, diversity or simply human relations in the school are at issue. In that way, homophobic insults are treated in the same way as other prejudices based on ethnic origin, religion, or any other difference.

(This activity has been adapted from "Challenging Homophobia in Schools," produced by GALE-BC.)

<b>ACTIVITY</b> An activity on chlidren's homophobic insults for the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> cycles of elementary school.	WHO? This activity is intended for children from 8 to 12 years of age. Depending on their age, it could be more or less complex and the pedagogical objectives may vary. It can be tied in with the competencies of the Qué-
WHY? This classroom activity shows children how all kinds of insults based on appearance, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. are similar.	bec Education Program of the Ministry of Education of Québec (see below). The activity can also be used in the context of the program "Ethics and religious culture: living together in today's Québec."
More specifically, the activity is intended to make children aware of the hurtful effect of homophobic insults (such as <i>faggot, homo, queer</i> and, when used pejoratively, the word <i>gay</i> ), the reasons people use them, and the best ways to respond to them.	<b>WHERE?</b> In an elementary classroom from grades 3 to 6 (2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle), in a school or neighbourhood library, or in a community organisation.
Supplementary activities will give students the opportunity to consider the places where intimidation occurs and how they can be transformed into more secure environments.	WHAT? Depending on your group's needs and circumstances:
	1 Information: The object of this activity is to help students under- stand the hurtful effects of insulting language and the reasons people use such language.
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	2 Awareness: Students should be able to identify common insults and understand why people use them. They will develop empathy for others and will be able to describe how a victim of insulting language
	feels. In a supplementary activity, students will establish links among different prejudices deriving from racism, sexism and homophobia.
	3 Intervention: A large number of students, including those with gay
	and lesbian family members, are the targets of homophobic insults.
	This activity will teach students how to react to homophobic comments and insults among children in the school environment. In a
	complementary activity, students will also discuss the places in
	school where they are most likely to encounter intimidation and ways to create a safer environment for all students.
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	WHEN?
	Prevention
	We recommend talking about homophobic insults proactively or in
	response to an actual situation in the school. Insulting language can be
	discussed at any point in the year. The subject can also come up as part
	of a theme day or week, for example against racism or homophobia, or in any other context where prejudices and stereotypes are the focus.

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### **INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD\***

### Stage 1: Observation of the reality

The first thing to note is that certain pejorative words (inappropriate words or acceptable words used as insults) associated with homosexuality can be deeply hurtful to children of homoparental families or with homosexual family members (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.). Such insults can also hurt children whose appearance or interests do not correspond to traditional stereotypes of boys and girls and who are victimised whatever their sexual orientation or that of their parents. This exercise will help students to understand the destructive power of such language and the reasons some children use insults to hurt. The object of the exercise is to **raise awareness** of the harmful effects of homophobic insults and, by association, of all insults based on ethnic origin, physical appearance, religion, etc.

## Stage 2: Analysis of the reality

Analysis involves identifying a phenomenon (in this case, homophobic insults) and deconstructing its essential elements in order to understand and explain it. When we analyse, it is necessary to be able to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable behaviour. To do that, the adult must awaken the child's **natural curiosity**.

The suggested activities explore a social issue (homophobic insults) in a manner adapted to the age of the children. The activities examine various aspects of hurtful language in general. The issue can be discussed during a single period or occur over a longer period, always in a climate of learning and respect. If inappropriate comments come up, it is important to point out how much harm homophobic language can do.

# Stage 3: Transformation of the reality

To transform the reality, it is first necessary to **reflect on our ideas and our behaviours**. The children are encouraged to adopt appropriate language and behaviours with respect to difference and homosexuality. The use of tables produced by the children themselves serves to reinforce and solidify the notion of respect for others whether they are like us or not.

In the end, this activity will lead children to make the commitment to adopt appropriate attitudes and language when talking about or to others.

# Activity

# **MATERIALS**

# For the main activity:

- Per team: a photocopy of the TABLE "WORDS THAT HURT."
- Per team: materials to create a poster against homophobia and homophobic insults (suitable paper, coloured markers, glue, scissors, paints, etc.).

# For the complementary activities:

- Per team: a photocopy of the TABLE "SAFE PLACES AND RISKY PLACES."
- Per team: a photocopy of the TABLE "WORDS THAT HURT-LONG VERSION."

# **PROCEDURE**

- 1 Explanation: The teacher explains the objectives of the activity. The teacher can use the TABLE OF DEFINITIONS AND ORIGINS to explain the significance of terms associated with homosexuality. The teacher can also use this table to explain the origin of certain homophobic insults.
- 2 Three questions in sub-groups: The teacher divides the class into single-sex sub-groups of four or five children and asks them to work together for 20 minutes with the TABLE "WORDS THAT HURT" to answer the first two questions: "What pejorative words (insults) are used?" and "Why do people use those words?".

For the third question, the teacher asks them to think as honestly as possible about how they would feel if they were called those names. To create empathy, the teacher suggests that the students close their eyes for a few minutes and imagine that other children are shouting homophobic insults at them in the corridors, at recess, in the school bus or when school gets out. When they open their eyes, they immediately write down how they felt.

3 Sharing and clarification: The teacher leads a discussion in which each team shares its answers. She writes the answers on the blackboard or a flipchart and explains, if necessary, the meaning of certain expressions (e.g., faggot, queer). The adult helps the children express clearly their feelings, helping them to find the right vocabulary where necessary (confused, ashamed, embarrassed, frustrated, annoyed, anxious, shocked, isolated, aggressive, sad, etc.).

The teacher makes the students aware that those terms are pejorative and hurtful. He/She discusses the reasons some young people call others faggot, queer, or lesbian. Teachers can refer to the TABLE "REASONS PEOPLE USE HOMOPHOBIC INSULTS."

# PROCEDURE (CONT'D)

4 Change and action: The teacher leads a brainstorming session on how we can put an end to such insults. She can use the following questions to start the discussion: "How can you help someone who is being insulted?", "What can students do to stop people insulting others?", "What can teachers do to stop such behaviour?", "What can others in the school (the principal, lunch and recess supervisors, bus drivers, etc.) do?" The suggestions are written on the blackboard or a flipchart.

The teacher invites the students to return to their groups, which then create a poster to make other young people aware of the destructive effects of homophobia.

# COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

# First activity: Safe places and risky places

## 1. Explanation and identification

The teacher explains that she wants to know the areas in the school where students feel safe or comfortable and others where they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. It is important for the teacher to be aware that student perceptions and opinions may vary with respect to any given location.

