



# Supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual young people

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# Foreword

Coming to terms with their sexual orientation should be an exciting time for all young people, including those who are lesbian, gay and bisexual. However, while being lesbian, gay or bisexual is not in itself a problem, lack of support from family, friends and services those young people access can make coming out and growing up confusing and isolating.

In 21st century Britain it no longer has to be that way. Recent changes in the law mean that we have a responsibility to support all young people – including those who are lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Stonewall research shows that many lesbian, gay or bisexual young people fear other people's reactions to their sexual orientation, and that they are happier and more likely to fulfil their potential when they feel valued for who they are. That's why through our Education for All campaign we've developed a range of resources including our feature film *FIT*, teaching packs, *Some people are gay. Get over it!* materials and the Stonewall Education Guides. These materials provide youth and education professionals with the tools to engage positively in dialogue about sexual orientation and to create environments where lesbian, gay and bisexual young people feel they can be themselves.

We hope this guide will help you feel confident to provide support for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people and help them feel valued and proud of who they are – at home, at school and at work.

Ben Summerskill  
Chief Executive, Stonewall

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# 1

## Introduction

Teenage years are an exciting and challenging time for young people. They'll start new schools and colleges, meet new people, take up new interests, and think about having relationships. They're also likely to start exploring their sexuality. For some young people, working out whether they are lesbian, gay or bisexual can be an extra pressure – depending on the extent to which they are able to be themselves at home, at school or with their friends.

Young people tell Stonewall that they generally realise they are lesbian, gay or bisexual when they are 12 or 13 but many don't tell anyone until they are 16 or over. This is because they are worried others will react negatively. A negative reaction and fear of a negative reaction can be very damaging to a young person.

This guide is written for everyone who works with young people and who wants to enable lesbian, gay and bisexual young people to be themselves and grow and learn in a safe and supportive environment. The guide contains practical recommendations about how to show lesbian, gay and bisexual young people that they can be themselves as well as advice on where to find further information.

# 2

## Who might be lesbian, gay or bisexual?

Government actuaries estimate that six per cent of the population, around 3.6 million people, are lesbian, gay or bisexual – so there's a good chance that in a group of 30 at least two young people will be lesbian, gay or bisexual. It is not possible to guess a young person's sexual orientation. Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people come from every socio-economic background, they are of different ethnicities, faiths and each will have their own way of dressing, acting, talking and their own interests. People realise that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual at different stages in their lives. So even if a young person seems to have been heterosexual in the past, it doesn't mean they are heterosexual now, or will be heterosexual in the future. Similarly, one shouldn't assume that a young person who identifies as bisexual is just in a phase and will later on be lesbian, gay or heterosexual.

Most people are heterosexual and there is often therefore an assumption that everyone is. This means that young people who aren't heterosexual often feel they have to 'come out' – that is, let other people know they are lesbian, gay or bisexual. People come out in lots of different ways. Sometimes they choose to make a statement to everyone or to proactively tell people they are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Some choose to simply let people find out what their sexual orientation is as it comes up and others may come out to themselves but decide not to let anyone know at all. How and when someone comes out is up to them. When young people come out, this is often the first time they've told anyone and how they do that will often be in response to the way they think others will react.

Being lesbian, gay or bisexual is not in itself a problem, or a risk, for young people. Young people tell Stonewall that they experience problems when other people – teachers, doctors, parents and family, friends, youth workers, faith leaders and other young people – respond negatively to the fact that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual.

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## The experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people

Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people have the same needs as any other teenager. They'll enjoy, achieve and stay safe if they:

- Feel able to be themselves
- Feel valued for who they are
- Feel included and part of a community
- Have access to resources and information relevant to them
- Feel safe and supported
- Feel they have people to talk to if things aren't going so well

Some schools, colleges and youth groups already provide an environment where the needs of all young people, including lesbian, gay and bisexual young people, are met. However, Stonewall's 2007 research, *The School Report*, found that **60 per cent** of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people feel there is neither an adult at home nor at school who they can talk to about their sexual orientation. **Seven in ten** have never been taught about lesbian, gay and bisexual people or issues in class. **Four in five** young gay people have no access in school to resources that can help them. This stops young people feeling able to be themselves.

“In RE the teacher avoided the question as best she could, but spoke to me after (assuming from my opinion and some of class members' comments that I was gay) about good and bad life choices, and that I shouldn't make a decision now but that I should resist going along with things that are bad life choices which will 'damage' me. May, 16, secondary school (South West), *The School Report*

Stonewall's 2009 research, *The Teachers' Report*, based on YouGov polling found that secondary school teachers say that homophobic bullying is the **most frequent** form of bullying after bullying because of weight and **three times** more prevalent than bullying due to religion or ethnicity. More than a **quarter** of secondary school staff (28 per cent) would not feel confident supporting a pupil who came out to them as lesbian, gay or bisexual. **Two in five** would not feel confident providing pupils with information, advice and guidance on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues.



