Ten ways educators can create a safe, supportive school community environment for all students, in particular, for LGBT youth.
Make it Better - Make it Safer

Accepting one’s sexual orientation and gender identity should be a unique, amazing, and safe journey. But that can only happen if school communities are inclusive, safe, and welcoming for all students. Elementary schools need to be included in this process, given that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBT) youth first report an awareness of same-sex attraction as early as age ten.

Unfortunately, it’s taken a series of high profile gay and lesbian teen suicides to remind us how vulnerable LGBT youth are in our classrooms and communities. While many people from all walks of life joined in a campaign on YouTube promising LGBT youth that “It Gets Better”, we as educators need to do everything we can to “Make it Better Now” for these students.

Almost two-thirds (64%) of LGBT students and 61% of students with LGBT parents according to a 2009 survey by EGALE Canada, feel unsafe at schools. It is estimated that one in ten people are gay, meaning on average, 10% of students are gay.1

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Homophobia and gender-based violence are learned behaviours. As educators, you can change these behaviours. An incident of bullying happens on average, every seven minutes in an Ontario schoolyard, and every thirty minutes in a classroom. A frequent form of bullying is to attack someone’s sexuality or perceived sexuality. Sexual orientation ranks third among the most frequent motivations for hate crimes in Canada, after race and ethnicity.\(^2\)

For almost a decade, ETFO has promoted a “Positive Space” campaign with posters and education about LGBT issues for Ontario’s elementary teachers. This positive action kit provides a list of ETFO resources on LGBT education, as well as other links to get you started. You will also find ten positive actions that ETFO locals and teachers can take to become role models and leaders in their community. Make your students proud to be who they are, and make your schools and communities positive spaces, that are safer for students, teachers, and staff.

**Get Started!**

1. **Professional Development for Teachers**
   ETFO offers a number of workshops for teachers and stewards related to LGBT issues, diversity, and human rights. Contact your local’s Social Justice Committee chair to enquire about professional development.

2. **Get Started!**
   - Book ETFO’s *Imagine a World that is Free from Fear* workshop, a K-8 resource addressing issues relating to homophobia and heterosexism.
   - ETFO offers funding of up to $300 per local for initiatives aimed at combatting homophobia and heterosexism. Contact Kathy Pigeon at kpigeon@etfo.org or by telephone at 416-962-3836/1-888-838-3836, ext. 2275 for details.
2 Get Your Local On Board
Talk to your local President or Social Justice Committee chair if you believe your local should provide LGBT training for your local executive and stewards.

Get Started!
In addition to the workshop listed in number 1, ETFO Equity and Women’s Services offers other workshops:
• Homophobia and Heterosexism: Member Rights, Union Responsibilities for Stewards; and
• LGBT issues in the Classroom.

3 Work With Your Board
The Ministry’s recent policy guidelines: *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools* (2009), requires that boards provide a positive school environment where diversity is respected, systemic barriers and biases are identified and removed so that, whatever their personal circumstances, all students can achieve at their highest potential. This provides an opportunity for you to promote inclusive education and to liaise with your board to make schools a safer environment for LGBT youth. Find out the name of your equity officer or the staff member who oversees school safety. Offer ETFO’s expertise and materials and discuss how you can work together.
Make Your Schools a “Positive Space”

Educate staff and students about how a positive space is a place where human rights are respected, and where LGBT students, their families, friends, and all community members are welcomed and supported.

Post ETFO’s positive space poster in staff rooms, hallways, and classrooms. Provide each teacher with her or his own poster as an educational tool.

Get Started!

• ETFO’s “Positive Space” poster, brochures, and stickers are available from shopETFO at etfo.ca.
• Consult the numerous resources on the Ontario Ministry of Education’s website (edu.gov.on.ca).
• Many resources and support services for LGBT youth can be found on ok2bme.ca. and the Pride Education Network (pridenet.ca).
Eliminate Homophobic Bullying

• Use in-class films and other resources to educate students on homophobic language and family diversity.
• Ask students to write stories on bullying and gender issues or to create a publication. Encourage students to post items relating to these issues on the safeatschool.ca website or to set up a face-to-face conference on LGBT issues, in which elementary students can participate.
• Promote an understanding of the challenges facing transgender people and their journey, through age-appropriate education and discussions.