The locations considered to be "risky" are those where insults or the possibility for other unacceptable behaviours such as harassment, intimidation, or physical violence are likely.

Some possible locations to look at with children are: corridors, stairways, toilets, classrooms, learning centres, cafeterias, specific areas of the playground, the nurse's office, the principal's office, the library, etc. The teacher should also include the route to school, the school bus or the bus stop. Locations mentioned can be written on the blackboard or a flipchart (SEE THE TABLE "SAFE PLACES AND RISKY PLACES").

### 2. Children's opinions

Students are asked to vote and express their opinion about each location: Is it safe or risky? The results can then be added to the table.

Not all students will feel comfortable marking their choices in front of the class. If the teacher senses this, she can distribute individual copies of the table and tabulate the results at the end. She can also divide the class into small groups chosen by the students themselves, with one member reporting the results at the conclusion of the exercise.

The teacher leads a discussion of why students feel safe or unsafe in school. He or she can ask why certain locations seem safer than others.

### 3. Change and action

A brainstorming session follows to determine what actions to take. The teacher can use the **TABLE "MAKING PLACES SAFER"** to consider what can be done in these locations where students feel they are likely to experience verbal or physical violence. The table is divided up based on the various activities that might be undertaken by the students, teachers, or the rest of the school staff. Students should understand that adults are also responsible for their safety and that they can always ask for help in the event they are victims of intimidation.

# Second activity: Strengthening our understanding

The activity "Words that hurt" can be enriched through the inclusion of other types of insults based, for example, on sex, race, ethnic origin, physical characteristics, etc. The teacher can use the long version of the **TABLE** "WORDS THAT HURT." The procedure for the activity remains the same.

# Third activity: Activities intended for the entire school

A homophobia awareness day could be organised in the school. Posters promoting the International Day Against Homophobia (May 17) could be displayed, or included as part of any other theme day or week to combat prejudice, intimidation or violence (including verbal violence) or promoting tolerance. Students can also organise information booths, write an article in the student newspaper, or form a committee to work for the prevention of violence in the school or the struggle against prejudices.

## CONCLUSION

The adult points out the hurtful impact that insults can have. He/She stresses that insults are unacceptable. Actions taken by students and teachers to prevent insults are encouraged.

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# Links with the Québec Education Program

By adapting these activities to the age of the children, it is possible to tie them in with the Québec Education Program (www.mels.gouv.qc.ca).



# BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

The activity "Words that hurt" and the complementary activities to prevent insults are consistent with the broad areas of learning for elementary instruction:

When a child is placed in a situation of solving problems with his peers, he is putting into action an important dimension of his education. The playground and other places where he relates with his peers are, effectively, locations that provide the opportunity to contribute to a climate of peace and justice. From such activities he improves his capacity to exercise critical judgement and to cooperate with others.

The broad areas of learning relating to this activity are:

- 1 Health and well-being: learning to cultivate a healthy lifestyle;
- 2 Personal and career planning: self-knowledge and awareness of his/her potential and how to fulfil it;
- 3 Citizenship and community life: learning how to play an active role within a group in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity.

# AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL (2<sup>ND</sup> AND 3<sup>RD</sup> CYCLE)

The suggested activities for combating insults and intimidation as well as class discussions can be incorporated into the subjects being taught: English, citizenship education, arts, ethics and religious culture. Also, a number of the nine cross-curricular competencies of the Education Program are touched on by these activities.

## • Intellectual competencies

The child learns to solve problems (competency 2) and to exercise critical judgement (competency 3) to recognise the destructive impact of verbal violence and intimidation, the ways to combat it, and the prejudices that underlie the words used as insults. The child employs his / her critical thinking (competency 4) to plan strategies to fight against prejudice and its manifestations (posters, day against violence, information booths, etc.).

### Methodological competencies

Working with a team to create a poster requires the child to adopt effective work methods (*competency 5*) to achieve the assigned task.

### Personal and social competencies

Constructing his/her identity (*competency 7*) involves, in particular, learning to accept differences and to be open to diversity. These activities are ideally suited to that objective.

The activity also requires the child to cooperate (competency  $\delta$ ) in a team structure and to communicate ideas and questions. Affirmation of the self while respecting others, constructive openness to diversity and non-violence — all in all, what is being acquired here is how to live harmoniously with others and be open to the entire world.

### Communication-related competency

This learning activity requires the student to prepare and transmit a message to the entire group through an artistic creation. Discussion, listening to others, and the formulation of questions will lead the child to a greater mastery of socially appropriate communication (*competency 9*). The theme of hurtful language helps to anchor the concept in the daily reality of the child.

# Words that hurt

# +OLDER kids

Sexual orientation	Labels or insults used	Why are these words used?	How would I feel if someone called me that?
omosexual boy			
or man (gay)			
omosexual girl woman (lesbian)			

# Reasons people use homophobic insults

+OLDER kids

Limited communication skills	Peer pressure	Power	Making fun of difference / Having prejudices	Revenge
I couldn't think of anything else to say.	My friends told me to do it.	To be aggressive.	People use insulting language	Everyone makes fun of me, so I
Everyone does it.	I did it on a dare.	To always have the final say.	because they don't like gays, because they are racist, etc.	defend myself.  People sometimes
Nobody listens to me unless I am insulting.	If I didn't do it, they would have insulted me.	To punish someone for not doing what I wanted.	Some people think it's not okay to be gay.	call me those names, so now it's my turn.
When I'm angry with someone, I insult him or her.	Just to make others laugh.	To be mean.	To put down girls because of the way they look.	He didn't want to play with me, so I got even.
	So others wouldn't make fun of me.	To tease someone.  To hurt someone.	To make fun of boys who don't like sports.	
		To show who's strongest.		
		To gain the respect of others.		