I do not believe my headteacher to be supportive in the slightest of our gay and lesbian students: he is, in my opinion, as bigoted as the bullies.

Daniel, teacher, secondary school (North East), *The Teachers' Report*



I would want to be following a clear and specific school policy regarding these issues before I addressed them in the classroom to ensure I would not be left open to criticism from school senior management, governors or parents.

Nat, teacher, faith primary school (East of England), *The Teachers' Report*

However, when schools, colleges and youth settings get this right and meet the needs of all young people, lesbian, gay and bisexual young people find it much easier to be themselves.



We were told how inappropriate it is to discriminate against people because of their sexuality. Our school is pretty good for things like that. There is always someone you can talk to about it who will take you seriously. If you are being bullied then it is taken seriously and action is immediately taken. Fergus, 17, comprehensive school (Scotland), *The School Report*

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## Supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual young people

“Gay issues need to be talked about in school. Make it as normal as possible because being gay is normal and it’s part of most people’s life because everyone, in theory, should know someone who’s gay, like a family member or someone. Stonewall Youth Volunteer

All professionals working with young people should want to ensure that lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are able to fulfill their potential but some are unsure about how to support them.

The following sections outline how adults can indicate to young people that they will be supportive of any young person who is lesbian, gay or bisexual, how to respond if someone comes out, and how to support them once they have come out.

### Avoiding assumptions

“I think adults shouldn’t just assume everyone is straight because not everyone is. All staff should represent all their students and they shouldn’t just say ‘oh there are no gay students here’ and they don’t know that – they don’t know every student’s personal life. Stonewall Youth Volunteer

Not every young person will be heterosexual and not all young people will grow up to be heterosexual adults. Sometimes it’s easy to make assumptions about who is lesbian, gay or bisexual and who is heterosexual. Not all boys who don’t act like other boys will be gay – though they are more likely to experience homophobic bullying. Similarly, not all ‘sporty’ girls or girls with short hair will be lesbians. It’s also important to remember that not all parents, carers, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts are heterosexual either.

Young people tell Stonewall that it’s often difficult to tell someone

that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual because of the way teachers or other people ask questions. They say that adults assume every young person is heterosexual, which makes it difficult for the young person to tell them they are lesbian, gay or bisexual. For example, 'Do you have a boyfriend?' is a difficult question for a young lesbian to answer if she is not out. A better phrase would be: 'Are you seeing anyone?'

## Young people and coming out

“If someone comes out, the teacher should say that it's fine. Maybe they could say that lots of people are gay, lesbian or bisexual and that it doesn't make any difference. The teacher definitely shouldn't say this could just be a phase.

They should ask how the student feels about it and also maybe ask 'why did you feel the need to tell me this'? A lot of people are pretty comfortable with their sexuality unless they are being bullied so that might be a reason for telling an adult. Another reason could be because they need more information so maybe the teacher could also ask 'do you have any questions for me?' Stonewall Youth Volunteer

“It's best to have someone to talk things over, like they do with other things. Someone who doesn't tell you what to do but who's prepared just to listen. It is good to have someone in school, college, or in the workplace to talk to and who can give advice on how to come out. They could say: 'I'll do my best to support you and if anything happens come see me and I can address it with you.' Stonewall Youth Volunteer

When a young person tells someone they are lesbian, gay or bisexual, it's an indication that they have confidence that an adult will respond appropriately, and they trust them. It might also indicate

that the young person is turning to an adult for information or further support. It is possible that the adult is the first person they've told that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual. This is therefore a good opportunity to reinforce that the young person can be him or herself and that being lesbian, gay or bisexual does not present a challenge or a problem. In order to support a young person coming out you should:

- Offer reassurance
- Tell the young person their confidentiality will be respected
- Listen and be supportive
- Discuss how parents and carers might respond
- Ask the young person how they'd like to proceed and whether they would like further information
- Let them know they can come and talk to you again or recommend someone else that they can speak to

When a young person comes out, it's important to remind them they can talk in confidence. Being lesbian, gay or bisexual is not an indication that a young person is at risk. Like all personal conversations with young people however, young people should be aware that adults have a responsibility to keep them safe and that might mean involving someone else. *When it is judged that a young person is at risk of significant harm in some other way* this will result in an obligation to disclose.

