



The Society for Safe & Caring Schools & Communities  
11010 142 St Edmonton AB T5N 2R1 Phone (780)447-9487 Fax (780)455-6481 Email: office@sacsc.ca

## **Micro Workshop 10**

### **Understanding LGBTQ Issues – A Workshop for Parents**

#### **Focus**

This micro workshop provides an opportunity for parents to develop an awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity issues. Schools, classrooms and communities should be models of diversity, where all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential. All children and youth need to feel valued, welcomed and safe, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

#### **Objectives**

1. Recognize the health and safety issues that affect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) children and youth
2. Review important policies and legislation
3. Consider ways to support LGBTQ children and youth
4. Provide resources for further inquiry

#### **Materials**

- Four handouts found at the back of this micro workshop may be copied and given to participants or used as overheads.
- A PowerPoint presentation is also available that corresponds to the handouts.

#### **Introduction**

Introduce yourself. Explain that participants may have varying levels of comfort with this topic, and they are encouraged to participate in whichever way is comfortable for them.

Read letter and quote from “Ruth” (Handout 1).

The workshop leader says that schools and communities must be places where all children and youth feel safe, cared for and included. LGBTQ children and youth are at tremendous risk, however, and that is why you will focus on this group during this workshop.

The workshop leader shares the research contained in Handout 2. This could also be shared as an overhead.

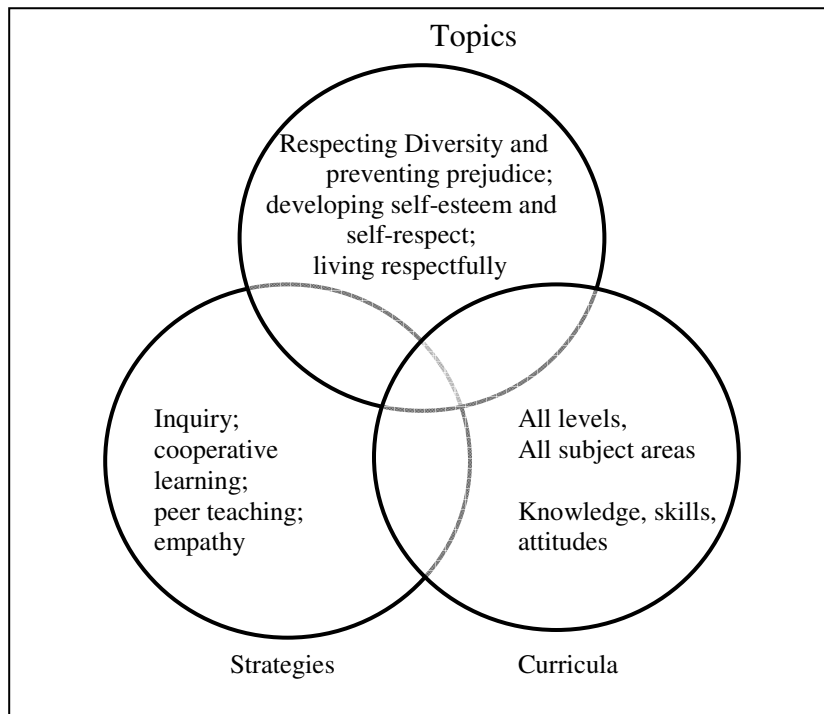
#### **Discussion**

Review the related policies, legislation and decisions using Handout 3 (or use as an overhead).

### Think/Pair/Square

What could parents do to create a safe and home and community environments for LGBTQ students? Have participants first reflect on the question privately, and then with a partner. Then ask partners to share their ideas with another set of partners. If time permits, generate a list that participants could use for further planning and information gathering.

### SACS Principles



### Conclusion

Handout 4 contains a list of possible actions for parents. If participants are interested refer them to the Safe and Caring Schools and Communities website ([www.sacsc.ca](http://www.sacsc.ca)), the Alberta Teachers' Association website section on Diversity, Equity and Human Rights ([www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) Click on Diversity Equity and Human Rights under Issues in Education and follow the links) or to Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays ( [www.pflag.ca](http://www.pflag.ca)). Participants can also be referred to resources contained on page 5 of this micro workshop.