# Safe places and risky places for insults and agression



Places in the school, around the school and on my way to school	I feel safe	I don't feel safe	Sometimes safe / Sometimes not so safe

# Making places safer

# +OLDER kids

	ACTIONS TO TAKE				
Risky places	Teachers	Principal / Administration	Other adults who work in the school	Students who are the victims of homophobic or racist words or actions, etc.	Students who witness another student being a victim of homophobic or racist insults, etc. or intimidation

# Words that hurt (long version)



 $(This\ activity\ has\ been\ adapted\ from\ ``Challenging\ Homophobia\ in\ Schools,"\ produced\ by\ the\ Pride\ Education\ Network.)$ 

Type of person	Labels or insults used	How would I feel if someone called me that?
Short		
Fat		
English is a second language		
Wears glasses		
Girl / woman		
Good student		
Native American		
Person with AIDS		

Type of person (cont'd)	Labels or insults used (cont'd)	How would I feel if someone called me that? (cont'd)
Person with learning difficulties		
Underprivileged		
Special needs		
Homeless		
Old		
5-year-old child		
Adolescent		
Person with particular physical characteristics		
Person of colour Asian, Indo-Canadian, black, etc.)		
Lesbian		
Boy/man		

# RESPECTING...

# loving relationships between people of the same gender



### ACTIVITY

Activity on stereotyping for children of 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle elementary.

### WHY?

For this activity, all loving relationships are presented as deserving respect, including those between persons of the same gender. The most common stereotypes and prejudices regarding homosexuality and gay and lesbian parenting are examined and deconstructed.

### WHO?

This activity is intended for children from 10 to 12 years of age. Depending on their age, it could be more or less complex and the pedagogical objectives may vary. It can be tied in with the competencies of the Québec Education Program of the Ministry of Education of Québec (see below). The activity can also be used in the context of the program "Ethics and religious culture: living together in today's Québec."

### WHERE?

In the grade 5 or 6 (3<sup>rd</sup> cycle) elementary classroom, a school or community library, or a community centre.

### WHAT?

Depending on your group's needs and circumstances:

- 1 Information: The object of this activity is to help children understand loving relationships between persons of the same sex and to deconstruct the most common stereotypes and prejudices with regard to homosexuality.
- 2 Awareness: Students learn to respect homosexuals and that loving relationships between persons of the same sex have the same value and significance as those between a man and a woman.
- 3 Intervention: A large number of students, including those with gay and lesbian relatives (parents, but also possibly an uncle or a cousin), are victims of homophobia and stereotyping. This activity requires students to reflect on the stereotyping associated with homosexuality and to deconstruct certain prejudices. It is intended to teach children to respect all loving relationships.

### WHEN?

We recommend talking about same-sex relationships in the context of all other forms of loving relationships. Stereotypes and prejudices can be the focus of discussion at any point in the year in response to a situation that arises in school. The subject can also be introduced during St. Valentine's Day activities, or at any other time when prejudice and stereotyping are discussed. This activity is also suitable whenever questions of peer relations, diversity or simply human relations in the school are at issue.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD\***

### Stage 1: Observation of the reality

The first thing to point out is that loving relationships occur not only between persons of the opposite sex but also of the same sex. Many people have negative prejudices against gays and lesbians which have no basis in reality. The exercise seeks to **make children aware** of the prejudices that exist against homosexuals and to **deconstruct** the myths associated with them.

### Stage 2: Analysis of the reality

Analysis involves identifying a phenomenon (in this case, loving relationships between persons of the same sex) and deconstructing its essential elements in order to understand and explain it. When we analyse, it is necessary to be able to separate prejudice from reality. To do that, the adult must awaken the child's natural curiosity.

The discussion suggested explores a current and relevant social issue of importance to children from 10 to 12 (loving relationships between persons of the same sex) in a manner appropriate to their age. It examines common misconceptions and stereotypes. The discussion should take place in a climate of learning and respect. In the event of any inappropriate comments, it is important to intervene and point out how hurtful homophobic comments based on prejudices can be not only for homosexuals but for everyone who believes in respecting others, whatever their race, religion or appearance.

### Stage 3: Transformation of the reality

To transform the reality, we have to **reflect on the ideas and stereotypes we embrace, sometimes unconsciously.** Children are encouraged to be more open and respectful to loving relations between persons of the same sex. The use of posters created by the children is intended to reinforce and solidify the notion of respect for others, whether they are the same as us or different.

# Activité

At the conclusion of the activity, the group can devise a formal commitment to appropriate attitudes and remarks regarding homosexuality and homosexuals that each child agrees to respect.

**GRIS-Montréal** is a non-profit community organisation that conducts interactive demystification activities on homosexuality for students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle elementary and secondary levels by organising meetings in the schools with volunteers. The GRIS volunteers are homosexuals who are often themselves parents.

In devising their method for elementary students, GRIS-Montréal learnt from their experience in the field that their interventions were significantly more effective when there was a reflection by the children with their teacher prior to their visit. For that reason, they strongly recommend that teachers whose classes they are to meet conduct such an exercise with their students in order to maximise the impact of the demystification.

This learning activity can also take place without the visit from GRIS-Montréal volunteers.

NOTES

## **MATERIALS**

- Coloured cardboard and string to decorate the classroom with hearts.
- Per group: materials to create a poster against homophobia (paper and poster board of suitable sizes, coloured markers, glue, scissors, paints, etc.).

## **PROCEDURE**

### 1. Symbolic decoration

The teacher decorates the classroom with coloured cardboard hearts, which symbolise the different kinds of loving relationships between people.

The teacher writes the names of two people on each heart ensuring that there are an equal number of hearts with the names of a man and a woman, two men and two women. Ideally, the names of actual students in the class should be avoided.

### 2. Discussion

Students are invited to observe the decoration of the classroom and share their impressions.

The teacher explains the purpose of the discussion: to discuss different types of loving relationships and to learn to respect both homosexuals and heterosexuals.

The teacher should ensure, either before or during the discussion, that students clearly understand the meanings of the terms used: loving relationship, homosexual, gay, lesbian, heterosexual.

### 3. Questions

To guide the discussion, the teacher should ask the students if they know anyone who is in love with someone of the same sex. She leads a discussion with the following questions:

- What is the difference between being in love, being attracted by someone, and being friends with someone?
- Is it possible for a girl to be in love with another girl?
- Is it possible for a boy to be in love with another boy?
- Is it possible to feel attraction for both a boy and a girl?
- · What are those people called?

### 4. Explanations

The teacher writes the names of the three possible sexual orientations on the board (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual) and provides the appropriate definitions (SEE THE TABLE OF DEFINITIONS AND ORIGINS). She points out that this diversity of sexual orientations is perfectly normal and stresses that all people, whether heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual, experience the same loving feelings.

The teacher defines prejudice, stereotype and myths with respect to individuals or groups. Then she deconstructs the most common prejudices and stereotypes with regard to homosexuality referring to the **TABLE "MYTHS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY."** 

### Some examples of prejudices:

- · Homosexuality is abnormal;
- · Homosexuality is a disease;
- · Gay men are effeminate;
- · Gay men are not good at sports;
- · Lesbian women act like boys, they are masculine;
- · Homosexuality is a choice;
- · Homosexuals cannot be good parents.