For example – it should not constitute a safeguarding risk if a young person tells an adult:

- They're lesbian, gay or bisexual
- They're having a relationship with someone of a similar age
- They're attending a youth group
- They're chatting with other young people online

or anything along these lines.

However, it may constitute a safeguarding risk and an adult should discuss with the young person ways to protect them if they tell you:

- They're experiencing abuse at home or are at risk of homelessness
- They're in a relationship with someone considerably older
- They go to pubs and clubs although they are underage
- They're chatting with adults online

or anything along these lines.

## Working with parents and carers

“Teachers need to be better at talking to parents. If someone asks them to help talk to their parents about something, then they should be able to help you and maybe invite the parents to the school or something – it's about having that safe space to come out. Stonewall Youth Volunteer

“They could send a generic letter home to parents for example that says homophobic language will not be accepted inside school grounds to make clear that this is a safe environment. Stonewall Youth Volunteer

Parents and carers want the best for their children and want them to live happy and fulfilled lives – they don't want them to be bullied or discriminated against regardless of whether their child is lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual. Not all young people will want their parents to know about their sexual orientation. If a young person says that they're lesbian, gay or bisexual, adults are not obliged to discuss this with parents and to do so without the young person's permission would be a breach of confidentiality. It is important to discuss with young people whether they've told their parents they are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Young people tell Stonewall that they feel isolated if they are not able to talk to their parents. They also say that they are anxious about how their parents might respond and this can affect how they feel about being lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Parents who have lesbian, gay or bisexual children may be concerned that their child will be bullied because of their sexual

orientation. They may be worried that their child will not have the adulthood that they anticipated. Some might fear they will never have grandchildren, even though many lesbian, gay and bisexual couples now have children. They may be angry or disappointed. Young lesbian, gay or bisexual people will need support from other adults and agencies if their parents have responded negatively to their sexual orientation. Schools, GPs, youth workers and other professionals can play an important role in providing that support and information.

Young people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual are more likely to feel positive about their sexual orientation if their parents are understanding and supportive. Schools can help all parents feel more comfortable about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues by:

- Informing parents and carers that schools will provide information, help and guidance on many different issues that may affect their children, including lesbian, gay and bisexual issues
- Ensuring parents and carers understand that no student will be discriminated against and that all students are welcome, regardless of their sexual orientation
- Reassuring parents and carers that every effort will be made to ensure their son or daughter feels part of the community whether they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual and that homophobic bullying is not tolerated
- Signposting parents and carers to organisations which can provide further help

Creating an inclusive atmosphere is not only for the benefit of young people but will also help parents, guardians and siblings of lesbian, gay and bisexual students.

## Young people and bullying



I can't tell anyone because, basically, no-one knows that I am gay... I got punched in the corridor today for example, and I can't tell the teacher because it will involve coming out. Nick, 14, secondary school (Wales), *The School Report*



Homophobic bullying needs to be addressed the minute it happens.

Stonewall Youth Volunteer

Every young person has the right to be treated with dignity and respect and grow up free from fear of bullying, including all young people who are openly lesbian, gay or bisexual.

**65 per cent** of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people experience homophobic bullying at school. This leads them to skip school and lowers their self-esteem and attainment and aspirations. Where homophobic bullying is prevented and tackled effectively, lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are **more than twice** as likely to feel part of their school community, they enjoy going to school and feel respected. They are nearly **three times** more likely to feel able to be themselves. *The School Report*



If pupils express misunderstanding about what it means to be gay, or show an anti-gay attitude, I confront the issue directly with the whole class so that it removes any mystery or secrecy.

Alisa, teacher, faith secondary school (London), *The Teachers' Report*



I talked to the kids when they called one of the boys 'gay' because he was a dancer. They realised how talented he was and began to look up to him.

Alison, teacher, secondary school (West Midlands), *The Teachers' Report*

Young people often realise early on that they're lesbian, gay or bisexual. However, if they are learning in an environment where homophobic bullying and homophobic language are not challenged, they are unlikely to feel able to be open about their sexual orientation until much later – which can have detrimental effects on their self-esteem, school work and aspirations. In 2007, Stonewall wrote practical guidance on preventing and tackling homophobic bullying in schools, commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and Stonewall has published these Education Guides. Young people tell us that they want anti-bullying policies to specifically mention homophobic bullying and that they want teachers to challenge it whenever it happens.

