

Homophobic Bullying Prevention Tips for Parents

What is homophobic bullying?

Homophobic bullying is defined as: bullying behaviours that are motivated by prejudice against a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Anyone can be the victim of homophobic bullying – anywhere and at any time.

What can parents or guardians do about homophobic bullying?

If your child is the victim of homophobic bullying:

Offer support – Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings and emotions. Let them know that it's okay to question their sexual orientation. There's no rush to decide or label feelings. Sexual identity can be a fluid and evolving aspect of one's personal identity and that's what makes us unique as human beings. If your child tells you about their experiences with bullying, they're asking you for help. They see you as a key resource and an important source of support in their lives.

Listen – Don't judge or blame them for what happened. Make sure your child knows that you love them for who they are and they don't deserve to be bullied or abused. Never turn your back or downplay your child's feelings. Always keep lines of communication open. Many heterosexual youth are also victims of

homophobic bullying – it often targets any youth who is perceived to be different.

Educate yourself – Reach out and find information on sexual and gender minority issues and childhood/adolescent development. Search for local supports in your community such as PFLAG (Parents, friends, and family member of LGBTQ* persons) and community youth groups or gay-straight student alliances. Talk to your school counsellor, family doctor, school resource officer or public health nurse.

Work with your school – Report any bullying incidents to your school immediately. Your school has a professional and legal responsibility to keep your child safe. Work with your school's administration team to develop a safety plan. Encourage your school and school board to include specific written protections for sexual and gender minorities in all bullying prevention policies and student codes of conduct.

With the passing of the Act to *Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children*, all Alberta Schools are required to set up a Gay-Straight Alliance, if requested by a student. If your school doesn't have a GSA, speak with a trusted teacher about starting one. For more information on setting up a GSA, please visit education.alberta.ca

alberta.ca

For more information, visit alberta.ca/bullying.
Call the Bullying Helpline 1-888-456-2323 toll-free anytime.
Trained staff are available to help in more than 170 languages.

Document everything – If the bullying persists, ask to speak to your school district’s administration team to develop a safety plan. Encourage your school and school board to include specific written protections for sexual and gender minority students in all bullying prevention policies and student codes of conduct.

Contact the police – If your child is threatened, physically hurt, sexually assaulted, or has their property damaged or stolen, immediately contact your local police service or RCMP detachment. Identify that you believe this to be a hate-motivated crime based on your child’s actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. Describe in detail the hate or prejudice expressed that caused your child to fear for their safety. If your police service has a specialized hate crimes unit, contact the unit or designated officer after you’ve filed your report.

Communicate and build self-esteem – Don’t ignore your child’s feelings. Homophobic bullying can be an intensely personal and disturbing experience for anyone, but especially for youth who are searching to find their identity and sense of belonging with a community of peers and adults. Create openings for your child to build their self-confidence and personal resilience. Help to develop their assets and strengths by creating opportunities for them to excel at activities of interest, such as sports, dance, drama or hobbies.

Understand that many youth who are bullied may feel ashamed. They can internalize negative feelings of guilt, ridicule, or stigma and can turn to negative coping mechanisms, such as drug and alcohol use, binge eating, smoking, cutting or other self-harming behaviours. Help your child move from internalizing to externalizing their thoughts, feelings and experiences so they can reach out and find support.

Everyone deserves the right to be themselves without fear of verbal or physical abuse or violence. When we don’t intervene in homophobic bullying, our silence and inaction send the powerful message that it is acceptable to discriminate and to hurt another human being. Homophobic bullying, just like other forms of bullying, is **not** a normal part of growing up and it should never be considered acceptable behaviour.

LGBTQ is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, queer and questioning identities. Sexual and gender minority is a synonymous term.*

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