Review what was covered during the workshop. Have participants reflect on personal things they could do to support LGBTQ children and youth in their community.

## Handout 1

Surrey, British Columbia  
March 11, 2000

Dear Mom and Dad:

The first thing is, I love you, Mom and Dad, but you don't understand why I had to commit suicide. There was so much going on, and I tried to cope with it, but I couldn't take it anymore...It was horrible. Every day, I was teased and teased, everyone calling me gay, fag, queer, and I would always act like it didn't bug me...But I was crying inside me. It hurt me so bad, because I wasn't gay. And when people said it, my own friends never backed me up. They just laughed. I would pray to God every night for everyone to stop saying that.

I know that you are going to miss me and that you will never forgive me, but you will never understand. You weren't living my life. I hate myself for doing this to you. I really, really hate myself, but there is no other way out for me.

Sure, I could have taken a gun and shot everyone in the head... but what would the point be?

I love you, Dad and Mom. Please, please tell the people at school why I did this. I don't want somebody else to do what I have done.

Mom, after my death, please, please go to schools and talk to kids that bullying and teasing have big consequences. Please visit my grave often, so I'm not lonely.

–Hameed Nastoh, age 14

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“A wonderful child with an incredible mind is gone because our society can't accept people who are different from the norm. What an awful waste. I will miss my daughter for the rest of my life. I'll never see her beautiful smile or hear her glorious laugh. I'll never see her play with her sister again. All because of hatred and ignorance. I strongly believe that the seeds of hate are sown early in life. Let's replace them with love, understanding and compassion.”

–Ruth, the mother of a lesbian student who committed suicide

## Handout 2

### Health and Safety Issues for LGBTQ Students

Students who are (or are perceived to be) lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified or queer are at risk for being the victims of verbal abuse, emotional violence and personal danger. School can be a hostile and uninviting environment. It is important that educational leaders be aware of the safety and health concerns that face many LGBTQ youth, including

- truancy or dropping out,
- drug and alcohol abuse,
- withdrawal from social and school activities,
- running away from home,
- turning to prostitution and/or living on the streets,
- depression,
- increased suicide risk (gay male and bisexual youth in Alberta are 14 times more at risk for a serious suicide attempt and heterosexual male youth),
- LGBTQ youth are 5 times more likely to be targets of violence and/or harassment,
- Between 20% and 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ,
- Almost 40% of gay and lesbian youth surveyed have dramatically low self esteem,

Many LGBTQ youth compensate by being

- perfectionistic A students;
- scholarship winners;
- doctors, lawyers, professors, artists, musicians; or
- high performance athletes

## Handout 3

# Important Policies, Legislation and Decisions

### **The ATA Professional Code of Conduct Section 1**

“The teacher teaches in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice as to race, religious belief, colour, sex, **sexual orientation, gender identity**, physical characteristics, age, ancestry or place of origin.”

### **The Alberta School Act Section 45(8)**

“A board shall ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board is provided with a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours.”

### **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms Section 15(1)**

“Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”

### **Chamberlain v. Surry School Board [2002] at para. #66**

“The demand for tolerance cannot be interpreted as the demand to approve of another person’s beliefs or practices. When we ask people to be tolerant of others, we do not ask them to abandon their personal convictions. We merely ask them to respect the rights, values, and ways of being of those who may not share those convictions.”

## **Handout 4**

### **What Can Parents Do?**

- Develop personal awareness of the topic
- Be aware of your child's feelings and opinions on the topic
- Be willing to listen and open up a dialogue on the topic
- Be aware of community partners and resources

## Handout 5

### Resources

The Alberta Teachers' Association (Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee)—[www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca)

Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE) Canada—[www.egale.ca](http://www.egale.ca)

Gay-Straight Alliance Network—[www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org)

Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Edmonton—[www.freenet.edmonton.ab.ca/glcce/](http://www.freenet.edmonton.ab.ca/glcce/)

Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia—[www.galebc.org](http://www.galebc.org)

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network—[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

Matthew Shepard Organization—[www.matthewsplace.com](http://www.matthewsplace.com)

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)—[www.pflag.ca](http://www.pflag.ca)

Safe Schools Coalition—[www.safeschoolscoalition.org](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org)

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities—[www.sacsc.ca](http://www.sacsc.ca)