



Homophobia: acting to prevent prejudice

Homophobia is a fear or disgust of homosexuality. It is a form of violence and discrimination. It targets people of homosexual or bisexual orientation (real or presumed orientation). Homophobia often targets people who do not correspond to society's norms of femininity or masculinity. For example, a sensitive boy who is "artistic" is more at risk of being the victim of homophobia than a boy who is rude, athletic and competitive.

Homosexuality means being emotionally and physically attracted to someone of the same sex.

In high school, nearly 87% of young people say that they often or occasionally hear negative remarks associated with sexual orientation.

Over 38% of students report experiencing at least one incident that is homophobic in nature.

HOW IS HOMOPHOBIA EXPRESSED?

There are many ways that people express homophobia: insults, teasing, vandalism, cyberbullying, gossip or rumours that harm someone's reputation. These statements and behaviour can be both obvious and subtle.

For example, homophobia can be heard at school, at the park, at the arena, on TV or even from a family member. The majority of homophobic incidents are not reported to adults or people in a position of authority (a teacher, a recess monitor, etc.).

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF HOMOPHOBIA?

Homophobia has major consequences for the victim. It can have a negative impact on:

- self-esteem
- mental health (anxiety disorders, suicidal thoughts)
- life at school (absenteeism, dropping out of school, insecurity, difficulty making friends)
- risky behaviour (isolation, drug use, unprotected sex)

Homophobia promotes the idea that the only acceptable sexual orientation is heterosexuality.

The more someone is a victim of repeated homophobic acts and comments, the greater the impact.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Think about what your child may experience when it comes to homophobia

- Has your child ever witnessed homophobic actions or heard homophobic comments?
- Has your child ever been the victim of homophobia?
- Has your child ever made homophobic comments?

As an adult and parent, your words, actions and silence will influence your child.

Talk to your children about homophobia

Young people don't always know who to confide in when they witness or are victims of homophobia. If your child doesn't want to talk to you about it, ask instead how their friends, other kids in school, or kids on their sports teams act.

Think about your own opinion of homosexuality

- What do you think of homosexuality or bisexuality?
- What messages do you want to send to your child about homosexuality?
- Do you share the same opinions as your friends and family or your child?

Think about your attitude when you witness or hear homophobic actions or comments

- How do you feel? (You feel uncomfortable, you agree, you're mad or indifferent.)
- How do you react? (You laugh along, you say it's unacceptable, you encourage the person to go on, you pretend you didn't hear.)

A FEW WAYS TO FIGHT HOMOPHOBIA

- Avoid using words with a negative connotation such as "gay," "fag" or "dyke." These words produce a negative image of homosexuality. They are sometimes wrongly used to describe something foolish or "lame" (e.g., calling a bad movie "so gay," or saying "that shirt makes you look like a fag").
- Does your child use these words? Point out their negative connotation. You should also clarify what these words really mean. In addition to being insults and showing a lack of respect, these names in no way represent a character trait that truly describes someone (i.e., sensitive, nice, intelligent, determined, etc.).
- Avoid taking for granted that everyone is heterosexual. Try asking neutral questions such as "Are you in love?" when you want to know whether someone has a girlfriend or boyfriend.
- If you witness bullying, violence, a lack of respect or homophobia: react! Not doing anything or saying anything when you hear a homophobic comment means that you agree with it. Each person has a role to play to prevent and combat homophobia.
- Finally, try to emphasize positive experiences about different sexual orientations (in the media, your environment).

Two very important words to fight homophobia: take action!

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