The teacher helps the children to understand how prejudices hurt gay, lesbian and bisexual people, as well as their children and all others, big or small, who have homosexual friends or family. Eventually, the children will run into homosexuals or people with homosexual friends or relatives (in school, on their sports teams, at work, etc.). Love between two people, no matter who, should be respected and celebrated, just as we celebrate the love between people of opposite sex (for example, on St. Valentine's Day).

### 5. Work in teams: How to react to prejudice

The teacher divides the class into groups of four or five students. She asks the students to answer the two questions below to identify two prejudices against gays or lesbians and to find arguments to counter those prejudices.

- How could you respond to people with those prejudices?
- The teacher asks each team to describe its arguments with the rest of the class in a sharing of responses.

Using the arguments the class has found, each team creates a **poster** with a message to combat homophobic prejudices in the school. The posters can then be exhibited during a theme day to combat intimidation, violence or, more specifically, homophobia in the school.

# CONCLUSION

The adult points out the harmful effects of prejudices on homosexuals, their families and their friends. The students' attitudes of openness and respect are reinforced.

NOTES

# Links with the **Québec Education Program**

By adapting the activity to the age of the children, it is possible to tie it in with the Québec Education Program (www.mels.gouv.qc.ca).



# BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

The activity "Respecting loving relationships" and the complementary activities to prevent insults are consistent with the broad areas of learning for elementary instruction:

When a child is placed in a situation of solving problems with his peers, he is putting into action an important dimension of his education. The playground and other places where he relates with his peers are, effectively, locations that provide the opportunity to contribute to a climate of peace and justice. From such activities he improves his capacity to exercise critical judgement and to cooperate with others.

The broad areas of learning relating to this activity are:

- 1 Health and well-being: learning to cultivate a healthy lifestyle;
- **2 Personal and career planning:** self-knowledge and awareness of his/her potential and how to fulfil it;
- **3 Citizenship and community life:** learning how to play an active role within a group in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity.

# AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL (2<sup>ND</sup> AND 3<sup>RD</sup> CYCLE)

The suggested activity "Respecting loving relationships," as well as class discussions, can be incorporated into the subjects being taught: English, citizenship education, arts, ethics and religious culture. Also, a number of the nine cross-curricular competencies of the Education Program are touched on by these activities.

### • Intellectual competencies

The child learns to solve problems (*competency 2*) and to exercise critical judgement (*competency 3*) to recognise prejudice and stereotypes with regard to gay and lesbian people. The child employs his / her critical thinking (*competency 4*) to plan strategies to promote respect (creation of posters).

### Methodological competencies

Working with a team to create a poster requires the child to adopt effective work methods (*competency 5*) to achieve the assigned task.

## Personal and social competencies

Constructing his/her identity (*competency 7*) involves, in particular, learning to accept differences and to be open to diversity. These activities are ideally suited to that objective.

The activity also requires the child to cooperate (*competency 8*) in a team structure and to communicate ideas and questions. Affirmation of the self while respecting others, constructive openness to diversity and non-violence—all in all, what is being acquired here is how to live harmoniously with others and be open to the entire world.

### Communication-related competency

This learning activity requires the student to prepare and transmit a message to the entire group through an artistic creation. Discussion, listening to others, and the formulation of questions will lead the child to a greater mastery of socially appropriate communication (*competency 9*). The theme of respect helps to anchor the concept in the daily reality of the child.

# Myths, prejudices and stereotypes relating to homosexuality

+OLDER kids

# HOMOSEXUALITY IS CAUSED BY A DISLIKE OR REJECTION OF THE OPPOSITE SEX

Some people wrongly believe that people develop a homosexual orientation because they had an unsatisfactory relationship with a person of the opposite sex. Some people also think that a woman becomes a lesbian because she can't find a man to love her and a man becomes gay because he can't find a woman. Such beliefs are false, and spreading them around serves to perpetuate these myths.

Others associate homosexuality with traumatic experiences such as incest, rape or other forms of sexual abuse. However, most women who are the victims of sexual assault by men do not become homosexual.

Similarly, sexual orientation has nothing to do with dissatisfaction with conjugal relationships. Lesbianism is not a form of man-hating, just as male homosexuals do not hate women.

Homosexuality, like heterosexuality, arises from desire, not abuse or dissatisfaction. Homosexuality consists of emotional and physical attraction to a person of the same sex.

## **HOMOSEXUALITY IS GENETIC**

A study conducted in the 1990s proposed the hypothesis of a gene that predisposes to homosexuality. Since then, other studies have been carried out, but none have definitively confirmed that theory. Research into the causes of homosexuality began at the end of the 19th C., and since then, over 13,000 studies have been produced on the subject. Examining, at various times, the brain, hormones, chromosomes, the inner ear, parental models, an absent father, an overprotective mother, sexual roles, education, etc., no study has been able to draw conclusions that are generalisable and scientifically valid for all homosexuals (Dorais, 1994). After a century of research, science has not found a cause of homosexuality and has shown little interest in the causes of heterosexuality and bisexuality. Perhaps love is ultimately an inscrutable phenomenon.

## **HOMOSEXUALS ARE PEDOPHILES**

This myth persists even though the vast majority of available studies indicate that homosexual men are no more likely to be abusers than heterosexual men.

# GAY MEN ARE MORE EFFEMINATE AND LESBIANS ARE MORE MASCULINE

Many people have a tendency to associate male homosexuality with femininity and lesbianism with masculinity. These are stereotypes. Based on numerous studies, we now know that this is not necessarily the case. On the contrary, there are no physical, psychological, behavioural, or clothing-style characteristics to distinguish homosexuals from heterosexuals. If some young gay men display so-called feminine characteristics, that may very well be a result of our western society's assigning certain images to homosexuals. In other words, a homosexual may have himself internalised the only model available and present himself through that model. It is always dangerous to generalise these stereotypes for all gays and lesbians, since most do not display any characteristics to distinguish them from anyone else. More and more, the stereotype of the effeminate gay male is disappearing with people who openly admit their homosexuality and who defy those images, such as gay firefighters, police or homosexual sports figures. Similarly, women with characteristics customarily considered feminine (e.g., long hair, make-up, feminine clothing, etc.) are also coming out and dispelling the stereotype of the masculine lesbian.

