

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.

Definitions and origins

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(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.

Myths, prejudices and stereotypes relating to homosexuality

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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.

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