

**Committed to all Students**

# **Responding to Homophobia in High Schools**



**Student success is based on students feeling safe and that they belong at their school.**  
**HDSB is committed to all students and we will: inspire and support learning, and create safe, healthy and engaging environments.**  
(HDSB Strategic Plan)

This pamphlet is intended to help teachers in schools stop homophobic behaviour. The suggestions below help broaden a teacher's tool kit and equip them to respond to various situations.

Making positive change in our schools means all staff need to respond in a consistent way each time.

## **Handling harassment in 3 minutes:**

Identify the harassment - Stop the harassment - interrupt the act in public, "your behaviour is homophobic."



Broaden the response - "At this school we do not harass people."



Ask for change in future behaviour, "Please think and don't use that phrase."



## Scenario A

A student approaches a teacher upset that a comment was written about her in a bathroom stall. It reads, "\_\_\_\_\_ is a dyke."

### Act:

1. Let the student know that the graffiti is not okay and that it will be dealt with.
2. Report it to Administration –[Administration will immediately cover the graffiti temporarily, contact Police for documentation and then have the graffiti permanently removed within 24 hours (as per HDSB Policy)]
3. Respond to the student in a caring and compassionate way.

### Educate:

4. Go back to reassure the student once the graffiti has been removed.
5. Make staff and students aware that hate graffiti is a crime.
6. Make a plan with staff to check the washrooms/change-rooms more often.

## Scenario B

A teacher hands out an assignment or a task and several students voice opposition to the assignment by saying, "That's gay."

### Act:

1. Challenge the comment right away: "That language is not acceptable and is homophobic."

### Educate:

2. Appeal to the person's intellect. "This kind of language can also be hurtful to others who overhear it."
3. Ask for a change in behaviour. "Please don't use that phrase again and use a better word to communicate clearly", or if you don't like what we're doing then tell me "I don't like this assignment."
4. All staff must be consistent in responding to any derogatory language. Raise this at a staff meeting.

## Scenario C

A student privately confides to you that they are gay.

### Act:

1. Find a safe space to have the dialogue.
2. Reinforce trust: "I'm glad you told me", or "Thanks for telling me."
3. Find out what the student needs and where they want to go with this information. Some may have just wanted you to know. Others might need to disclose harassment and/or require other support and resources.
4. Reassure the student that their information is confidential unless their safety and well-being is at risk. Ask: "Do I have permission to share this information with people who can support you?"



## **Scenario D**

In a general conversation with a student it comes out that they are LGBTT2QQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Transsexual, 2 Spirited, Queer, Questioning)

### **Act:**

1. Engage in a supportive way with the student without demonstrating shock or surprise.
2. Allow the student to direct the conversation.

### **Educate:**

3. In case the student asks for more support or resources:  
Halton Organization for Pride Education - Youth Support Group [www.haltonpride.org](http://www.haltonpride.org)
4. Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays  
[haltonon@pflagcanada.ca](mailto:haltonon@pflagcanada.ca)
5. Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans Youth Line: 1-800-268-youth (9688)  
[www.youthline.ca](http://www.youthline.ca)

## **Scenario E**

A student who identifies as transgendered (i.e. biologically male and identifying as female, or opposite) confides that she is uncomfortable with using the student change rooms or washrooms.

### **Act:**

1. Provide a private washroom/change room that the student is comfortable with.

### **Educate:**

2. Problem solve with administration for a permanent solution.
3. Access should be easy and confidential for the student.

## **Scenario F**

You challenge a student who is harassing a boy. The student who is harassing responds by saying that the boy deserves it because "he is wearing eye liner."

### **Act:**

1. Point out that no one has the right to harass another person.

### **Educate:**

2. Dress code should be applied equitably. The student is not violating a school dress code by not conforming to gender norms. They have done nothing to violate the rights and safety of any other person.

## Scenario G

A teacher states to his peers at lunch that “two fags moved in next-door and he is going to keep his son inside from now on.”

### Act:

1. Tell the teacher “I feel uncomfortable with what you are saying” or, “You are creating an unsafe environment.”

### Educate:

2. If they continue to offend you, you have options to follow HDSB harassment policy or union policy.

## Scenario H

A day after teaching a lesson about families including same sex relationships you receive a call from a parent stating that they are not happy that you are “promoting homosexuality to their child.”

### Act:

1. State to the parent: “We teach the Ontario curriculum and our school is part of an inclusive public board which recognizes and values differences in families. This is in accordance with the HDSB Diversity policy and the Ontario Human Rights Code.”
2. If the parent becomes belligerent thank them for their phone call, direct them to the Principal and discontinue the call. Inform your Principal right way.

### Educate:

3. Inform the parent that you are following through with expectations for teachers. Don’t feel you have to defend this as a personal belief. Do not debate with the parent.
4. Refer the parent to HDSB Diversity Policy on the HDSB website, and inform them that the inclusive family content will come up again because it is integrated throughout the program and will also come up through conversations among students.





## Resources

Halton Organization for Pride Education -  
Youth Support Group  
[www.haltonpride.org](http://www.haltonpride.org)

Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays  
[haltonon@pflagcanada.ca](mailto:haltonon@pflagcanada.ca)

Lesbian, Gay, Bi Youth Line  
1-800-208-youth

HDSB anonymous CHATT  
conference – Student Spectrum  
Talk or Staff Spectrum Talk

### **For more information contact Spectrum Team:**

Dawn Cruickshank  
Suzanne Muir  
Diversity Coordinators

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Halton District School Board