## Meeting other lesbian, gay and bisexual young people



If teachers knew about local lesbian, gay and bisexual youth groups, that would help. Most of the time, they don't know anything so people have to look it up themselves. If teachers knew about a group and someone comes out to them, they could just say 'oh, you know that there's a youth group in your area'. Stonewall Youth Volunteer



It's great if there are campaigns in schools which are supported by external organisations – similar to my campaign with the Stonewall Youth Volunteering Programme. Through that, we meet other young people and form links with other schools where we can highlight the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students. Stonewall Youth Volunteer

All young people want places to go and things to do in an environment where they feel valued and accepted. A lesbian, gay or bisexual young person who does not feel included and welcome at services for young people, such as youth clubs, sport teams and after school groups, may seek support and a community elsewhere. Some lesbian, gay and bisexual young people hope to find this in pubs and clubs even if they are underage and this makes them more likely to make unsafe choices.

**Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are two and a half times more likely to go to a pub and club rather than a youth group. *The School Report***

It is therefore important to make sure lesbian, gay and bisexual young people feel included and are able to meet other young people, including other lesbian, gay and bisexual young people, in a safe environment. Schools and other agencies should ensure that lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are welcome in all local services and take steps to identify local lesbian, gay and bisexual youth provision.

“We need more information. These kids need to be able to contact support services outside of school as school is only a small part of their daily lives.

Morgan, teacher, secondary school (South East), *The Teachers' Report*

There are a number of activities and services especially for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people. Initiatives include gay youth groups, volunteer schemes, help lines and counselling as well as youth led projects. Staff should know about initiatives in the local area for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people and support anyone who wishes to start their own project. A good starting point for research is Stonewall's *What's in my area?* database and our Youth Volunteering Programme. When investigating a local service, find out where it is based, how accessible it is, whether it is funded and supported by the local authority or Primary Care Trust or another charity, who runs it, and what their safeguarding procedures are. If possible, talk to the adult running the service. A young person will feel more confident seeking safe and age-appropriate support if they know what to expect.

## Providing relevant information

“Sex and Relationship Education should be taught in a gender neutral way. My teacher only talked about 'your boyfriend'. I just switched off because it didn't apply to me at all. If they used 'partner' instead, that could make it so much more inclusive. The gay girls in my school didn't think they could get STIs at all. Teachers need to know their same-sex sex education so that if students have questions, they would be able to give them that information.” Stonewall Youth Volunteer

When young people realise they are lesbian, gay or bisexual, they generally have a lot of questions. Young people need access to information relevant to them and it is important they have peers and adults they feel they can talk to.

All young people need accurate and reliable information to be able to make safe choices and young people tell us that they would like lesbian, gay and bisexual issues discussed in class, especially in Sex

The flowchart on the following pages can be photocopied and circulated

# Getting it right: How to respond when a young person comes out

Young Person: *I think I might be gay.*

Staff: **Ok. I'm glad you've come to talk to me about it. How do you feel?**

YP: *Scared, alone, I don't know anyone else who is gay.*

Staff: **Well, you won't be the only gay young person here. It is ok to be gay you know. Have you discussed this with your parents?**



YP: *No. I don't want to tell them because I'm worried about how they'll react.*

YP: *No, but I'm going to tell them soon.*

YP: *Yes. My dad refuses to speak to me.*



Staff: **Ok, we can talk about that later and think about some ways to approach it.**

Staff: **Good. Have you thought about how they might react?**

Staff: **Ok, well we can help you with that. What does your mum say? Is there anyone else in your family who can help? There are organisations that can help – I can give you their details.**



YP: *No. I don't really know where to start. It would be good to know some other gay people.*

YP: *Yes, I went on some websites but I haven't met anyone my age yet.*

Staff: **Have you met anybody else who is gay? Or joined any groups or looked at resources?**

YP: *Yes. I've been to a gay bar and a club a few times – when I've been able to get in.*



**Staff:** Well, there's a local youth group that meets every week. There are also websites for young people. I can give you the details of them, and some advice about how to use the internet safely.

**Staff:** There are some good youth sites. I'll give you the details, but you need to be very careful on the web. If you find that you are being contacted by adults be very cautious and alert a parent/carer or teacher immediately.

**Staff:** Have you thought about going to the local youth group instead? You'll be able to meet people of your own age. You are underage, and shouldn't be going to clubs. I'll get you the details.

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**Staff:** Does anyone at school know? Has anyone treated you any differently because you are gay?

**YP:** No, they don't know, and I don't want them to either. Everyone says something is 'gay' when they mean something is rubbish. I just don't want to get bullied.

**YP:** Some know and they are ok with it, but I don't want the others to find out.

**YP:** Yes, they all know and some have given me a hard time about it.

**Staff:** We won't let that happen. Homophobic bullying is not tolerated in this school, and we will respond effectively to any incidents.

**Staff:** What do your friends think? Will they be supportive? And if other students find it difficult come and talk to me. I can assure you we won't tolerate homophobic bullying in this school.

