



COMBATING HOMOPHOBIA

For older kids:
**Learning respect
for diversity**

This pamphlet is intended for those working with children in the 2nd and 3rd cycles of elementary school (8 to 12 years of age). It will help those involved with children of that age to promote respect for family diversity and prevent homophobia in the school. The suggested activities deal with subjects such as hurtful language, prejudices, stereotypes, diversity and respect.

Why?

Tens of thousands of Québec children are living with homosexual parents¹. 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... what lies behind the words.

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 2nd and 3rd 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 stakeholders, 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.gaiecoutte.org • aide@gaiecoutte.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

Éducation,
Loisir et Sport
Québec

 Coalition des familles
homoparentales
LGBT Family Coalition

UNDERSTANDING...

what lies behind the words

Resource guide for
+ OLDER kids

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

ACTIVITY

An activity on children's homophobic insults for the 2nd and 3rd cycles of elementary school.

WHY?

This classroom activity shows children how all kinds of insults based on appearance, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. are similar. More specifically, the activity is intended to make children aware of the hurtful effect of homophobic insults (such as *faggot*, *homo*, *queer* and, when used pejoratively, the word *gay*), the reasons people use them, and the best ways to respond to them.

Supplementary activities will give students the opportunity to consider the places where intimidation occurs and how they can be transformed into more secure environments.

NOTES

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 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 an elementary classroom from grades 3 to 6 (2nd and 3rd cycle), in a school or neighbourhood library, or in a community organisation.

WHAT?

Depending on your group's needs and circumstances:

- 1 Information:** The object of this activity is to help students understand the hurtful effects of insulting language and the reasons people use such language.
- 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.

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. 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.

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.

NOTES

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 (2ND AND 3RD 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 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 hurtful language helps to anchor the concept in the daily reality of the child.

Words that hurt

Resource guide for
+OLDER kids

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

Reasons people use homophobic insults

Resource guide for
+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 because they don't like gays, because they are racist, etc.	Everyone makes fun of me, so I defend myself.
Everyone does it.	I did it on a dare.	To always have the final say.		People sometimes call me those names, so now it's my turn.
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.	
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 make fun of boys who don't like sports.	
		To hurt someone.		
		To show who's strongest.		
		To gain the respect of others.		

Words that hurt

(long version)

Resource guide for
+OLDER kids

(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		

Continued on following page

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

Resource guide for
+ OLDER kids

ACTIVITY

Activity on stereotyping for children of 3rd 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 (3rd 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.

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 (2ND AND 3RD 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

Resource guide for
+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 over-protective 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

RESPONDING...

simply to questions from children in the 2nd and 3rd cycles of elementary school

Resource guide for
+ OLDER kids

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."

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.

NOTES

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 friends 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.

REACTING...

to children's homophobic words and actions

Resource guide for
+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 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?"

Definitions and origins

Resource guide for
+ OLDER kids

(Taken from the activity for the 3rd 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 14th 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

* Origin: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.