### **HOMOSEXUALS CANNOT BE GOOD PARENTS**

The sexual orientation of a parent is no guarantee of parenting ability. Numerous studies looking at homosexual parents have revealed no difference from heterosexual parents in parenting skills and abilities. Since June 2002 with the adoption of the *Act instituting Civil Unions*, same-sex couples in Québec have been able to adopt children. Also, a female couple wishing to become parents can conceive a child through insemination. Such children legally have two mothers or two fathers and are entitled to the same rights as any other child in Québec.

The non-biological parent can contribute as much as the biological parent to the care and education of the child and assume a portion of the costs for support of the child and the family. He/She represents a parental figure and a model for the child often quite different from that of the biological parent. The distinctiveness of the couple and the parental models are not solely a matter of biological gender. The fact that they share a biological gender does not necessarily mean that the parents will adopt the same role, have the same skills and abilities, and have the same personality or the same relationship with the child. In that sense, two parents of the same sex can provide the child with two different models of adults who are loving, feeling and responsible.

Continued on following page

# Myths, prejudices and stereotypes relating to homosexuality (cont'd)

## CHILDREN OF HOMOSEXUAL PARENTS WILL BECOME HOMOSEXUAL WHEN THEY GROW UP

Children with homosexual parents are no more likely to turn out gay than children with heterosexual parents. It is a myth that sexual orientation is transmitted through heredity or that the homosexuality of a parent is acquired by a child through imitation of the parents. In fact, the vast majority of homosexuals have heterosexual parents, and the majority of homosexual parents have heterosexual children.

## HOMOSEXUALITY IS A SYNONYM FOR MISERY AND **LONELINESS**

No sexual orientation assures either happiness or unhappiness. While it is true that some gays and lesbians (especially adolescents and young adults) are inclined to feel isolation, distress or suicidal thoughts, it isn't their sexual orientation that is the cause, but, rather, the judgement, real or anticipated, of friends, family and society in general of their sexual orientation and the lack of support in confronting homophobia.

Research indicates, as well, that men and women who successfully integrate their homosexuality are as happy as anyone else. Also, samesex couples demonstrate the same level of satisfaction with their conjugal lives as heterosexual couples (Roisman et al., 2008; Balsam et al., 2008). In fact, the struggle for same-sex marriage in Canada was an indication of how important it was to legalise such relationships.

More and more public personalities in various fields of activity are coming out with their homosexuality, whether ministers, pop stars, hockey players, businessmen, writers, etc. In so doing, they communicate a vital message that it is possible to be homosexual and, at the same time, participate in society to the full extent of one's aspirations and abilities.

NOTES
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# RESPONDING...

# simply to questions from children in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles of elementary school



Nowadays, children hear about gay and lesbian people at younger ages than in past years. Lesbian and gay people are mentioned more frequently in the newspapers, on the radio and on TV. Some children have parents or other family members who are gay and lesbian.

Children also commonly hear the word gay used as an insult. When children's questions go unanswered or when homophobic insults go unchallenged by adults who are present, they presume that homosexuality is bad and that it is fair game to make fun of it or to use it as an insult.

# Teachers and educators can prepare themselves to answer students' questions in ways that are both honest and age-appropriate.

People working with children sometimes find it is difficult to answer their questions simply because they have not had time to think about a simple and natural response. Many professionals don't have much experience talking about gay and lesbian topics. Not very long ago, the words *gay* and *lesbian* weren't spoken or, if they were, they were used pejoratively or furtively.

This section is intended to help those working with children in schools to reflect on how to answer students' questions so that they feel better prepared and more comfortable when the situation occurs. Certain of these questions will arise in some schools but not in others. These are questions that students have asked and teachers have responded to in the past.

It is important for teachers and educators, to be able to identify the essence of each child's question and to be able to respond in an age-appropriate, clear and respectful manner.

We have assembled a number of the questions asked by children from 9 to 12 years of age. We suggest a variety of answers which should be adapted to your own personality and the nature of your group. You can also check a student's understanding by asking, "Does that answer your question?"

Some of the possible answers are longer than those you will provide, while others provide different ways of answering the same question.

Some students will use slang or unacceptable language in asking a question since they do not know the correct terms. Your answer should employ the more appropriate vocabulary. If they use slang or inappropriate language, you should be sure what the child means by it. Then you can indicate clearly to the entire group that, as with other subjects, certain words are acceptable and others are not when we talk about homosexuality. Humiliating language is hurtful and unacceptable.

Direct answers show respect for the honesty and curiosity of the child. Some children may have thought about discrimination in the context of, for example, the values of fairness, a personal experience of exclusion or humiliation, or positive relations with others. These can be recounted in the discussion to generate empathy and demonstrate problem resolution.

On occasion, you will not have an answer to a student's question. That's fine. You can answer, "I don't have an answer for that right now, but I'll find out and get back to you."

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Try not to appear offended by questions you find shocking. That will only reinforce the desire to embarrass you or the other students in the class. If the class gets into more of a discussion, beyond a question or two, you may acknowledge that this is a topic about which some people and families hold very different views or beliefs. The goal in your classroom is to create a safe and caring community for all students.

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# Questions

# **EXAMPLES OF CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS WITH SOME SUGGESTED ANSWERS**

# What does gay mean?

Being gay means that a person loves, in a very special way, someone who is the same gender. For example, a gay man wants to have a loving relationship with another man. A gay woman, or a lesbian, wants to have a loving relationship with another woman. A gay or homosexual person may want to have a special relationship with another person of the same sex, to live with that person, and to have a family with children.

Note: Answer simply. Focus on relationship and family. With older children, you can mention that they are "men who are attracted to and want to have a loving relationship with other men" or "women who are attracted to and want to have a loving relationship with other women."

## What is a lesbian?

The word "lesbian" describes a woman who is attracted by another woman and wants to have a loving relationship with a woman. You can also point out that a lesbian is a woman who is or wants to be in love with another woman in a very special way.

# How can a person know if he / she is gay? How old are you when you become gay?

Some people become aware they are gay as adolescents or young adults, while for some others it is much later. Being gay is a feeling that is deep inside you.

Note: Gays or lesbians often say they became aware of their difference much earlier, but didn't associate that feeling or difference with being gay until adolescence or later.

# Are people gay or lesbian from the time they are born?

We don't know for sure. Science has not come to any agreement on the reason some people are gay or lesbian. However, most scientists believe that sexual orientation is at least partially something you are born with.

