

## What can parents or guardians do about homophobic bullying?

Homophobic bullying is defined as bullying behaviours that are motivated by prejudice against a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. Anyone can be the victim of homophobic bullying, and it can happen anywhere, and at anytime.

If your child is the victim of homophobic bullying:

1. **Offer support** – Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings and emotions. Let him or her know that it's ok to question one's sexual orientation or gender identity. By your child telling you about their experiences with bullying, they're asking you for help and see you as a key resource and important source of support in their lives.
2. **Listen** – Don't judge or blame them for what happened. Make sure your child knows that you love them for whom they are and they don't deserve to be bullied or abused.
3. **Educate yourself** – Reach out and find information on sexual minority issues and childhood/adolescent development. Search for local supports in your community such as community groups or gay-straight alliances. Talk to your child's school counselor, family doctor, or public health nurse.
4. **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 LGBTQ students in its bullying prevention policies and student codes of conduct.
5. **Document everything** – Keep a written record of all bullying-related incidents and follow-up meetings, including the date, time, location, witnesses, and what was said or done.
6. **Contact the police** – If your child is threatened, physically hurt, sexually assaulted, or have had their property damaged or stolen, immediately contact your local police service or RCMP detachment. If your police service has a hate crimes unit, contact the unit or designated officer after you've filed your report. 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 his or her safety.

7. **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 to a community of peers and adults. Create opportunities for your child to build their self-confidence and personal resiliency. Help to develop their assets and strengths by creating opportunities for them to excel at activities of interest (i.e. Sports, dance, drama, or hobbies). Understand that many youth who are bullied may feel ashamed and internalize negative feelings of guilt, ridicule, or stigma. Help your son or daughter to move from internalizing to externalizing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Everyone deserves the right to be him or herself without fear of verbal or physical abuse or violence. Homophobic bullying, just like other forms of bullying, is **not** a normal part of growing up and should never be considered acceptable behaviour.

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\* LGBTQ is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, two-spirited and queer identities.