

# REACTING...

## to children's LGBTphobic 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. Racist, xenophobic, sexist, transphobic and homophobic slurs hurt everyone. Hurtful teasing, name-calling and bullying affect those who are victims, those who do the bullying and bystanders.

Children who are victimized and students who exhibit bullying behavior have lower academic achievement. Meanwhile bystanders lose self-esteem and empathy when they observe someone getting hurt physically or psychologically 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 and transparental families live with this reality. For a child, the fear of LGBTphobic insults takes on a very personal character when they have one or more parents who are LGBT+. However, they are not the only victims of LGBTphobic insults.

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

other adults in authority do not act to confront insults and intolerance, students quickly learn that the expression of hate against an identifiable group or a person who is different from the norm 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 LGBTphobic language. Some adults are uncomfortable even broaching issues related to the plurality of genders, sexual orientations and relationship types.

Young people use the word "gay" as an insult, or use terms like "fag", "homo", "lesbo", "shemale", "tranny", 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. Children who don't conform to gender norms (for example, a boy who isn't sporty, a girl with short hair or a trans child) are particularly targeted. When the children of LGBT+ parents hear these remarks they have a particular resonance, as well. Therefore, all children are potential victims for LGBTphobia, and it's in everyone's interest to work for its elimination.

LGBTphobic 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. They can explain that there is no such thing as "girl character traits" or "boy character traits", there are only human character traits. And that everyone has the right to choose their own traits. They can then add, according to the context, that everyone has the right to love who they want to love, to dress how they want to dress and to identify in a way that is right for them.

Many schools have adopted practices to combat intimidation and various forms of violence. This guide and the student activities on

the website [www.famillesLGBT.org/tools](http://www.famillesLGBT.org/tools) can serve as a complement to any practices already in place, since they place a particular emphasis on family diversity, including LGBT+ families, and because they deal with the question of LGBTphobia in the context of discussions about bullying.

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 identity, their interests, or the composition of their families.

# Action Strategies

## EXAMPLES OF LGBTPHOBIC INSULTS

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

"Shemale" and "tranny" are transphobic insults you may hear. The word "transvestite" (except when it's used properly), as well as expressions like "you're not a real boy/girl" and "tomboy/sissy girl" can also be used as insults.

Gender-based name-calling, where boys are said to be acting like girls, or vice versa, is another type of bullying based on sexist, binary and stereotyped norms connected to 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 LGBTphobic 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 LGBTphobic 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 and transphobia:***

*"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)**

- If you have the time and the opportunity to educate on the spot, do it. If you don't, make time later.
- Ensure that the spotlight is focused on the name-calling behavior and not the victim. Do not imply that the victim is a member of that marginalized group.
- Personalise your response. Point out the impact of the behavior on others.

*“That is offensive to me and everyone else in this class.”*

**EDUCATE**

- If you have been hearing LGBTphobic insults or, for example, 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.
- Make it clear to students that when they use the word ‘gay’ as an insult or when they use other LGBTphobic insults, they are showing disrespect. Make it equally clear that using such insults is also hurtful to students who have parents, siblings, or other family members who are LGBT+.
- Use the lessons and classroom activities on the website of the LGBT+ Family Coalition ([www.famillesLGBT.org/tools](http://www.famillesLGBT.org/tools)) to teach respect for differences and deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices about LGBT+ people. Draw analogies between LGBTphobic insults and other forms of harassment based on skin colour, religion, country of origin, ability, gender, age, economic status, size, weight, etc.

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**BE PROACTIVE**

- 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 classroom that forbid insults, teasing, or hurtful remarks.
- If you have been hearing LGBTphobic comments in the classroom or elsewhere in the school, let students know that the school’s rules and code of conduct prohibit hurtful and disrespectful name-calling and include that particular phrase or anti-LGBT put-down.

**DON’T IGNORE IT**

- Ignoring LGBTphobic insults and hurtful remarks means that the situation will persist and, possibly, grow even more serious. If other students see that there is no reaction, they will conclude that there is nothing wrong with using such language and that talking that way will be tolerated.
- Verbal and physical violence will not stop on their own. Adequate intervention on the part of adults in authority is essential to eliminate the phenomenon.

