

Information about Sexual Orientation

What are the words I need to be familiar with before teaching this topic?¹

Attraction: includes emotional, intellectual, spiritual, physical, and sexual (similar to physical attraction, but it could be possible for someone to find someone else physically attractive but not desire to have a sexual relationship with that person) attraction. Most often, people are attracted to others based on more than one of the attraction levels.

Bisexual: to be a woman or a man and to have feelings of affection and attraction, both emotionally and physically, to both men and women.

GLBT: (**G**ay, **L**esbian, **B**isexual, and **T**ransgendered) a term encompassing all non-heterosexual sexual orientations.

Heterosexism: the belief that everyone is heterosexual.

Heterosexuality: to have feelings of affection and attraction, both emotionally and physically, to people of the opposite gender.

Homophobia: any negative belief, feeling or action directed against non-heterosexual persons or stimuli including gay, lesbian bisexual or transgendered individuals.

Homosexuality: to have feelings of affection and attraction, emotionally and physically to people of the same gender. Related terms: gay and lesbian.

Transgender: Transgendered is an umbrella term, relating to how some individuals express their gender identity. For some it might mean changing their gender, perhaps surgically; for others, to dress in the clothing of the “opposite” gender; for some, to be free to express themselves as neither male or female; and, for others it means having been born with ambiguous genitalia.

What are some issues I need to be aware of before I teach this topic?

All people, regardless of their sexual orientation, have a choice in how they choose to act on feelings of affection and attraction. All heterosexuals are not sexually active, and neither are all homosexuals, bisexuals and transgendered people.

Some effects of homophobia on people who are not heterosexual include:

- Low self esteem
- Depression & Suicide
- Alcoholism
- Violence; physical, emotional, verbal

¹ Definitions from Health Canada, 2000. http://www.hcsc.gc.ca/hppb/hiv_aids/youth/journey/whoami.html

- Discrimination
- Loneliness, Isolation, Rejection & Exclusion
- Homelessness

Some effects of homophobia on everyone include:

- Rigid adherence to gender roles
- Identity confusion
- Anger
- Fear

Sexual experimentation does not cause a person to become GLBT, just as smoking one cigarette does not make a person a smoker.

What does a student questioning his or her sexual identity experience?

STAGES OF IDENTITY

Models provide examples to enhance understanding of ways people may experience sexual identity formation. Sexual identity models are evolving, so if someone doesn't "fit" in a model it doesn't mean his or her experience is abnormal. A GLBT person may move from one stage to another in a non-linear fashion depending on his/her situation. If a student approaches a teacher with questions or concerns about identity development, you can refer this student to a counsellor for appropriate interventions.

STAGE 1	"I'm Different."	
THINKING/SAYING	BEHAVIOUR	FEELING
a) Correct and acceptable. Move to Stage 2. "I'm different, but it's OK."		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not belonging. • Loneliness. • Lack of connection.
b) Correct and unacceptable. Incongruent. "My behaviour may be GLBT, and GLBT is not OK."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same sex sexual contacts. • Infrequently, sexual exploring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion. • Cognitive dissonance.
c) Not correct and not acceptable. "I was only experimenting."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celibacy. • Compulsory heterosexuality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial. • Grief.

STAGE 2	Coming Out. Exploration.	
THINKING/SAYING	BEHAVIOUR	FEELING
a) Correct and acceptable. "I'm GLBT but what's a GLBT"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going out to events. • Self-discovery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification with the community. • Belonging.

<p>person?"</p> <p>b) Correct and unacceptable.</p> <p>"My sexuality is private and individual."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearing symbols. • Dependence on lover. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgement. • May identify as a bisexual.
<p>c) Not correct and not acceptable.</p> <p>"I'm in love with a person who happens to be of the same sex."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Closeted" behaviour. • Identity fusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some are bisexual. • Isolation. • Denial of same sex partner.

STAGE 3		Coming Out. Identity. Pride.	
THINKING/SAYING	BEHAVIOUR	FEELING	
<p>a) Correct and acceptable.</p> <p>"I'm GLBT and I'm OK."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wears symbols. • Goes to gay pride events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belonging. • Pride. • Acceptance of self. 	
<p>b) Correct and acceptable.</p> <p>May develop a belief that being GLBT is better than being straight.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively learns about GLBT culture. • Social circles enlarge within GLBT community. • May be exclusively GLBT. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger at hetero-sexist society. 	
<p>c) Not correct and not acceptable.</p> <p>"I'm not GLBT even though I have an intimate relationship with someone of the same sex."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement into a hidden relationship. • Develop an "in the closet" presence. • Social circles diminish. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation • Denial. • Energy drain (due to covering up and denying). • Feeling trapped in a relationship. 	

STAGE 4		Congruence. Integration.	
THINKING/SAYING	BEHAVIOUR	FEELING	
<p>"I'm GLBT. I'm proud and I recognize that heterosexuals can and will support me."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows integration in life as a GLBT person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GLBT is part of my identity. • Other life tasks are important, too. 	

Credits:

Cass, V. (1979). Homosexual Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4 (3), 219-235.

Young, R.E. (1990). Realizing That the Knight in Shining Armour Is a Woman: Theories and Issues in Lesbian Identity Development. Unpublished manuscript.

Lewis, L. (1984). The Coming Out Process for Lesbians: Integrating a Stable Identity. *Social Work*, 29 (5).

Lindquist, T. (no date). Counseling Issues with Lesbian Clients, Thurston County Rape Relief, Olympia, WA.

What Can I Do About Safety For Gay and Lesbian Students and Staff In My School?

1. Read books and other materials that provide accurate and up-to-date information about GLBT individuals and anti-homophobia.
The Alberta Teachers Association has an excellent website that provides Alberta teachers with information, contacts and resources that can assist them in creating safe, caring and inclusive learning environments for GLBT students and staff.
To access please copy and paste the following in your browser:

<http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Issues%20In%20Education/Diversity%20and%20Human%20Rights/Sexual%20Orientation/Pages/Index.aspx>

2. Attend workshops on diversity and safety. Arrange workshops for your colleagues and students at your school.
3. Think about, recognize and change your own reactions.
 - Stop telling or laughing at jokes that put people down.
 - Stop assuming that everyone is heterosexual.
4. Withdraw your silent support and consent for the disrespectful actions of colleagues, parents and students.
 - Do not allow students to name-call, harass or tease others.
 - Let your colleagues know that innuendo's, jokes and teasing are unacceptable.
5. Provide a supportive environment for the expression of all sexualities.
 - Make it clear that you are available as a source of support.
 - Use inclusive language. (I.e., partner instead of boy or girlfriend.)
 - Make sure there is access to sexuality information that is accurate and age-appropriate.
 - Identify or develop local resources (support groups or agencies) that can provide assistance, and make them accessible by students.