Note: According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "Sexual orientation is probably not determined by any one factor but by a combination of genetic, hormonal, and environmental influences. For the last several decades, specialists have been inclined to favour theories based on biology."

# Is it something people choose?

No, it is not a choice. People do not choose to be gay or not. As they grow up, people realise that they are attracted to other people, whether of the same sex, the opposite sex, or both.

Note: According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "Sexual orientation is generally determined in early childhood."

# If I know someone who is gay or if I'm friends with a gay person, does that mean I'm gay?

No, having a gay friend or acquaintance doesn't make you gay. Being gay is something that is deep down inside you. Gay people know a lot of people who aren't gay, but that doesn't change who they are.

# Can animals be gay?

Yes, it's possible. Among the hundreds of different species of animals on earth, some are attracted to others of the same sex, from rams to penguins, not to mention macaques.

# Can a doctor make someone a heterosexual?

No, it is impossible to change a person, whether gay or heterosexual. Those feelings are deeply rooted.

Note: According to the president of the American Academy of Paediatrics, "There is no scientific proof that conversion or correction therapy is effective in modifying a person's sexual orientation. (...) On the contrary, there is evidence that such therapy can be destructive."

# Why do children always use the word gay to put someone down?

A lot of children use the word *gay* this way because that is the only way they have ever heard it used. Often, they don't know exactly what it means, but they want to hurt someone by using it. They think they can get to other children by using it. It is not acceptable to use the words *gay* and *lesbian* as insults. It hurts everybody.

# What do the words queer and faggot mean?

The words *queer* and *faggot* are slang words that mean gay. They are usually intended as insults and are not acceptable. They are hurtful.

# What should I do if my religion says it's bad to be gay?

All faiths are different. Even within a single religion, different people believe different things about homosexuality. Nevertheless, they all believe that we should treat others with respect. Here in school, we try to respect everyone's faith. However, we also have to remember that every person also has the right to be respected as an individual. So sometimes, while respecting a belief of our own tradition, we have to try to respect others who believe something different. This might be a good subject to discuss with your family or with someone you trust who shares your religion. There are gays and lesbians of all faiths all around the world. There are a number of religious communities that welcome gays and lesbians.

# My grandmother says it's bad to have two moms.

Many people have different ideas about families. Your grandmother isn't the only one who thinks that way. There are many different kinds of families. Some have a mom and a dad, some have two moms and some have two dads, while others have only a mom. In this school, we respect all families that love each other and care for their children. Taking care of children is the important thing in a family, not how the family is made up.

# Do gays act like girls? Do lesbians act like boys?

Some gay men and some heterosexual men seem more feminine, and some lesbians and some heterosexual women seem more masculine. At the same time, some gay men are very masculine and some lesbians are very feminine in the way they dress and in what they like. It is impossible to say if a person is gay from appearance, clothing, tastes or behaviour. There are gay football players, firefighters and police, while there are lesbian ballerinas, princesses and singers.

# If a girl plays sports or a boy likes to play with dolls, does that mean they're gay?

No. Some girls are very active and love sports and competition. Some boys like to play with dolls and don't like sports. It isn't what we like to do that determines whether we are homosexual.

# Can you tell if someone is gay or lesbian just by how they look?

No, that isn't possible. Most gays and lesbians cannot be identified by their physical appearance or their clothes. Being gay or lesbian doesn't mean you are any particular kind of person. There are gays and lesbians of all ages, of all sizes and shapes, of all cultures, of all races, religions, and nationalities, just like everyone else. They have all kinds of jobs and live everywhere in the world.

# Do gays and lesbians have children?

Yes, many gays and lesbians have children. They form homoparental families, with two moms or two dads. Sometimes kids can have just one gay or lesbian parent.

# Don't you have to have a man and a woman to have a baby?

Children come to families in different ways: sometimes by birth, sometimes by adoption. Children are raised in many different ways. Some children have a mom and a dad, others only have a mom or a dad, and some have two moms or two dads. What's important is to have one or two parents who love you and take care of you.

Note: If one of your students has two moms or two dads, or one homosexual parent, it can be useful to know how his or her parents talk about their family. That will help you answer questions from other students.

## How can two men have children?

Sometimes two men can bring a child into their family through adoption. Sometimes two men will raise children together because one of the men was married to a woman before and had children with her. Sometimes gay men make a family with a woman.

# How can a kid have two dads?

Families are made up in many different ways. Some children live in a family where there are two dads. Two men can adopt a child together and so the child will have two dads. A man might have had a child when he was in a relationship with a woman and later on fell in love with a man. In these kinds of families, the dads are the ones who make a home for the children, take care of them and love them.

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# How can two women have a baby? Don't you need a man to have a baby?

Children can come into a two-mom family through either birth or adoption, just like with other families. One of the two moms may have carried the baby in her belly. She was pregnant. If this is how the baby came into the family then probably a man gave the woman his "seed" so that she could become pregnant.

# How can a family have two moms? Which one is the real mom?

Both of them are. The two moms care for their children and love them. There are all kinds of families. Some have two moms, some have two dads, others have a mom or a dad, still others have a mom and a dad. In some families, the adults are grandparents, other relatives or guardians.

# Why wouldn't a child have a dad? Wouldn't he miss not having a dad?

Because he has two moms instead. They are his parents, his family. Sometimes children want something they can't have but that other kids have. For example, a brother or a sister. Sometimes it's a dad he doesn't have, though others without a dad are perfectly happy without one. On the other hand, some kids with a mom and a dad say, "It's not fair that he (or she) has two moms. I want two moms too." Every child is different. What's important is that a child feel happy in his or her family and loved and respected by the parents, whether two moms, two dads, or a single parent.

# Will a person be gay because her two moms are gay (lesbian)?

No. Children grow up to become what they were born to be. Having gay or lesbian parents doesn't make a child gay or lesbian. Most gays and lesbians were raised by heterosexual parents

# If I play with someone who has two moms or two dads, will I become gay?

No. You will always be yourself, no matter whom you play with. Being gay or heterosexual is something that's inside you. It is impossible to add to that or take it away.

# Julie's mom and dad just got divorced, and now her dad is involved with a man. What's that all about?

When children's parents get divorced, sometimes their parents will get involved with other people. Sometimes that person is of the same gender. Maybe Julie's's dad knew that he was attracted to (or liked) men before. Maybe he didn't. The important thing is that no matter whom he gets involved with, he still loves Julie, and he is still her dad. When parents divorce, the adults usually work things out to be sure that children still see both of them. All new things take getting used to. What's most important is for everyone to have opportunities to create and maintain relationships that are healthy, caring and respectful of one another. Parents still love their children and want to include them in their life as much as possible.

