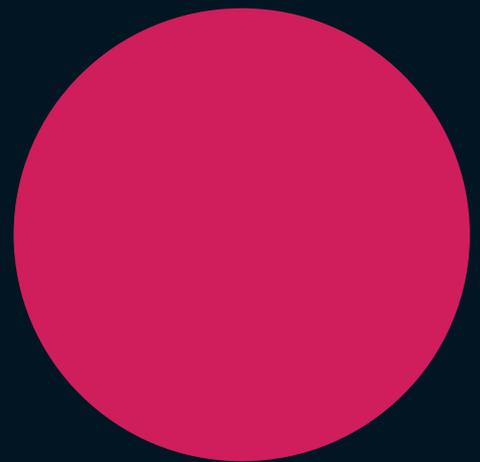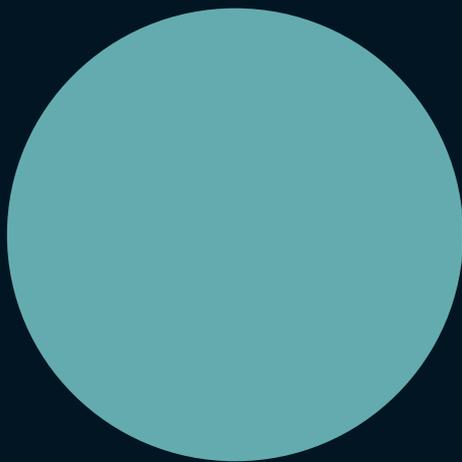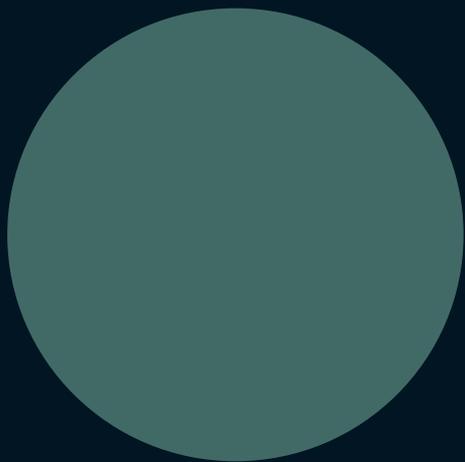education
for all

Tackling
homophobia
in schools

EDUCATION
FOR ALL

Stonewall

Bullying causes permanent damage to young people and blights the schools and colleges where it takes place. One of the most invisible forms is homophobic bullying. But it's not just a gay issue. Homophobia affects all pupils and students – lesbian, gay, bisexual and straight.

Anti-bullying campaigns need to understand and address this. Making all young people – regardless of their sexuality – feel included and valued is a major opportunity for our educational system to transform the lives of a significant number of pupils and students.

What's wrong?

Homophobic bullying is endemic in British schools.

- Four in five secondary school teachers say they are aware of verbal homophobic bullying.
- One in four secondary teachers is aware of physical homophobic bullying.
- Just 6 per cent of British schools have fully inclusive anti-bullying policies which address homophobic bullying.

What impact does this have on students' education?

- Lesbian and gay pupils are more likely to leave school at 16 despite achieving marks that merit continuing with their education.
- Two in five say they fear that bullying will continue if they stay.
- Three in four bullied lesbian and gay young people say they feign illness or play truant to escape the impact of bullying.
- The effects of homophobic bullying are not limited to lesbian, gay and bisexual young people. An educational culture where homophobic bullying exists can affect anyone singled out as different. A culture where any sort of bullying exists makes schools unsafe for everyone.

Ten things schools can do to create an inclusive culture

1 Acknowledge and identify the problem of bullying

The most important step is to recognise that all sorts of bullying takes place in schools. Homophobic bullying may be hidden from view. If you record the incidence of racist bullying, you can do the same with bullying involving homophobia.

2 Develop policies that recognise the existence of homophobic bullying

Make reference to national guidance indicating that issues relating to sexual orientation as well as bullying can be addressed in schools. Take other appropriate action such as challenging use of the word 'gay' as derogatory, ensure fast and effective removal of graffiti.

3 Promote a positive social environment

The ethos of a school – shared with parents as well as teachers – will influence what can be done to support lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils as well as to tackle homophobic bullying.

4 Address staff training needs

Dealing with gay pupils, and homophobia and bullying, can be challenging for some staff. Don't assume that only lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers are well placed to address such issues. It is often most difficult for them.

