



Celebrating difference

Challenging homophobia
in primary schools

All children need to be prepared for life in 21st century Britain. All primary schools want children to learn and play in an environment where they can be themselves and can talk honestly about their families. Primary school teachers say that children can experience homophobic bullying and may use homophobic language in their schools.

Homophobia in primary schools

Polling conducted by YouGov found that:

- Three quarters of primary school teachers report hearing the phrases 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay' in schools.
- More than two in five primary school teachers say children experience homophobic bullying in their schools.
- One in five primary school teachers say children experience homophobic verbal abuse in their schools.

The Teachers' Report, 2009

'My experience in primary schools is that the bullying of this type tends to be a boy thing – directed at boys who are more 'feminine' or just weaker or less popular than others, not necessarily homosexual.'

Julia, teacher, primary school (London)

'At primary level to call another child gay is currently a term of abuse.'

Jill, teacher, primary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

Different families. Same love.

Lots of gay people have families. Stonewall research, conducted with the University of Cambridge, found that children with two mums or two dads think their family is perfectly ordinary and has lots in common with their friends' families. They realise, however, that other children use the word 'gay' to mean rubbish. This can make them feel excluded and invisible if their families are never talked about.

- Children with gay parents said that lesbian, gay or bisexual people are never mentioned in schools and they find this difficult as it makes them feel invisible.
- Children with gay parents find it hard if other children use the word 'gay' to mean rubbish and teachers don't challenge it.
- Children are sometimes afraid to tell other people they have gay parents. They are worried about bullying and having to answer a lot of questions about their family. Many find this stressful and wish they could be open about their family.

Different Families, 2010

Top ten recommendations for primary schools

1	2	3	4	5
START EARLY	DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS	TEACH ABOUT DIFFERENT FAMILIES	INCLUDE LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL ISSUES IN THE CURRICULUM	ENCOURAGE PUPILS TO BE THEMSELVES
Use opportunities in circle time to talk about difference and different families to ensure all children, including those with gay parents, feel included and know it's ok to be different.	Don't assume that all children have a mum and a dad. It may stop them talking about what their family is really like and may discourage other parents from getting involved in school life.	Use books which feature different families during circle time and include them in your library. Stonewall posters can be used around school to highlight how all families can be different but have lots of things in common.	Schools should make an effort to include lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in the curriculum, for example, talking about civil partnerships as well as marriage.	Children learn better when they can be themselves and when they feel able to do what they enjoy. Challenge statements like 'pink is for girls' and encourage all pupils to participate in different activities.

Mark, eight, explains that because he has gay parents **‘when people say ‘gay’ ... I feel worse than other people’**. He says that a lot of the children in his school say this, but when asked how teachers handle it, Mark says **‘well they’re not usually there. The people are clever by being naughty’**. Mark doesn’t say anything when this happens. He says **‘I just ... walk away from them.’**

‘Pupils with parents or carers in same-sex relationships are often embarrassed to talk about it as they fear they will be bullied or negative comments will be made about their families. If this issue was discussed more openly in school then it would perhaps reduce issues such as this, as other children would hopefully see it not as something freaky or bad.’

Victoria, teacher, primary school (West Midlands)

Challenging homophobia

‘A pupil called another pupil ‘gay’ as a general insult. This was immediately pointed out as being inappropriate behaviour – just name-calling is bad enough! When asked if they knew what ‘gay’ meant, that pupil just said ‘stupid’. Another pupil pointed out that it meant being in love with someone of the same-sex, and also pointed out she had a family member who was gay and that she was pleased about that. That was the end of the discussion.’

Eve, teacher, primary school (East of England)

‘A child described his sister as ‘so gay’ and didn’t want to write about her. I knew he wasn’t being homophobic so addressed it in a light-hearted way and said that there was nothing wrong with her being gay if she was, and perhaps he would like to write about her girlfriend too. This led him to question his use of the word ‘gay’ in a bad way, and how perhaps he should choose a more suitable adjective in future.’

Victoria, teacher, primary school (West Midlands)

Many primary schools already celebrate difference. Children learn about different families and teachers encourage children to try new things – even if those activities are traditionally associated with boys or girls. Many teachers want to challenge homophobic language and teach about difference.

Polling conducted by YouGov found that:

- Almost nine in ten primary school teachers believe that school staff have a duty to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying.
- Two thirds of primary school teachers who have addressed these issues in the classroom did so because the children brought it up.
- Two thirds of primary school teachers who have included sexual orientation issues in their classrooms report a positive reaction from their pupils.
- Ninety five per cent of secondary school teachers and primary school teachers who have addressed these issues say they would do so again.

The Teachers’ Report, 2009

6	7	8	9	10
RESPOND TO HOMOPHOBIC LANGUAGE	TACKLE HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING	PROMOTE A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT	SEND A CLEAR MESSAGE FROM SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM	USE OUTSIDE EXPERIENCE
Challenge phrases like ‘that’s so gay’ or ‘you’re so gay’ every time you hear them and explain to children why using the word ‘gay’ to mean ‘rubbish’ is not acceptable.	All children should be able to concentrate on their learning and feel safe from bullying. Check that homophobic bullying is explicitly included in your anti-bullying policy and ensure it’s dealt with like other forms of bullying.	Make sure that your school clearly celebrates difference and diversity in everyday school life. Use assemblies and campaigns to communicate this to all staff, pupils and parents.	Most staff have the skills to tackle homophobic bullying but want to know they will be supported by the leadership team. Ensure all staff know this is important.	Work with others who are doing this work including other primary schools, Stonewall’s Education Champions programme, your local authority and secondary schools to share best practice.

What the law says

New Government legislation means that schools have to be proactive in preventing homophobic bullying and make all children feel included. The Public Duty requires all public bodies, including schools and academies, to eradicate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations – this means preventing and tackling homophobic bullying and language and talking about different families in school.

Education Champions Programme

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.

www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions

We'd like to hear from you!

- Tell us what you think about Stonewall's resources, order materials and find out how you can get more involved in our work.

Visit www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool/primary

email education@stonewall.org.uk

or call 08000 50 20 20 (free from landlines).

Further resources

www.stonewall.org.uk/educationresources



Celebrating Difference – Challenging homophobia in primary schools (2011)
28 minute primary school staff training DVD

Different Families Posters



Primary School Book List including Stonewall's top five:

Sissy Duckling
And Tango Makes Three
King and King
Spacegirl Pukes
The Family Book

Education Guides:
Challenging homophobic language,
Supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual young people,
Including different families



Different Families (2010)

The experiences of children with gay parents

The Teachers' Report (2009) YouGov polling of over 2,000 primary and secondary teachers and other school staff

