

HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING

What is Homophobia and Homophobic Bullying?

Homophobic bullying is the deliberate and intentional inappropriate behaviour or comments directed towards an individual or a group that is of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning and Intersex (LGBTQI) background. Transphobia describes a range of negative feelings or behaviors towards anyone who is transgender or gender diverse. Transphobia and fixed ideas about gender can affect people, including those that have transgender friends or family members.

Homophobia and transphobia bullying can happen face to face, at school, in the workplace and online. Homophobic and transphobic bullying can be direct, targeted at an individual, or indirect, passive use of homophobic and transphobic language. The most commonly practiced and experienced form of homophobic bullying is verbal.

Verbal (direct) homophobic bullying and abuse can include:

- Teasing, name calling, spreading rumours associated with a person's gender, sexuality, making suggestive remarks, and social isolation through verbal means i.e. "no you cannot join in because you're gay or you are such a 'fag', 'dyke' or 'tranny'."
- The use of phrases such as 'that's so gay', 'what a homo' and 'gay as', that compare same sex attraction to words like 'crap'. These may be perceived as harmless amongst students and work groups if not directed against an individual, but such statements imply that people who are same sex attracted or gender diverse are inferior.
- Homophobic bullying can also include physical violence, threats, damage to personal belongings, social exclusion and cyber bullying.
- Bullying of LGBTQI people can have devastating consequences to victims, their family and friends.

Indirect homophobic bullying and abuse:

- Social isolation and exclusion on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity i.e. not allowing the individual to participate in an activity because of their background is unacceptable and a form of indirect bullying.

- Both direct and indirect homophobic and transphobic language and remarks are hurtful, and its use has tangible ramifications. Failing to intervene and prohibit the use of homophobic language generates further discrimination as such remarks can exacerbate homophobic bullying into other non-verbal means of harassment.
- Homophobic and transphobic behaviour can also include abusive threats or actual physical violence, damage to personal belongings, sexual harassment and deliberately excluding someone because of their sexual orientation.

Impact of Homophobic Bullying

The practice of homophobic and transphobic bullying can be both physically and emotionally detrimental to the health and wellbeing of the victim.

A recent survey of 564 LGBTQI individuals in 2015 into homophobia and transphobia found:

- Over 50% of same sex attracted or gender diverse young people in Australia have experienced verbal abuse.
- Over 15% of same sex attracted or gender diverse young people in Australia have experienced physical abuse.
- Over 70% of homophobic and transphobic incidents take place in schools.

An individual experiencing homophobic or transphobic bullying could demonstrate one or many of the following attitudes and behaviours:

- Low self-esteem and confidence.
- Signs of stress or depression.
- Absenteeism or presenteeism from work.
- Poor academic and/or work performance.
- Lack normal engagement with their peers.
- Scared, worried, anxious, emotionally hurt, upset, physically weak, irritated, ashamed, sad, angry, disconnected, socially isolated and withdrawn.
- Feelings of helplessness and insecurity.
- Poor concentration.
- Regardless of an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, homophobic and transphobic bullying can leave scars and have long term effects on the victim, their family and friends. Individuals that experience homophobic bullying could permanently leave school, engage in risky sexual and physical behaviours, abuse drugs and alcohol, experience suicide ideation and/or commit self-harm.
- Schoolyard assumptions of heterosexuality and gender norms leave victims feeling frightened, helpless and alone. Such feelings and

emotions can lead the victim to believe that their school or peer group are unable to provide support, as it would require them to self-identify or 'come out' as same-sex attracted or gender diverse.

How to Prevent Homophobic Bullying?

School staff, employers, work colleagues and parents should raise awareness and advocate for education programs to be delivered on the topic of homophobic and transphobic bullying. Early intervention to address issues and determine preventative measures applicable to each case is paramount.

We have an obligation to:

- Make it clear that the school, workplace, sporting club or community group will not tolerate homophobic or transphobic bullying by displaying posters and other anti-bullying messages.
- Understand and discuss why homophobic language is harmful and outline why the effects on the victim are indifferent to racial and/or physical bullying.
- Educate workers, teachers, students, sporting clubs and community groups that being same sex attracted or transgender is not a disease, nor a form of inferiority.
- Make it clear that both direct and indirect homophobic and transphobic remarks are offensive, regardless of the sexual orientation of the individual.

Call out homophobic and transphobic bullying when witnessed.