5 Provide information and support for pupils

Many pupils find it difficult to discuss lesbian and gay issues with teachers. Can you make information about services and support available to all pupils through notice-boards, school diaries, websites?

'I used to be physically ill at the thought of going to school… I would get my books and pretend to go off to school, but the minute I turned the corner I was off to a secret place I could hide.'

What's the legal position?

- Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act never applied to schools and has now been repealed. Teachers are free to discuss homophobia with their students in the classroom.

England and Wales

- State schools have a duty of care to ensure the safety and to protect the emotional well-being of every person in their care. Children Act 1989.
- Head teachers are required to develop policies and procedures to prevent all forms of harassment. Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Scotland

- Schools must have an annual plan to encourage equal opportunities. Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000
- All pupils should benefit from education. They should learn respect for self, one another and their neighbourhood and society. National Priorities in School Education (Scotland).

What can your school or college do?

Anti-bullying activities can improve pupil behaviour, help focus attention on the links between social relationships and academic attainment and contribute to school improvement and school effectiveness.

Teachers and parents are often unaware of the nature and extent of this form of bullying in particular. Other pupils are often reluctant to get involved and don't know how to help. Effective interventions involve the entire school community rather than just focusing on traditional notions of perpetrators and their victims.

By following the 10 steps outlined below your school will go a long way to creating an inclusive culture for all pupils. If you want further help or information, contact some of the organisations listed overleaf.

education for all

6 Integrate sexual orientation into curriculum planning

Try to integrate teaching about sexual orientation into the curriculum as a whole. Identify lesbian and gay people both formally, in what is taught, and informally, in posters, assemblies etc.

7 Use outside experience

People working in external agencies (such as lesbian and gay charities, youth groups or local telephone helplines) can offer support, both outside and inside the classroom, in addressing homophobic bullying and related issues

8 Encourage role models

Schools with openly gay staff, governors, parents and/or pupils provide more appropriate education for all and help to replicate the community in which they live. Both teachers and pupils may come out as lesbian, gay or bisexual in an educational environment that values them as individuals. Are you ready and able to support them?

9 Don't make assumptions

Don't assume all pupils in a class are, or will be, heterosexual. Don't assume all teachers in a school or college are heterosexual.

10 Celebrate achievements

Make successes, such as changing the curriculum or reducing the incidence of bullying, known – for example through assemblies, newsletters, notice-boards or websites

'Finally at 16 I had a teacher I knew to be gay. She was widely respected at my school and everyone wanted to be in her class. Her influence made a huge difference to my self-confidence after years of homophobic bullying.'

Homophobia exists in schools, its impact is evident and teachers often want to help. Education for All is a call to action. It aims to supply educators with the tools and advice necessary to create a positive environment for all pupils, to support lesbian, gay and bisexual young people and to create a healthy and open learning environment in which everyone can learn. For more information about what schools can do to support the campaign see the Education for All website at www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall

Resources

www.stonewall.org.uk
Stonewall's best practice guide Safe for All can be downloaded here. You can also find a range of links to education information and resources, support organisations and anti-bullying initiatives.

www.lgbtyouth.org.uk
LGBT Youth Scotland provides direct services and support to young people across Scotland and works with local authorities and health boards to develop policies and training.

www.fflag.org.uk
FFLAG (Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is dedicated to supporting parents and their gay, lesbian and bisexual sons and daughters.

www.eachaction.org.uk
EACH challenges homophobia through education in schools and delivers training for other professionals. It has a national freefone number for young people. 0808 1000 143.

www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk
Wired for Health is a portal run by the Health Development Agency that provides information on the National Healthy Schools Programme. Stand up for Us is a resource to help schools challenge homophobia by developing an inclusive, safer environment. It covers early years through to secondary education and includes special schools, off-site units and pupil referral units. www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/standupforus

www.glsen.org
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, is an American organisation that offers an imaginative range of classroom activities and background information.

www.schools-out.org.uk
Details of books, videos and training packs for teachers can be found here.

Contacts

www.stonewall.org.uk
educationteam@stonewall.org.uk

What is Education for All?

Education for All is a campaign launched in 2005 to ensure access to education in Britain is not limited by a person's sexual orientation. Organised by Stonewall in partnership with FFLAG and LGBT Youth Scotland, it is supported by a range of organisations across Great Britain.

Sources

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