

# C. ADVICE FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF

## C4: Prevention

### C4.1 Leadership

Refer to **DL29** with this section

Preventing homophobic bullying is a long term strategy to eradicate it from schools. **Responding** to incidents is important, but teachers and school staff have a responsibility to provide on-going information to pupils and parents/carers about homophobic bullying, the **effect** that it has on pupils, and the consequences of bullying. Pupils will be more likely to understand that homophobic bullying is unacceptable if this is visible throughout the ethos of the school. Reiterating the message after an incident will only have a limited impact.

Staff should also feel **protected** [21] from bullying. Preventing homophobic bullying will also therefore have an impact on pupil attitudes to staff, and help prevent future incidents of bullying.

Further information about how to integrate homophobic bullying into wider approaches to bullying can be found in *Safe to Learn*.

### C4.2 How to introduce the issue of homophobic bullying

Refer to **DL20** with this section

**Heads** and the senior leadership team (including those with strategic responsibility for anti-bullying work) will have developed general strategies for preventing homophobic bullying. This will include the school anti-bullying policy which, Departmental guidance suggests, should be re-communicated to all members of staff, parents/carers and pupils at least once a year. Giving students and staff an opportunity to comment on the school's approach

to dealing with homophobic bullying ensures the issue is kept alive and understanding is maintained.

Schools can also use occasions such as national Anti-Bullying Week (November) to facilitate discussion and raise awareness about the topic. Other opportunities for incorporating prevention work are discussed within the following sections.

Some staff members can feel nervous about introducing issues related to homophobic bullying with pupils. It can be helpful in these situations if staff bear in mind the following three points:

That regardless of what a pupil thinks about gay people, no-one deserves to be bullied.

That gay people are entitled to equal rights in the UK, and will be protected from bullying of any sort.

That homophobic bullying is unacceptable in any context, even if it is being used against heterosexual people.

### C4.3 How to discuss issues around homophobic language

Refer to **DL12** with this section

Homophobic language is often used without thinking and is often ignored because it is difficult to know how to respond. **Homophobic language** is often dismissed as "harmless banter" and not thought to be particularly hurtful. Homophobic language in schools needs to be challenged because ignoring it allows homophobic bullying in general to continue to escalate.

Homophobic language should be challenged within a general programme of work that the school undertakes to tackle the problem of homophobic bullying, including negative attitudes towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It is not a singular response to the difficulties that arise. Any action to challenge homophobic language should be taken within the framework of the **school's behaviour policy**.

*"They say gay means lame, and it is nothing to do with hating gays. It doesn't make me feel like that though".*  
14 year old boy, London

Staff should consistently make it clear that homophobic comments are **unacceptable** and ensure that pupils who experience it feel supported. Staff will need to be sensitive when talking to pupils about incidents. They may be gay but not know how to tell someone that, or may be concerned that parents/carers will be involved.

*"When we hear homophobic language, we make it clear it is not acceptable: I will not tolerate language like that in my classroom. If they say it's just a bit of banter, I make them write me an essay on why homophobic language is not acceptable in our schools."*  
Secondary school teacher, Manchester

If a pupil continues to use homophobic language, they need to understand the effect that their language has on other people. This could include asking the pupil to write why homophobic language is unacceptable in school. If the pupil continues to be homophobic, they could be spoken to by a senior manager. A pupil may be given detention, but parents will need to have been informed about this policy and be given 24 hours' prior notice if the detention occurs before or after the school day, or at lunchtime.

If a pupil continues to bully others, schools may want to consider contacting **parents** or carers to discuss the issue and problem with them and reminding them about the school's anti-bullying

policy. Parents/carers also need to understand why homophobic language is unacceptable.

Sharing information with pupils and parents/carers is central to ensuring that they understand why their behaviour is unacceptable. Homophobic language is often used in ignorance, and therefore education is crucial.

For more information on sanctions see Safe to Learn and School Discipline and Pupil Behaviour Policies: Guidance for Schools.

#### C4.4 Using curriculum opportunities

Refer to **DL6, DL21, DL22, DL23** and **DL24** with this section

Schools should refer to what the guidance on the sexual orientation regulations says about the curriculum. The guidance can be found at: **[www.teachernet.gov.uk/sholeschoole/equality/sexualorientation/regulations2007/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/sholeschoole/equality/sexualorientation/regulations2007/)**

The key to tackling prejudice-driven bullying is to provide opportunities for pupils to think, understand and challenge their own prejudice.

Through **curriculum** subjects, including English, Geography, History, Art, Music, Drama, PE, Citizenship and PSHE opportunities may be provided to introduce issues around homophobic bullying. More widely General Studies and Religious Education lessons can be used as vehicles for discussing this topic, although they should not be considered the only subjects where it is appropriate to raise issues around bullying and discrimination. In raising issues around religious perspectives it is important to distinguish that bullying behaviour is entirely different from religious belief.

Citizenship and PSHE classes provide an ideal time to talk about **different families** and look at the effects of bullying, as well as to discuss inappropriate language and prejudice.

Teaching about sexual orientation does not mean teaching about sex or sexual activity. Instead, it is about teaching pupils about difference and diversity. Teaching about sexual orientation, and bullying, will prevent homophobic bullying.

#### C4.5 How to discuss different families

Refer to **DL13** with this section

The concept of what constitutes a family has changed over the years. Increasingly families can include:

- One parent, either a mother or father
- One or two grandparents
- One parent, and the partner of a parent (either same sex or opposite sex)
- Parents who have adopted a child
- Siblings from different families and different ages
- Parents who live with a child and a parent who does not live with the child
- Looked after children, including those in long and short-term care.

It is likely that some children and young people in a primary school and secondary school will either have, or know about, same-sex parenting.

*"My partner, my daughter's biological father, and I all have parental responsibility. The school was a bit confused to begin with but I think my daughter explained it all to them!"*

Parent of a Primary School Pupil, Birmingham

Children and young people can experience bullying because of their family arrangements, regardless of whether or not a parent is gay. Some pupils report that they experience **homophobic bullying** because

they come from a one-parent family, and it is assumed by peers that the parent is gay.

**Acknowledging and recognising difference** in families, and ensuring that those differences are not seen to be inferior, is key to tackling homophobic bullying.

Preventing homophobic bullying of this sort relies on a broader and more inclusive approach to discussing families and parents. Pupils should understand that different family structures exist.

*"All my friends know my mum is a lesbian and she has a girlfriend. I know I'm not the only one in school either, though I'm probably the most open. I've learnt some quick lines if anyone has a go. Most don't these days."*  
14 year old girl, Lancaster

#### C4.6 How to support pupils who are lesbian, gay or bisexual

Refer to **DL14**, **DL15** and **DL26** with this section  
Staff should feel comfortable enough to deal with a situation where a pupil "comes out" to them. If pupils receive a supportive reaction from staff, they are more likely to feel able to tell someone about incidents of homophobic bullying. Staff should therefore:

- Listen and be **supportive**
- Discuss how **parents** and carers might respond
- Tell pupils their **confidentiality** will be respected, and explain the circumstances where it may not be possible to do so
- Ask them how they would like to proceed
- Recommend other resources [see further resources], such as local youth groups and websites.

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*"My teacher told me that we have to all make choices and some choices are bad choices and some choices are good choices. She made it clear that I was about to make a bad choice."*

15 year old girl, Cumbria

Staff who respond negatively to pupils who come out, can compound the sense of isolation that a young person may be experiencing. Pupils may be reluctant to tell anyone else, and will not feel able to report incidents of homophobic bullying if this occurs.