# Can girls marry girls or can boys marry boys?

No, children aren't allowed to marry! Only grown-ups can get married. At the same time, adults can start a family in a lot of different ways. Many adults live together and take care of one another. Getting married is one way of doing that. In Canada, a woman can marry another woman and a man can marry another man. People who love each other can live together, care for one another, and be a family, with or without children and whether or not they are married.

# Why do gays and lesbians display flags and stickers with rainbows on them? What's the meaning of that?

The rainbow flag and the stickers show support for gays and lesbians. Anyone can use them to show support. The rainbow flag is also the symbol of gay and lesbian pride. It was designed to show the diversity of the gay and lesbian community. It consists of many colours. A lot of people use these symbols.

# What does the pink triangle mean?

The pink triangle is a symbol to show support for gays and lesbians.

Note: In the concentration camps during World War II, a reversed pink triangle was used to identify gay male prisoners. If you have studied or discussed the Holocaust at any level, it would be worthwhile to explain the origin of the pink triangle to introduce the idea of different sorts of intolerance and persecution.

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# REACTING...

# to children's homophobic words and actions

+OLDER kids





Every day we hear a multitude of hurtful names in and around our schools. These insults take many forms, and all are hurtful. Racial, ethnic, sexist and homophobic slurs hurt everyone. Hurtful teasing, name-calling and bullying affect the victims, the perpetrators and the bystanders.

Children who are victimized and students who exhibit bullying behaviour have lower academic achievement. Meanwhile bystanders lose self-esteem and empathy when they observe someone getting hurt and feel unable to stop it. Additionally they live under the fear that they might become the next victims of teasing and/ or bullying.

All children living in homoparental families live with this reality. For a child, the fear of homophobic insult takes on a very personal character when his or her parents are homosexual. However, they are not the only victims of homophobic insult.

A school that does not take a proactive stance to end violence will have a negative impact on all its students. If teachers and other

adults in authority do not act to confront insult and intolerance, students quickly learn that the expression of hate against an identifiable group or a person who is different is acceptable in our society and its institutions.

Yet educators and support staff often don't know how to react to children's insults, particularly when they take the form of homophobic language. Some adults are uncomfortable even broaching issues related to homosexuality.

Young people use the word gay as an insult, or use terms like "fag", "homo", "dyke", etc because they've learned how effective these words can be in attacking the self-esteem of others. In general, these insults are directed at anyone who looks or acts differently from group norms or gender stereotypes (for example, a boy who isn't sporty or a girl with short hair). When the children of lesbians and gays hear these remarks they have a particular resonance, as well. Therefore, all children are potential victims for this type of name-calling, and it's in everyone's interest to work for its elimination.

Homophobic slurs aren't always recognized as hurtful, and may even be considered to be a joke. Sometimes students will use an expression without even having any sense of its meaning. Educators can inform students that that the terms they are using or the way they are using them are insulting to gays and lesbians (or more simply put "men who love men" and "women who love women") and that language used in this way is always insulting.

Many schools have adopted practices to combat intimidation and violence. This guide and the student activities in this kit can serve as a complement to any practices already in place, since they place a

particular emphasis on family diversity, including homoparental families, and because they deal with the question of homophobia in the context of discussions about intimidation.

Your simplest efforts will make a difference. Through systematic intervention, you reaffirm the fundamental principle that intolerance has no place in the school or in the classroom. Teachers and educators are thus in a position to create a learning environment where diversity is recognised and seen as beneficial. In that way, all students will feel respected in their school environment, whatever their appearance, their interests, or the composition of their families.

# Action Strategies

### **EXAMPLES OF HOMOPHOBIC INSULTS**

Queer, faggot, homo, dyke, lesbo are just some of the homophobic insults you may hear. The words gay and lesbian, along with the expression "that's gay" are also used as insults.

Gender-based name-calling, where boys are said to be acting like girls, or vice versa, is another type of homophobic bullying that is linked to sexist views about how boys and girls "are supposed" to act.

### BE AWARE OF THE CONTEXT

- Deal with the situation in the context. It is important that all students, whatever their role (aggressor, victim, witness or accomplice) receive the same message that all students are safe and protected in the school and that homophobic remarks are unacceptable. Make sure that all the students in the area hear your comments.
- When you intervene, don't make the assumption that you are dealing with an isolated incident. It is possible that there have been other acts of intimidation directed at the same person. Occasionally, bystanders or witnesses will need to speak to you in private, to protect their own safety.

### **PUT A STOP TO IT**

Keep it simple with quick responses. Respond verbally to the immediate situation. Here are some examples of potential responses depending on the context and your role with respect to the children.

## PUT A STOP TO IT (cont'd)

To draw attention to the school's policy against verbal violence:

"Remember, we don't use hurtful language in this classroom/school."

"That word/expression is not acceptable."

# To indicate the unacceptability of homophobic remarks and insults:

"It is not acceptable to say 'It's gay to..'..."

"You may not have wanted to hurt, but when you use the word 'gay' to mean something bad or stupid, it hurts people."

## To initiate a more intensive discussion of homophobia:

"What did you mean to say by that?"

"Do you understand what 'gay' means?"

"Do you understand why what you just said is hurtful?"

PUT A STOP TO IT (cont'd)	NOTES	
<ul> <li>If you have the time and the opportunity to educate on the spot, do it. If you don't, make time later.</li> </ul>		
<ul> <li>Ensure that the spotlight is focused on the name-calling behaviour and not the victim. Do not imply that the victim is a member of that identifiable group.</li> </ul>		
<ul> <li>Personalise your response. Point out the impact of the behaviour on others.</li> </ul>		
"That is offensive to me and everyone else in this class."		
EDUCATE		
<ul> <li>If you have been hearing homophobic insults or the word gay to mean something stupid or bad, take the time in a class or group meeting to make sure your students understand what the word gay means and why it is hurtful to use it as an insult.</li> </ul>		
<ul> <li>Make it clear to students that when they use the word gay as an insult or when they use other homophobic insults, they are show- ing disrespect. Make it equally clear that using such insults is also hurtful to students who have parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles or other family members who are gay.</li> </ul>		
<ul> <li>Use the lessons and classroom activities in this kit to teach respect for differences and deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices about homosexuality. Draw analogies between homophobic insults and other forms of harassment based on race, religion, ethnicity, ability, gender, age, economic status, size, etc.</li> </ul>	BE PROACTIVE	
NOTES	Create an environment of respect and caring toward all the students in your class and in the school.	
	Establish clear policies in the school and in the classroon forbidding insults, teasing, or hurtful remarks.	
	<ul> <li>If you have been hearing homophobic comments in the classroom or elsewhere in the school, let students know that the school's rules prohibit name-calling and include that particular phrase o anti-gay put-down.</li> </ul>	
	DON'T IGNORE IT	
	<ul> <li>Ignoring homophobic insult and hurtful remarks means that the situation will persist and, possibly, grow even more serious. I other students see that there is no reaction, they will conclude tha there is nothing wrong with using such language and that talking that way will be tolerated.</li> </ul>	
	<ul> <li>Verbal and physical violence will not stop on their own. Adequate intervention on the part of adults in authority is essential to elimin ate the phenomenon.</li> </ul>	

