

Homophobic Bullying

Homophobic bullying is prejudiced behaviour against a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Comments like “that’s so gay” are used frequently, but they are hurtful to youth who are sexual and gender minorities. Homophobic slurs and anti-gay talk perpetuate negative stereotypes about sexual and gender minority people. They also keep everyone in specific “gender boxes” by reinforcing stereotypes of what it means to be male or female. Homophobia can become the language of bullying, language, which targets anyone who is perceived to be different.

70% of all Canadian students surveyed hear derogatory comments such as “that’s so gay” every day in school.

Who experiences homophobic bullying?

Homophobic bullying can affect anyone and may be targeted at people who:

- Self-identify as non-heterosexual.
- Are perceived to be non-heterosexual.
- Don’t conform to conventional gender norms or stereotypes.
- Have lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, trans-identified, two spirited and queer relationships (LGBTQ) family members, friends, or relatives.
- Have parents or caregivers of the same gender.
- Are teachers, parents, coaches and community members who identify as non-heterosexual.

Homophobic bullying may include:

- Mean-spirited name-calling about a person's sexual orientation.
- Obscene and/or sexualized gestures.
- Sexualized harassment, teasing, taunting, frothing, hazing, or threats.
- Spreading rumors or gossip about a person's sexual orientation.
- Unwanted disclosure of someone's sexual orientation.
- Physical aggression such as hitting, pushing, kicking, punching, choking and stalking.
- Isolating or excluding someone from their friends or peer group.
- Using texts, messaging and/or social networking sites like Facebook to intimidate, put down, spread rumors, gossip, make fun of, threaten, or exclude someone because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

If you find yourself the target of homophobic bullying, you may feel:

- Alone.
- Embarrassed or ashamed.
- Depressed and uncertain about yourself or your future.
- Angry - you want to turn the tables and become a bully yourself.
- Unsafe at school or in your community.
- Stressed - you often think about skipping school or activities to avoid the bullies.
- Isolated - and wanting to withdraw from social activities and hide away.

These are all normal and natural feelings. But remember: **you can always reach out for help.**

For more information, visit b-free.ca
Call the Bullying Helpline 1-888-456-2323 toll-free anytime.
Trained staff are available to help in more than 170 languages.

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Bullies who hide behind homophobic beliefs and attitudes are still bullies. Homophobic name-calling and gay bashing are bullying with a theme or motivation. In fact, law enforcement may consider homophobic bullying to be a hate incident - something that's against the law.

If you, or someone you know, is experiencing homophobic bullying:

- 1. Tell someone you trust** – Talk to a friend or trusted adult who respects your confidentiality. This may be a teacher, parent, relative, youth worker, police officer, counsellor, coach or faith leader. Remember, you don't have to suffer in silence. Keep telling until someone helps you. No one deserves to be bullied.
- 2. Know your rights** – Check out your school's bullying prevention guidelines, anti-harassment policies, or student code of conduct. Your school is responsible for protecting you from bullying, discrimination and abuse. You have the right to be respected and feel safe at your school and in your community, regardless of your actual or perceived sexual orientation.
- 3. Stay safe** – Don't fight back. Bullies want attention and fighting back gives them what they want. If you fight back, you may get hurt or make the situation worse. If you are a bystander or witness, become an ally. Go for help and provide moral and emotional support to the person being bullied.
- 4. Write down everything** – Keep a record about the incident, including the date, time, location and what was said or done. If you are being bullied online or in a text, don't delete the message. You don't have to read it, but keep it. It's your evidence. The police, your parents/guardians, or school authorities can use this information to help protect you from further abuse.

Almost half of sexual minority students, surveyed in a recent Canadian survey, are verbally harassed about their sexual orientation.

- 5. Remain calm** – You do not have to reveal your actual sexual orientation to seek help. Unless you are at risk for self-harm, your teacher or school counsellor does not have to tell your family or caregiver that you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ). Remember, you don't have to deal with bullying on your own. Caring and trusted adults are available to help and support you.
- 6. Find support in your community** – Check to see if there is a local LGBTQ youth group where you can meet like-minded youth. Consider enrolling in a school that has a gay-straight alliance or diversity club. Often these schools will be welcoming spaces for sexual and gender minority, questioning and allied youth.

Help Break the Silence: Take a Stand Against Homophobia!

Homophobic language is the most commonly heard form of verbal bullying in schools, yet it is the least responded to by adults and youth. If homophobic bullying is not responded to appropriately, it reinforces to everyone affected that it is okay to discriminate. These behaviours and words can have devastating results for everyone involved. By speaking out or intervening in homophobic bullying you send a message: you don't tolerate homophobia or homophobic bullying in our society.

More than 1 in 5 surveyed Canadian, sexual and gender minority students are physically harassed because of their sexual orientation.

Join us. Stand up, speak out, and B-Free from bullying!

All statistical information provided in this fact sheet can be obtained in the 2011 "Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final Report." This report was funded by Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

Rivers, I. (2011). *Homophobic bullying: Research and theoretical perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). (2010). *Questions & answers: Sexual orientation in schools*. Retrieved from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>.

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