

Staff Training - LGBTQ+ Inclusion



FINHAM PARK
SCHOOL

Overview

This document and associated training covers the following topics:

- The importance of such training in school
- Usualising vs Normalising
- Language
- Pronouns
- Identity vs Expression
- Supporting students

Section 28

Section 28 was a Thatcher-era piece of legislation that prevented local authorities (and by extension, schools) from “promoting” homosexuality. Only repealed from UK law in 2003, it led to a generation of people unable to discuss sexuality in a school environment. Whilst 19 years have passed since then, most schools are heteronormative - thus preventing students and staff being able to express themselves freely.

Key Statistics and the importance of inclusion

- 45% of LGBTQ+ students face bullying in school (Stonewall, 2020)
- This includes 64% of transgender students
- 60% of non-heterosexual young people have attempted to harm themselves (Stonewall, 2018)
- 89% of transgender students have attempted to harm themselves. Of these, 1 in 4 commits suicide (Stonewall, 2018)
- Young members of the LGBTQ+ community face higher instances of mental health issues, with over two-thirds suffering at 68% (Stonewall, 2018)

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many struggling young people to spend more time around abusive and/or unaccepting families. The inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues into the curriculum ensures students feel represented, preparing them for their adult lives as well as acting as the first line of defence against intolerance and hate. Areas that schools can help in are essential to get right; of utmost importance.

Normalisation vs Usualisation

“Normalise” is a phrase used fairly widely currently, typically in the context of making a topic no longer frowned upon or taboo. However, the term “usualise” is a lot better suited in this case - it has connotations of the every day, instead of a situation where some things are considered more “normal” than others.

An example would be including LGBTQ+ experiences in everyday teaching, learning and discussion, seeing such experiences and stories as shared.

A lesson is being planned that involves Christmas and what is associated with it. As family is considered to be an important part of Christmas, you include images of families from various backgrounds - same-gender parents, white parents, black parents, straight parents. You do not invite discussion about their differences; they are all accepted as examples of family.

Language

Contrary to the popular phrase “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me”, language *does* have an impact - hence why verbal feedback is so important in lessons. The use of the word “gay” or other LGBTQ+ cliches is incredibly common in insults in secondary schools and their use in negative contexts can make many people feel uncomfortable. It is very similar to the negative use of phrases such as “running like a girl” amongst men, and can deal a lot of damage.

In the 2016 book “Straight Jacket: Overcoming Society’s Legacy of Gay Shame”, the use of such language in the school environment was investigated. It ultimately suggested that up to 55% of teachers did not challenge such language out of fear of not being supported or not having the relevant confidence. This is a fear that needs to be quickly and drastically overcome. If students see it challenged in the classroom, a safer environment is created and people are less likely to use this language.

Using gender-inclusive language is a great way to show support to trans and gender non-conforming (GNC) students in the classroom. Often, teachers use phrases such as “girls at the back” and “ladies and gentlemen” (among others). Such language has the potential to alienate or exclude trans/GNC people (for instance it could misgender someone who hasn’t come out yet). Instead, terms such as “folks”, “team” or even just “people” are more inclusive and are easy to use.

Whilst not necessarily incredibly common in school environments, there are several LGBTQ+ specific slurs that should always be looked out for - these are the worst and most offensive words towards LGBTQ+ people. These words include fag(got), dyke, tranny and trap. If heard, these should be firmly and quickly challenged (and the students punished).

Aside from slurs, there are also other phrases that tend to be incredibly offensive and harmful and are used more commonly by young people. Some examples are listed below:

- “Super Straight” (Suggesting that trans identities are not valid)
- “There are only two genders” (Invalidating non-binary and other gender non-conforming people)
- “Did you just assume my gender?” (Making fun of trans/gender non-conforming people)
- Attack helicopter jokes (comparing gender non-conforming people’s identities to inanimate objects)
- “Homosexuality (or similar) is unnatural” (It isn’t!)
- “I’m not homophobic/transphobic but....”/“I don’t have anything against gay people/trans people but....” (typically precedes bigotry)
- Anything about being LGBTQ+ being a choice/conscious decision (It isn’t!)

Another important segment in this topic is language reclamation - the act or process of destigmatising words previously used as slurs or in a negative context by using them in a positive way. A key example is “queer”, which is what the “Q” in “LGBTQ+” stands for and sees use in both describing an individual identity (if the person does not want to be specific) and referring to the LGBTQ+ community in general terms. Outside of this term, no other notable slurs have been reclaimed at a universal level - their use is/should remain to be challenged.

Pronouns

Pronouns and their use is something we should be doing our best to usualise, especially in the school environment. Someone's pronouns will not necessarily be evident in the way they express themselves. Therefore, we should all do our best to introduce ourselves with both our pronouns and names. One thing to be noted is that some students may prefer to use one set of pronouns in the classroom and another if you are talking in front of family - keep this in mind and ask students if needed. A way to ask students discreetly could be through an icebreaker sheet, similar to what some teachers use at the start of the school year. Alongside the usual fields of "favourite food" and "what did you do over the holidays?", spaces to put preferred names/pronouns would also be available. Common preferred pronouns are as follows:

- He/Him/His
- She/Her/Hers
- They/Them/Theirs
- He/They
- She/They
- They/She/He
- It/Its

When someone uses multiple sets of pronouns (for example, he/they), this usually (but not always) means they prefer the pronouns to be roughly alternated between - i.e Using "he" in one sentence and then "they" in another rather than picking one exclusively. Sometimes the order they are written in can indicate preference - for instance somebody who uses they/she may prefer they/them pronouns. Again, however, this is not a rule and try your best to ask a student what applies to them best.

Neopronouns also exist, used by those who may not feel that the pronouns above work for them. There are many variations, including but not limited to:

- Xe/Xem/Xer
- Ze/Hir/Hirs
- Ey/Em/Eir

It is important to note that pronouns do not always equate to gender identity.

Identity vs Expression

The idea of breaking gender norms when it comes to fashion and general expression of gender is nothing new. Clothing, makeup, jewellery; there is precedence throughout history of all these things transcending gender.

Therefore, it is not possible to assume someone's gender based on how they present themselves. If a cis man can be accepted for wearing a skirt or a dress, then we should not invalidate a transman's identity if he does the same.

The same is true of someone's sexual orientation; there is no one way for someone to look queer.

Supporting Students

It can take a lot of courage to come out to someone, whether this be about their gender identity or their sexuality.

If a student feels comfortable in talking to you about this part of them, don't take for granted the trust they have placed in you; they are hoping you will not judge or invalidate them. This includes doing your best to use their preferred name and pronouns.

Do not get flustered if you slip up; correct yourself and move on. The more attention you draw to your mistake, the more likely you are to make the student feel uncomfortable.

Other Resources/Helpful information

<https://bit.ly/3KbwCC3> - Stonewall's Trans statistics page

<https://bit.ly/3llzb35> - Gendered Intelligence resource pages

<https://bit.ly/31X04dR> - Historic England's LGBTQ+ history page

<https://bit.ly/3tMkt0Z> - Facebook group with resources and support for educators wanting to champion LGBTQ+ inclusion in UK schools

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/> - Stonewall, the largest LGBTQ+ charity

<https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/> - Mermaids, a charity that supports transgender and gender-nonconforming young people

<http://www.theproudtrust.org/for-young-people> - The Proud Trust, offering support and advice to LGBTQ+ about coming out, etc.

<http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/> - Gendered Intelligence, offers resources and information about gender identity

Created and compiled by the Finham Pride Alliance

