

Some practical responses to create an atmosphere of equality



Do Not Assume Heterosexuality

The constant assumption of heterosexuality renders gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people invisible. Such invisibility is devastating to the individual's sense of self. Language can change easily from a divisive "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" to a more inclusive "partner".

Guarantee Equality

At policy level, organisations can check that their equal opportunities policy is inclusive of LGBT people, and that anti-bullying policies explicitly address homophobia. For those working directly with young people, it may be helpful to consider homophobia within an anti-discriminatory context, alongside sexism and racism. By including homophobia within a wider agenda, links between anti-discrimination and celebrating diversity can be drawn.

Create a Safe Environment

It's not enough for a youth group or school to have effective policies in place if they don't follow through with them. Schools and young groups must make it clear that neither physical violence nor harassing language like "faggot" and "dyke" will be tolerated. Displaying posters or information booklets can also help create this atmosphere. As long as LGBT issues are seen as "special" and outside the classroom, students will continue to see LGBT people as marginal.

Diversify Libraries and remove internet filtering systems

Access to current, relevant and safe information can be very important to young people discovering their sexuality. All too often relevant information about sexuality is not included in school libraries or within the youth group setting and young people have difficulties accessing such information using the web because the internet filtering system blocks sites with the mention of any gay vocabulary, thus promoting the concept that being gay is perverted and wrong.

Provide Training for Staff

Understanding the needs of LGBT youth/families and developing the skills to meet those needs should be expected of all professionals working in the youth field regardless of their personal or religious beliefs. Training can be provided to your organisation by contacting the LGBT Development Officers at Youthnet or the Rainbow Project. (contact details can be found on pages 18 and 20 of this guide)

Provide Appropriate Health Care and Education

While being LGBT is not only a “health issue,” health education on sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases should sensitively address the issues of LGBT people. Counselors and health staff should be particularly careful to make their sensitivity to LGBT issues clear. By educating themselves about related support services and agencies, and making pamphlets and other literature available, health professionals can provide for the needs of the LGBT students and families with whom they work.