**Staff:** I'm glad you've told me. I'll be able to help you sort this out. Do you feel able to give me any names/times when incidents have occurred?

**Staff:** I'm glad you've told me. You've nothing to be ashamed of – lots of people are gay. I'll find you the details of the youth group – that is better than going to clubs and pubs. And I'll find details of groups that your parents might want to contact. I also want you to tell me if anybody bullies you. We can't stop it if you don't tell us.

and Relationship Education but also in English Literature, History, Information Technology etc. Stonewall's teaching resource '*Oh no! Not the gay thing!*' provides lesson ideas for seven different subjects.

“It definitely needs to be addressed in Sex and Relationship Education and not just when talking about AIDS. Teachers need to say, this is what actually happens in relationship, this is what a civil partnership is.

Stonewall Youth Volunteer

Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people can be best supported by ensuring they have access to a range of resources such as age appropriate books, films, websites, info leaflets, magazines and information about the local lesbian, gay and bisexual youth group.

“They have a lot of leaflets everywhere on a variety of things, like teenage pregnancy or arranged marriage and it wouldn't hurt to have a couple of gay leaflets about. Or if at least teachers knew where the information was so they could tell the students where to access it. Stonewall Youth Volunteer

Good libraries have a range of different resources on lesbian, gay and bisexual topics and they make sure these are easy to find, can be searched for online and accessed anonymously. It is important to check firewall settings to ensure safe sites on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues and bullying websites are not blocked. Notice boards, resource points and a section on the website are also good ways of publicising information.

“My school blocked every website which had lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans in the title so you couldn't even access the Stonewall website or look for gay youth groups. This is valuable information people are trying to access and many aren't especially comfortable accessing that kind of information from home. Stonewall Youth Volunteer

“Books on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues should be in the library because that way people can learn about the history and that it's not anything different because gay people have always existed. Stonewall Youth Volunteer

## Helping young people stay safe

“Me and a lesbian couple I knew were at a pub and three men were taking an interest in our conversation about being attracted to women... they verbally abused us a bit but it didn't really bother me that much... when we left the pub they followed us without us knowing... when we got to a relatively secluded area they offered us money if we 'proved we were lesbians' and when we refused they got pushy... there was a fight and I ended up being undressed.

Sammy, 17, FE college (South East), *The School Report*

A young person who doesn't feel able to be open with adults about their sexual orientation, does not feel included and who does not receive information relevant to them at school may seek support elsewhere. Online search for the local lesbian, gay and bisexual youth group is often likely to fail – either due to strict firewall settings blocking any search with the words 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual' or because the young person will be confronted with a great number and wide spectrum of websites – not all of them appropriate, accurate, reliable or safe.

It is therefore helpful to be able to provide a list of reliable and appropriate websites with useful information for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people as a starting point. This could be accompanied by tips and links on staying safe online and when out and about. It will also help ensure that lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are making age-appropriate choices and know how to stay safe.

“It would be good if they made sure that they use gender neutral terms in internet safety lessons, just because otherwise it excludes people.

Stonewall Youth Volunteer

**Online:** All young people should be aware of the risks of sharing any personal details online, be that through e-mail, in a forum, blog or at a dating site. They should also know what to do if they experience cyberbullying.

**Out and about:** All young people should know that there are

great risks associated when meeting up with people they got to know online. A young lesbian, gay or bisexual person will naturally want to meet other lesbian, gay or bisexual people with similar experiences, and they will seek friends they can relate to and a community where they can be themselves. This can make them vulnerable and it's therefore important they know that healthy friendships and relationships are based on mutual respect and trust and where to turn to for further advice and support.

## **Making lesbian, gay and bisexual people visible**



We studied Carol Ann Duffy but we were never told she was gay. And the same with Oscar Wilde. If all students knew that sort of information they might think twice about what they are saying because they would realise that gay people did some really good stuff and it would portray them in a more positive light. It is important to show that gay people can be successful. Let's talk about gay artists, gay literature, and let's celebrate lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans history month in February as a whole school event so everyone has to be involved. Stonewall Youth Volunteer

It is easy to feel invisible as a lesbian, gay or bisexual young person. Raising awareness about sexual orientation diversity with young people and staff can make a real difference to the environment of a school, college, youth club or any other service young people access.

To make lesbian, gay and bisexual young people feel visible:

- Integrate lesbian, gay and bisexual issues into the curriculum and encourage open discussions with students, staff and parents
- Display positive images and representations of lesbian, gay and bisexual people
- Invite the local lesbian, gay and bisexual youth group to talk to students
- Make sure lesbian, gay and bisexual young people have a say and their ideas and opinions are valued

- Ensure brochures, newsletters, websites, and communication with young people and parents are clearly inclusive of all young people



A student asked a question over whether an historical political figure was gay and this turned into discussion on what are essential qualities for leadership and whether sexuality is relevant.