Get Started!

• The Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF) and the Centre Ontarien de prévention des agressions (COPA) have set up, with funding from the Ministry of Education, safeatschool.ca/static/en/changeourworld/index.html, a place for students to speak out about homophobia.
• Consult sites such as thinkB4youspeak.com for resources, including videos and a report on the use of homophobic language on social networking websites.
• Sites such as transpulse.ca and tgstation.com contain valuable information on trans issues.
Promote a ‘Pink Day’

The First Pink Day was held in Nova Scotia in 2007 when two students heard about a male student who was bullied for wearing a pink shirt. They bought pink T-shirts and encouraged students to take a stand against the bullying by wearing a ‘sea of pink’.

- Organize, support, and promote a Pink Day. The International Day of Pink is on the second Wednesday of April, however Pink Days can be held at any time such as during Pride Week.

Get Started!

- ETFO sends posters and resources to locals for International Pink Day, held every year in April. You can also get them at etfo.ca.
- Consult websites such as: dayofpink.org, deal.org/youth-initiatives-database/day-of-pink/, optionsforsexualhealth.org/events-calendar/international-day-pink, and standupday.com/08/participants/index.php?target=pages&page_id=whypink or use an Internet search engine to find other resources for “Day of Pink”.

Promote a ‘Pink Day’
Support/promote GSA Initiatives
Gay Straight Alliance student groups (GSAs) provide a safe, neutral space where students can discuss issues of sexuality without identifying as either straight or gay. That’s why they work.

• Support school GSAs or initiate one where students request it.
• Volunteer to organize, or provide financial resources for, a board-wide GSA graduation celebration.
• Consider jointly organizing a board-wide GSA conference.
• Set up a GSA for teachers in your local.

Get Started!
• See EGALE’s website mygsa.ca for resources, samples of activities, and newsletters, or consult some of the numerous web-based resources on GSAs such as gsanetwork.org/, pinktriangle.org/Eng/gsaguide.htm, safeschoolscoalition.org/rg-gaystraightalliances.html.
• Search your board’s, or other boards’ website, such as the Toronto District School Board, for anti-homophobia resources.
Reach out to LGBT Families

Children of LGBT parents who are open about their family composition may be harassed and victimized by other students. Schools and teachers can support these families by being inclusive.

- Set up a “Positive Space” movie evening, with students and families. Plan for a discussion during the evening.
- Ensure that books and resources celebrating LGBT families are readily available.

Get Started!

- See ETFO’s “Positive Space – Positive Place” brochure for resources related to LGBT families.
- PFLAG supports parents, families, and friends of LGBT and questioning youth and adults. Consult some of their numerous resources at pflagcanada.ca.
- Make use of some of the many movies concerning LGBT issues. Primary-Junior movies include: Sticks and Stones; That’s a Family; It’s Elementary – Talking about Gay Issues in School. Intermediate movies include: Breakfast with Scott; Trevor; It’s Elementary – Talking about Gay Issues in School. Adult movies include: Breakfast with Scott; Trevor; Priscilla Queen of the Desert; Transamerica; Beautiful Thing; Were the World Mine; It’s Elementary – Talking about Gay Issues in School.
9 Support Local Pride Events
March in your local Pride Parade carrying your flag or banner. Support and sponsor your local Pride Week along with family pride events and sponsor a table. If you don’t have a Pride Week, reach out to community groups and get one started.

Get Started!
- Visit ETFO’s website at etfo.ca to access our Pride Kit with many ‘how to’ ideas, posters, stickers, and flag designs.
- Visit websites such as en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gay_pride, fiertepridecanada, for information about Gay Pride and Pride events across Canada.

10 Support Other Union LGBT Initiatives
Many labour organizations such as the Canadian Labour Congress (canadianlabour.ca/search/node/LGBT) and Labour Councils are doing excellent work on LGBT issues.

Get Started!
- Find other LGBT resources by the Ontario Federation of Labour at ofl.ca, and Ontario Public Service Employees Union (opseu.org). Search their sites for “LGBT”.
- The Canadian Teachers’ Federation website offers numerous resources at ctf-fce.ca. Search the site for “Rainbow”.

Reach out to LGBT Families

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