### DON'T BE AFRAID OF MAKING THE SITUATION WORSE

- Almost any response is preferable to silence or inaction on the part of the adult. Even though you may not be sure exactly what to say, you should always intervene in incidents of violence between children.
- Action establishes limits for children. Putting a stop to verbal aggression is not always easy. With experience, you will feel more comfortable handling these situations.
- A mistake is far less harmful than doing nothing at all. You can always go back to the student and say or do something else if you feel you did not respond well.

### DON'T BE AFRAID OF BECOMING THE VICTIM

When teachers and educators defend lesbians and gays or homoparental families, certain colleagues, students or parents may display suspicion of their motives, even to the extent of "accusing" them of being gay or lesbian. This is not an uncommon fear.

If you should hear of any such suspicions or accusations, the following are possible responses, depending on your particular situation.

"You don't have to be Black, First Nations or Asian to know that racial slurs hurt people. And you don't have to be gay or lesbian to know that homophobic slurs hurt people too."

"My job as an educator / teacher is to make sure the school provides a safe and respectful environment for all my students."

"My personal life is not at issue here (and is really none of your business)."

## DON'T EXCUSE THE BEHAVIOUR AND DON'T UNDER-ESTIMATE ITS IMPACT

- Saying things like "Justin just doesn't know what he's saying" or "Sophie was just kidding" excuses the hurtful behaviour. Children who use homophobic remarks or insults to hurt other children should be made to understand the consequences of their actions.
- It is hard to know how a victim really feels. Victims are often shy, sometimes ashamed or fearful, and act as if they are not offended or hurt by these remarks. Saying that "Michael doesn't seem to be disturbed by Laura's remark" trivialises the victim's feelings. It sends the message to the child-aggressor, to witnesses and to accomplices that it is permissible to make hurtful remarks to another child with impunity. This teaches not only the victim but everyone else around that no one in the school is safe from violence.

### LOOK TO THE FUTURE

 Insist that the child-aggressor change behaviour and ask him how he will take responsibility for his actions.

"In this school, we don't harass people. How do you plan to make ammends?"

- Ensure that the child-aggressor suffers the consequences of his remarks.
- · Encourage the victims to have confidence in you.

"If that continues, please let me know, and I will take further measures. We want everyone to feel safe in this school."

### **OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS**

- Remember to deal consistently with homophobic remarks and don't give up.
- Record what happened, where, why when, who was involved, how
  many times it has happened, how long it has been going on and
  who were the bystanders. The incident may be one amongst many
  others in which a child is being consistently victimized by another
  child or group of children. Specific actions may be needed to stem
  the violence.
- If the problem persists or you feel you're in over your head, notify
  the school administrator who may need to follow up with changes
  to the code of conduct, a strategy for the entire school to combat
  homophobic insult, educational programs for parents and the community, or intervention plans developed on a case by case basis.
- · Seek out the support of the administration and your colleagues.
- Encourage all the children to report any homophobic gestures (actions, comments, insults) against them or others to an adult in authority.

Name-calling" by the Pride Education Network)
NOTES

# Definitions and origins

+OLDER kids

(Taken from the activity for the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of elementary prepared by GRIS)

# Terms to be defined at the beginning of the intervention:

# **HOMOSEXUAL OR GAY**

A man who is attracted to other men and, when he falls in love, is in love with a man.

# **HOMOSEXUAL, GAY OR LESBIAN**

A woman who is attracted to other women and who, when she falls in love, is in love with a woman.

## **BISEXUAL**

A person (man or woman) who is attracted to both men and women.

## **HOMOPHOBIA**

A fear of homosexuality and, in practice, insulting, mistreating, or discriminating against people just because they are homosexual or because they are thought to be homosexual.

# **HOMOPARENTAL**

When a family has one or two parents who are homosexual, the family is described as a homoparental family.

## **HETEROSEXUAL**

A woman who is attracted to men and who, when she falls in love, is in love with a man. Or a man who is attracted to women and who, when he falls in love, is in love with a woman.

# The Origin of Some Common Insults:

## THE HISTORY OF "FAG" OR "FAGGOT"

The word "faggot" has been a part of the English language since the 1300s. During the European Inquisitions, "faggot" referred to the sticks used to set fires for burning heretics, or people who opposed the teachings of the Catholic Church. Eventually people began to use the word "faggot" to refer to anything that was considered to be a burden or difficult to bear.

The word "faggot" appeared in the North America during the early 20th century to abuse gay men and men perceived to be gay. Since many people are biased against homosexuals, being called "faggot" is the biggest fear of many heterosexual men, and thus the easiest way to hurt them. Considering the long and violent history of the word, it's important for people to understand its meaning before they use it carelessly.

# THE HISTORY OF "DYKE"

There are a number of theories about the origins of the word "dyke" as an anti-lesbian slur. One theory suggests that "dyke" came from the word "hermaphrodite," which used to be a very common term describing people born with ambiguous sex characteristics. "Hermaphrodite" comes from the Greek *hermaphroditos*, and entered the English language in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. When the word "hermaphrodite" was more commonly used, popular variations such as "morphodite" and "morphodike" sprang up. Some people believe that "dyke" came from "morphodike" and was used to reinforce the stereotype that all lesbians look and act like men.

No matter which theory is the most accurate, all point to the word "dyke" having its roots in beliefs about how women are supposed to look and act. Women who've refused to conform to society's expectations of them often have been labeled as "dykes," whether or not they've identified as lesbians.

### **NOTES**

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\* Origin: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.