

### **Responding to homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and other prejudiced language**

Even if lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender pupils and students are not directly experiencing bullying they are learning in an environment where homophobic language and comments are commonplace. According to Stonewall's The School Report (2012), ninety six percent of gay pupils hear homophobic remarks such as 'poof' or 'lezza' used in school. Almost all, (99 per cent) hear the phrases "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" in school. If homophobic language is allowed to persist it is likely to encourage homophobic bullying.

*'The misuse of the word 'gay' meant that it was only when I was sixteen I knew what the word really meant. I think it's important that teachers challenge the use of the word 'gay' as a negative term. They should encourage kids to use other words as an alternative, such as 'rubbish'. By doing this, pupils will (hopefully) realise the potential impact it can have on the pupils who are lesbian or gay, or questioning their sexuality.'* Joe, Allsorts

#### **Some key skills and tips for challenging prejudice**

- Ensure you are aware of school policy and that you follow school policy and legal requirements such as reporting racist incidents
- Challenge all incidents, behaviour and language and be seen to be doing this
- Be calm and constructive (responding and helping to build skills). Take time, remain silent if you are upset or angry until you regain control
- If appropriate remove them from an audience or the scene of the incident, although be clear with the whole group that the language / behaviour was unacceptable
- Role model how to challenge/how to take a stand in a non-aggressive way so that the group can be effective without you
- Be mindful of what happens next with friendships and other spin-offs
- Show that you are delaying judgement (in some cases) by asking questions
- Allow them space to reflect on what they have just said or done
- Give them a chance to back-track: self-justify, own or modify their behaviour
- Be critical of behaviour and language, but not of individuals and so allowing the challenged child/person to still feel OK and able to move on
- Build a sense of empathy, co-operation and shared rules "we all agreed..." "how would you feel if..." Linking back to ground rules at all times
- Be firm and clear about diversity and rights – and what is not acceptable. This should be supported by policy
- Show upset and hurt if appropriate
- Search for the personal, individual concerns which may lie behind their words or reflect
- Use stories/scenarios as distancing techniques – to help find solutions to issues that have arisen within the group
- If required by school policy / the law record the incident for monitoring purposes and report to relevant school personnel.

#### **Guide to challenging homo/bi/transphobic/sexist language & gender stereotyping: a range of responses**

All prejudiced language should be challenged and how that challenge is made will depend on the circumstances of the incident, the severity of the incident, who it involves, where it takes place and the intention behind the comment. This script can be adapted for use in challenging all forms of prejudice.

**A Institutional response**

In our school we always try to be kind to each other and when you use 'gay' like that it is unkind.

In our school we treat everyone with respect and when you use 'gay' like that it is disrespectful of gay and lesbian people.

The ground-rules we agreed at the beginning of the session said we would show respect to each other.

Some people would find that word insulting so it's not ok to use it at our school.

The anti-bullying policy says that homo/bi/transphobic language is not tolerated.

The school policy says that we are all responsible for making this a safe place for everyone.

That kind of language is homo/bi/transphobic and makes people feel unsafe. Therefore it is unacceptable.

It's really important that at this school people feel able to express their gender however they feel comfortable so we try to avoid gender stereotypes.

At this school we want to recognise every pupil's strengths and we don't want people to feel limited by expectations that relate to their gender.

**B Question**

What do you think that word means?

What makes you think that?

Do you realise that what you said is homo/bi/transphobic?

Can you explain what you mean by calling that 'gay'?

That word is an insulting term for someone who is transgender. Do you know what it means to be transgender?

How would you feel if someone spoke about you in that way?

Do you know what a gender stereotype is? Can you think of why some people might be upset when they hear them at school?

**C Confront**

Language like that is not acceptable.

You might not think that remark is offensive, but many would.

What you are saying presents a very stereotypical view of what men and woman are like.

When you do that it means that people who don't fit into your way of seeing things can feel left out or ashamed.

**D Personal response**

I'm not happy with what you said.

Homo/bi/transphobic/sexist language offends me. I don't want to hear it again.

What you've said really disappoints/disturbs/upsets/angers me. I hoped you would recognise that it is important to treat everyone with respect and that it is therefore wrong to use such as homo/bi/transphobic language.

Taken from:

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