



# Homophobic Bullying

Homophobic bullying is defined as bullying behaviours that are motivated by prejudice against a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. You don't have to be a sexual minority to become a target. For example, while using comments like "that's so gay" may seem innocent, they still contribute to the development of a negative or hostile environment towards sexual minorities. They also serve as a way to keep people in their "gender boxes" by reinforcing stereotypes of what it means to be male or female. Too often homophobia becomes the language of bullying which targets anyone who is perceived as different or outside the "norm".

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

## Who experiences homophobic bullying?

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

- Who self-identify as non-heterosexual.
- Who are perceived to be non-heterosexual.
- Who don't conform to conventional gender norms or stereotypes.
- Who have same-gender parented families or caregivers.
- Who are teachers, parents, coaches and community members who are non-heterosexual.

## 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 and want to turn the tables and become a bully yourself.
- Unsafe at school or in your community.
- Stressed and 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.**

## Homophobic bullying may include the following behaviours and actions:

- Malicious name-calling (such as "fag", "dyke" and "sissy").
- Obscene and/or sexualized gestures.
- Sexualized teasing, taunting, frothing, or threats.
- Spreading rumors or gossip about a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Unwanted disclosure of someone's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Physical aggression such as hitting, pushing, kicking, punching, choking and stalking.
- Isolating someone from his or her friends or peer group.
- Using the Internet, instant messaging, and/or social networking sites to intimidate, put down, spread rumors, make fun of, threaten, or exclude someone because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Need to talk to someone about bullying?**  
**Call 1-888-456-2323 (24 hours, toll-free in Alberta).**

**b-free.ca**

Children's Services and Education are proud to lead Alberta's Cross-Ministry Strategy for the Prevention of Bullying.

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## If you, or someone you know is, the victim of homophobic bullying:

- 1. Tell someone you trust** – Talk to a trusted adult or friend who respects your confidentiality. This may be a teacher, parent, relative, youth worker, counselor, 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 policies or student code of conduct. Your school has a responsibility to protect you from bullying and abuse. You have the right to be respected and feel safe at your school and in your community, regardless of your sexual orientation or gender identity.
- 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, 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, don't delete the message. You don't have to read it, but keep it. It's your evidence. The police or your school authorities can use this information to help protect you from further abuse.

- 5. Remain calm** – You do not have to reveal your sexual orientation or gender identity to seek help. Unless you are at risk for self-harm, your teacher or school counselor does not have to tell your family or caregiver that you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, two-spirited, or queer (LGBTQ). 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 student alliance or diversity club. Often these schools will be welcoming spaces for sexual 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<sup>i</sup>. If homophobic bullying is not addressed, it reinforces to everyone affected that it is okay to discriminate. It also reinforces a spiral of violence and self-hatred that many youth who are bullied carry with them into adulthood.

When we don't speak out or intervene in homophobic bullying, our silence and inaction make us part of the problem. Stand up, speak out and B-Free from bullying!

For more information on homophobic bullying, visit [www.b-free.ca](http://www.b-free.ca).

<sup>i</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2007). *Homophobic bullying. Safe to learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools*. Nottingham, UK: Government of the United Kingdom.

<sup>ii</sup> Warwick, I., Aggelton, P., and Douglas, N. (2001). Playing it safe: Addressing the emotional and physical health of lesbian and gay pupils in the UK. *Journal of Adolescence*, 24, 129-140

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