Eleanor, teacher, independent secondary school (South East), *The Teachers' Report*

**Young people tell us that if lesbian, gay and bisexual issues are taught in a positive way as part of the curriculum, they are**

- **60 per cent** more likely to be happy at school
- **40 per cent** more likely to feel respected
- **50 per cent** more likely to feel their school is an accepting, tolerant school where they feel welcome
- **one and a half times** more likely to feel safe at school
- **36 per cent** more likely to enjoy going to school
- more than **69 per cent** more likely to feel able to be themselves
- **25 per cent** more likely to feel that there is an adult at school who they can talk to about being lesbian, gay or bisexual

*The School Report*

## The role of lesbian, gay and bisexual staff

“Gay teachers and staff should be out wherever possible. It’s good to be able to talk to a gay teacher about gay stuff rather than talk to a heterosexual teacher because they have probably experienced bullying and coming out. But teachers don’t want to come out in school because it’s such a hostile environment.” Stonewall Youth Volunteer

A key indicator of an inclusive environment is the extent to which staff are able to be open about their sexual orientation. If staff do not feel able to be open about being lesbian, gay or bisexual, it’s unlikely that a young person would feel able to be open about being lesbian, gay or bisexual. Lesbian, gay and bisexual staff can be good role models for all students, including those who think they might be lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual staff are sometimes unsure how much they’re allowed to reveal about their private life and what they can and cannot talk about. This depends entirely on the ethos and code of conduct of the school, college or youth setting but the same rules should apply to all staff, whether lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual. So for example, if a heterosexual teacher is open about their relationship status, lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers should be able to be open as well.

“I was asked whether I knew any gay people and what they are like. I answered honestly telling them about my friends who are gay. They were interested in what I had to say and this led to further discussions on how you should treat people. The students were very respectful.”

Maya, teacher, secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber), *The Teachers’ Report*

However, it’s not only the role of lesbian, gay or bisexual staff to support lesbian, gay or bisexual young people. Any member of staff regardless of their sexual orientation can be an important role model for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people by talking openly about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues, displaying positive materials and challenging homophobia. Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people should be able to approach any member of staff to talk about issues

that affect them. The gay community is very diverse and therefore being lesbian, gay or bisexual doesn't mean a member of staff will be able to support a lesbian, gay or bisexual young person in every challenge they face. It is therefore good practice to provide all staff, including support staff, with information and training on how to support lesbian, gay and bisexual young people.

## Using inside and outside experience

“It would be good to have lesbian, gay, bisexual alliances or a council sort of thing. Representatives could then go to meetings and ensure lesbian, gay and bisexual young people have their own voice. Or something like peer mentors – it would be great if they were trained in anti-homophobic bullying work. Organisations like Stonewall can help a lot with that. The more support a school gets from the outside the better.

Stonewall Youth Volunteer

Agencies should work together to enable young people to be safe, healthy and able to be themselves. Local and national organisations are able to support schools, colleges, health organisations and others to support young lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It's helpful to find out what kind of initiatives are going on elsewhere. This guide includes case studies from local authorities which are members of Stonewall's Education Champions programme. Education Champions work with Stonewall and each other to provide inclusive environments and tackle homophobic bullying in their local schools and communities.

# 5

## Learning from others

### case study 01

#### Allsorts Youth Project – lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans Youth Peer Education Project, Brighton & Hove

Allsorts provides a range of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people living in Brighton & Hove. Since 2005, Allsorts has also developed a lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (LGBT) Youth Peer Education Project. This involves trained LGBT youth peer educators going into local secondary schools, colleges and youth projects and running 'Sexuality and Gender Identity Awareness' workshops for their peers.

With the support of Allsorts' staff, the peer educators lead a range of workshop activities exploring the impact that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language and bullying has on LGBT youth. The peer educators also talk about their personal experiences of growing up as an LGBT young person. This is particularly powerful: hearing the young people's personal stories encourages the workshop participants to empathise with their LGBT peers.

The peer educators have also helped to run 'Challenging Homophobic Language' training for staff at local secondary and primary schools. Run in partnership with Brighton & Hove Healthy Schools Team, the training aims to provide staff with practical guidance on how homophobic language can be challenged. From April 2008 to March 2009, the peer educators helped to run 45 training sessions to six schools, nine colleges, one youth project and two conferences, reaching over 481 young people and 52 teachers and other staff.

