



FACTS AND MYTHS ABOUT ANTI-HOMOPHOBIA EDUCATION



Sometimes people make assumptions about what is taught in schools without accurate knowledge. Misconceptions lead to emotional reactions including anger, anxiety and fear. Here are some facts to help you better understand how schools operate.

Myth # 1: Teaching about homosexuality in schools condones the lifestyle.

Fact #1: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people have lives like everyone else. There is no distinct LGBT “lifestyle.” Teachers often teach about unfamiliar topics to help students develop respect for other people and to acknowledge their contributions to society. A teacher’s job is to present accurate, age-appropriate information to students.

Myth #2: Teaching about homosexuality in schools involves talking about gay sex.

Fact #2: Anti-homophobia education can be done in a variety of ways. Most involve no discussion of sex or sexual practices whatsoever. The only exception may be in the health segment of *Personal Planning* or *Health & Career Education* classes. Otherwise, teachers may talk about LGBT role models in history, or read a story about same gender families. They may also discuss the oppression of LGBT people and focus on stopping homophobic name-calling in schools. These are just a few examples of age-appropriate anti-homophobia education.

Myth #3: LGBT teachers have a gay agenda for public schools by introducing LGBT topics.

Fact #3: Teachers and principals have a legal obligation to respond to all forms of harassment and discrimination in schools. All students have the right to attend school in a safe environment – and expect to see their lives positively reflected in curriculum and classroom activities. Just as anti-racism and multicultural education have been embraced by educators as worthy topics, there is also a growing awareness by educators that anti-homophobia has to be addressed. You do not have to be a person of colour to care about racism. Similarly, you do not have to be LGBT to fight homophobia in schools or society at large.

Myth #4: Gay-Straight Alliance Clubs (GSAs) in high schools are a way to recruit students and encourage them to experiment with being gay or lesbian.

Fact #4: No one suddenly chooses to become LGBT simply because they heard about the topic in school, from friends, or via their social circles. There is no known “cause” for a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity – whether that person identifies as homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual or transgender. Sexual orientation and gender identity are complex traits, and have been understood differently by different cultures and at different times in history. GSAs help all students to come together in a safe space to talk about issues that are important to them. GSAs help all students to learn from one another and make their school safe and more welcoming for students, staff and families. Anyone can be the target of hateful slurs, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Myth #5: Students will become more sexually active and/or promiscuous if they hear about LGBT issues at school.

Fact #5: Like it or not, some teenagers are sexually active. The decisions they make about their bodies have little to do with LGBT issues or anti-homophobia education. However, lack of information about safe sex can have dramatic and sometimes tragic consequences for youth. Promiscuity and unsafe sexual behaviours often occur when students do not have access to age-appropriate, accurate information.

Myth #6: LGBT issues are not part of the curriculum. Some schools are just making this up.

The Ministry of Education establishes the mandatory curriculum. *Health & Career Education* and *Personal Planning* include references to sexual orientation, discrimination, and sexual health. *Social Studies* includes curriculum on families, Canadian society, and human rights. Furthermore, public schools are secular, and have an obligation to be inclusive of the diverse communities they serve -- including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.



ANTI-HOMOPHOBIA EDUCATION IS . . .

- inclusive of all members of our school communities
- respectful of differences and inclusive of diversity
- respectful of the BC Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- mindful that harassment and discrimination are present in our school system
- mindful that silence around certain topics can be a form of discrimination
- optimistic that a better school environment is possible for everyone

ANTI-HOMOPHOBIA EDUCATION LOOKS LIKE . . .

- schools where all members of the school community can be accepted and open about their lives without fear or shame
- classrooms which acknowledge and respect diverse family models
- classrooms which acknowledge and positively represent the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people across the curriculum
- schools where students and educators speak out against injustice and inequity
- schools where youth can take the lead on concerns that are important to them
- schools districts where there is knowledge and expertise available to support schools in this work

