



Making a Difference in Bullying for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (GLBTQ) Youth



**Networks of Centres
of Excellence**
**Réseaux de centres
d'excellence**

Fast Facts about GLBTQ Youth

- Approximately **4%** of teens identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning
- More teens identify as **questioning** or **bisexual** than as gay or lesbian
- Equal number of boys and girls identify as questioning
- Adolescents may have romantic experiences with both same-sex and opposite-sex partners
- Questioning may eventually lead to acceptance of homosexual or heterosexual identification

Victimization

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning adolescents (GLBTQ) are more likely to be victims of bullying, sexual harassment, and physical abuse than heterosexual youth.

Read on to learn about how you can make a difference in bullying for GLBTQ youth.

Signs and Signals of Victimization among GLBTQ youth

- ♦ Be aware of potentially negative issues that GLBTQ youth face:
 - ♦ Victimization
 - ♦ Social Isolation

These issues may result in:

- ♦ Withdrawal from family and friends to avoid discussing sexual orientation concerns.
- ♦ Feelings of depression because these youth may be keenly aware of societal heterosexual bias
- ♦ Acting out behaviours, in an effort to detract or mitigate the stress of the questioning or coming out process
- ♦ Acting out against parents or peers for rejecting them, or in actual defence against victimization and harassment.

10 THINGS PARENTS CAN DO TO DEAL WITH BULLYING AMONG GLBTQ YOUTH. . .

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

You're the parent and youth watch what you do very closely.

Demonstrate tolerance and acceptance of all sexualities and diversities.

Do not tolerate homophobic slang for GLBTQ (e.g., fag, lezzie, dyke).

Do not support media that is making fun of GLBTQ issues.

CHALLENGE YOUR OWN ASSUMPTIONS

Don't automatically assume your child or his or her friends are heterosexual or "straight".

Parents may assume that their children are heterosexual and this may limit the perception of support and closeness.

Identify your own misconceptions and stereotypes about GLBQT issues.

ENCOURAGE YOUTH TO REPORT

It is the parents' job to deal with bullying.

GLBTQ youth are often afraid to come forward for fear of re-victimization or because they are not "out".

Let your child know that you want to hear about every incident of bullying and harassment.

LISTEN TO YOUR ADOLESCENT

Listening to your adolescent can provide very needed support and understanding.

Parental support can be a powerful weapon against the negative effects of victimization.

Recognize signs of victimization and treat every incident as important.

BE INCLUSIVE OF ALL YOUTH

As the parent, you have a lot of power over how children act.

You can encourage positive connections among GLBTQ youth by encouraging and reinforcing respectful and cooperative behaviour whenever you see it.

Treat GLBTQ youth as members of your family, that you would not tolerate being hurt or embarrassed.

Parents of GLBTQ youth should know:

- ◆ Depression and problem behaviours reported by GLBTQ adolescents occur largely because of *victimization* and *lack of support* from friends and family.
- ◆ Supportive parents and families can help GLBTQ youth feel better about themselves and combat the negative experiences of victimization!
- ◆ Parental companionship can provide emotional support and guidance to help sexual minority youth deal with victimization and feelings of isolation.

Parents can support GLBTQ youth by:

- ◆ SHOWING UNCONDITIONAL AND INSTANT SUPPORT
- ◆ Showing your kids full out that you love them.
- ◆ Spending time with your child.
- ◆ Parental companionship can provide emotional support and guidance to help GLBTQ youth deal with victimization and feelings of isolation
- ◆ Don't be afraid to ask questions, (e.g., when did you know? How did you know?) but do so with sensitivity and respect.
- ◆ *"Kids are incredible as long as they feel they are heard. Where you get problems is when you pretend nothing is going on."*

REDUCE THE CHANCES FOR BULLYING

Organize activities so that your adolescent who is being bullied is always surrounded by youth who will stand up for him/her.

Connect with school and community groups that support GLBTQ issues.

Work with your adolescent's school to promote a tolerant environment.

RECOGNIZE NEED FOR OUTSIDE SUPPORT

GLBTQ youth who are bullied often have difficulties with depression and self-esteem.

Counsellors can provide support through individual counseling or support groups for GLBTQ adolescents who are having difficulty fitting in, and who may be marginalized or targeted by peers.

PUBLICALLY SUPPORT GLBTQ ISSUES

Help make the voice of GLBTQ youth heard by the people responsible for policy development in schools boards and provincial and federal governments.

Increase policy makers' sensitivity to the issues faced by these youth.

Support policies that recognize the existence of homophobic bullying.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

If you suspect that your adolescent is being bullied, you're probably right.

GLBTQ youth may deny bullying out of shame or fear. If it looks like bullying and feels like bullying, it most likely is.

Trust your instincts and intervene.

BE READY TO LISTEN AND HELP

If your adolescent or a friend of your adolescent reports being bullied because of his or her sexual orientation, be ready to listen right away.

Thank the youth for having the courage to come forward and explain that it is her/his right to feel safe.

Ask for details about the incident and convey your concern. Be willing to respond to all complaints.

THE MANY FORMS OF BULLYING EXPERIENCED BY GLBTQ YOUTH:

Physical bullying

- ◆ Hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, beating up, stealing, or damaging property

Verbal bullying

- ◆ Name-calling, mocking, hurtful teasing, humiliating or threatening someone, racist or sexist comments
- ◆ Common name-calling includes "fag, dyke, lezzie, queer"

Social bullying

- ◆ Excluding others from the group, gossiping or spreading rumours, setting others up to look foolish, and damaging friendships.

Cyberbullying

- ◆ Using email, cell phones, text messages, and internet sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, or damage reputations and friendships

HOW DO PARENTS KNOW IF THEIR ADOLESCENT IS INVOLVED IN BULLYING?

Bullying is a covert behaviour and is usually hidden from adults. Look for the following clues:

SIGNS OF BEING BULLIED

- ☑ Afraid to go to school or other activities
- ☑ Appear anxious or fearful
- ☑ Low self-esteem and make negative comments
- ☑ Complain of feeling unwell
- ☑ Lower interest in activities and performance
- ☑ Lose things, need money, report being hungry
- ☑ Injuries, bruising, damaged clothing or articles
- ☑ Appear unhappy, irritable
- ☑ Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- ☑ Threats to hurt themselves or others

WHY PARENTS SHOULD CARE ABOUT HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING

Many people feel that homophobic bullying is "*just kids being kids*" and that it's "*harmless*." In fact, this type of bullying is anything but harmless, particularly for GLBTQ youth, whose identity is insulted

RISKS FOR GLBTQ YOUTH WHO ARE BULLIED:

- Depression (low mood, a sense of hopelessness)
- Poor health (e.g., headaches, stomachaches)
- School absenteeism and academic problems
- Running away
- Contemplating, attempting, or committing suicide
- Social anxiety, loneliness, isolation
- Low self-esteem
- Aggressive behaviours
- Drug and alcohol use

For more information about PREVNet, visit our website: www.prevnet.ca