The peer education project has been very well received by young people and staff. Feedback suggests that the training has

greatly helped schools to challenge homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language and bullying. Response from one teacher is typical: 'I wanted to feedback to you what one of our students said after you had gone. She said that she'd no longer use the word 'gay' to describe things that she didn't like as she now understood the impact it could have on other people and how unfair it was. I think it is brilliant that you were able to change her attitude towards the language that she spoke.'



## **Farlingaye High School, Suffolk**

At Farlingaye, we've always believed it's essential to promote equality of opportunity and for everyone to actively engage in strategies that promote this. Fundamental to this is our Rights and Responsibilities approach – ask any student and they'll tell you that they have the right to be safe, to learn and to be treated with respect; and thus they have the responsibility to treat others with respect, to allow others to learn and ensure others are safe. With this as our 'backbone' it's easy to reward and recognise positive behaviour and to challenge unpleasant or damaging behaviour.

Supporting our lesbian, gay and bisexual students is very much part of our Equal Opportunities Policy. The School Council, staff and governors wanted to recognise that everyone has the right to be different and to be an individual. For some students this can be difficult, especially due to peer pressure and/or traditional attitudes in their local community. We therefore believe in building up students' self-esteem and confidence as this provides them with the confidence to stand up for their values and beliefs. We achieve this through initiatives such as Our Student Voice through which students are essentially involved in school life – they interview prospective staff, are on working parties, advise the governing body, provide feedback on lessons and are represented

on all our various Councils. We also have a varied and vast system of peer and adult mentoring and a huge range of extracurricular activities ensures students can find things they enjoy and new friends who have similar interests. Support with problems including a Student Support Centre, a Relationships Clinic, a counsellor, a Self Esteem Group, support for Young Carers and Anger Management all help students know we're on their side.

We believe in zero tolerance of negative and bullying remarks, not only supporting the victim but challenging and working with the instigator to try to change their behaviour, and we are currently working hard to stop the negative use of the word 'gay' – the highly motivational and inspirational visit by Sir Ian McKellen, organised by Stonewall, has significantly advanced this agenda.

Much of our work on gay and lesbian rights is currently led by an amazing Year 12 student, who also works closely with Suffolk County Council. Her current project is to develop and facilitate a Continuing Professional Development session for our staff to help them understand the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students and how we should challenge negative images and language. Other students and a couple of teachers support her with this project. She is also really pushing us to consider the needs of transgender students – something I'd never thought about before – and as a result we're re-writing our Equal Opportunities Policy to include this important area.



## Wisewood School and Community Sports College, Sheffield

Wisewood School and Community Sports College has a well established approach in supporting young lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Our approach has been led by the specialist PSHE Co-ordinator who has been fully supported by the School's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and our governing body.

Over the last five years our PSHE work has significantly contributed to normalising diversity work around sexuality within the school. We teach a specific unit on sexuality in PSHE.

Stonewall's *Some people are gay. Get over it!* posters have been placed throughout the school including inside and outside our PSHE rooms. In addition, publicity including posters from the local organisation working with lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) young people *Fruitbowl*, have been extensively circulated within school.

If a young person tells us about their sexuality, we always take a welcoming, friendly and inclusive approach and ask the young person about the information that they would like to receive. We give a leaflet on *Fruitbowl* and offer support, for example if the young person wants to tell their friends, we advise them on how to come out. We also tell them how to tell their parents about coming out.

We have run an LGB group which meets once or twice a term within a safe environment and invitations to the meetings are sent by the young people.

We have ensured that all Year Heads have information on *Fruitbowl* and all school staff receive copies of Stonewall guidance.

We always challenge any homophobic language that we come across and provide support to any LGB young person experiencing bullying.

Our approach through having specialist PSHE teachers which have been supported by SLT and our governors have significantly contributed towards making Wisewood an inclusive school for our LGB young people.

# 6

## Top ten recommendations on supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual young people

### 1 DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

It's impossible to tell whether a young person is lesbian, gay or bisexual by the way they act, talk, dress or by who their friends are.

### 2 BE POSITIVE WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE COME OUT AND KNOW WHAT TO SAY

Offer them reassurance, listen and be supportive, discuss how parents and carers might respond, ask how they feel and how they would like to proceed.

### 3 WORK WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

Make sure all parents and carers know that lesbian, gay and bisexual issues will be covered in school. Don't discuss a young person's sexual orientation with parents without the young person's permission. Remember that many parents and carers can feel overwhelmed when they find out their child is gay so be prepared to provide them with information and advice.

### 4 PROTECT YOUNG PEOPLE FROM BULLYING

All young people have the right to grow up free from fear of bullying and there are a few easy steps which can significantly reduce homophobic bullying. See Stonewall's research *The School Report* and *The Teachers' Report* for more information at [www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool)

### 5 ENSURE LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE PLACES TO GO AND THINGS TO DO

Any setting and service for young people can make sure it's inclusive by creating a zero-tolerance zone for homophobic bullying, knowing what local services exist and helping young people find safe places to go.

## **6 PROVIDE ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND INFORMATION**

Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people should have easy access to information and a range of resources on issues that affect them in order to have all the information they need to make safe choices. This can be achieved by making the curriculum, and especially Sex and Relationship Education, inclusive and by displaying leaflets, books, films, magazines at info points, notice boards, in the library and by providing information and links online.

## **7 HELP LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL YOUNG PEOPLE TO STAY SAFE ONLINE AND WHEN OUT AND ABOUT**

It is helpful to provide a list of reliable and appropriate websites with useful information for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people alongside tips on staying safe online and when out and about.

## **8 INCREASE VISIBILITY**

Raising awareness of lesbian, gay and bisexual people with young people, staff and parents can make a real difference to the environment of a school, college, youth club or any other service that lesbian, gay and bisexual young people access and will also make them feel welcome and included.

## **9 THE ROLE OF STAFF**

Openly lesbian, gay and bisexual staff can be important role models, especially for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people but any member of staff, regardless of their sexual orientation, can be a great role model by talking openly and positively about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues, using materials which celebrate diversity and by challenging homophobia.

## **10 USING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE EXPERIENCE**

Don't forget, lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are themselves experts and should be given a voice and be involved in any initiatives to support them. Outside experts such as community groups can also be a very useful resource.

# 7

## Further information

For further information on Stonewall's Education for All campaign, homophobic bullying and to find out about all events, reports, materials and teaching resources, please visit [www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool)

### Stonewall education events

[www.stonewall.org.uk/educationevents](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/educationevents)

- Education for All Conference for youth and education sector professionals
- Youth Events for young lesbian, gay and bisexual people

### Stonewall resources

[www.stonewall.org.uk/educationresources](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/educationresources)

- Education Guide *Challenging homophobic language*
- *FIT* – an interactive DVD teaching resource for Key Stages 3 and 4 accompanied by a teacher resource pack and online lesson plans
- *Spell It Out* training DVD for teachers which covers issues such as how to challenge homophobic language in the classroom and staff room and how to react when a young person comes out
- 'Oh no! Not the gay thing!' lesson ideas on how to integrate lesbian, gay and bisexual issues into the curriculum for 7 subject areas at Key Stages 3 and 4
- *The School Report* (2007) based on a survey of over 1,000 lesbian, gay and bisexual young people
- *The Teachers' Report* (2009) based on a YouGov polling of over 2,000 primary and secondary teachers and other school staff

- Department for Children, Schools and Families guidance  
*Preventing and responding to homophobic bullying in schools*
- *Some people are gay. Get over it!* materials including stickers, posters, postcards, t-shirts and travelcard holders
- List of books for primary and secondary school

### **Further links and information**

- *What's in my area?* – database for local LGBT community and youth groups [www.stonewall.org.uk/whatsinmyarea](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/whatsinmyarea)
- For links on issues such as health, family and friends, faith [www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool/links](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool/links)

### **Stonewall programmes**

- Education Champions programme for local authorities  
[www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions)
- Youth Volunteering Programme for young people 16-25  
[www.stonewall.org.uk/youthvolunteeringprogramme](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/youthvolunteeringprogramme)
- Diversity Champions programme for employers  
[www.stonewall.org.uk/diversitychampions](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/diversitychampions)

### **We'd like to hear from you!**

Tell us what you think about Stonewall's materials and find out how you can get more involved in the Education for All Campaign, visit [www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool) email [education@stonewall.org.uk](mailto:education@stonewall.org.uk) or call 08000 50 20 20 (free from landlines).



Stonewall's **Education Champions** Programme provides bespoke support and guidance to local authorities in tackling homophobia and homophobic bullying with their local schools. Local authorities work with Stonewall and each other to establish ways in which they can address homophobic bullying and promote a safe and inclusive learning environment for all young people.

If you would like more information on Stonewall's Education Champions Programme please visit

**[www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions)**

or email **[educationchampions@stonewall.org.uk](mailto:educationchampions@stonewall.org.uk)**

Supported by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation

**Education for All** is Stonewall's national campaign to tackle homophobic bullying

**[education@stonewall.org.uk](mailto:education@stonewall.org.uk)**

**08000 50 20 20**

**[www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall)**

Supporting lesbian,  
gay and bisexual  
young people

