



# Positive Space



# Supporting our LGBTQ2S+ Students

Supporting the body, mind, spirit, and emotions of an individual increases a sense of well-being, connectedness and resilience, and improves student achievement. This Feed All Four way of being applies to all students and is incorporated into all aspects of Positive Space in Trillium Lakelands District School Board schools.





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# Helping You to Navigate This Document

The following terms are used extensively throughout this document. There are many more important terms that are helpful to learn in support of LGBTQ2S+ students and their families. Additional definitions can be found at the end of this document.

- Lesbian:** A person who identifies as a woman who is romantically, sexually, and emotionally attracted to others who identify as women.
- Gay:** A person who identifies as a man who is romantically, sexually, and emotionally attracted to others who identify as men. It can also be used as a term for both gay males and lesbians.
- Bisexual:** A person who is romantically, sexually, and emotionally attracted to both men and women.
- Transgender:** A transgender person is someone whose inner gender identity does not match the gender they were assigned at birth based on their biological anatomy. For more information, please refer to the *Creating a Positive Space: Understanding Our Transgender Students* document created by TLDSB.
- Queer:** Queer is an umbrella term used by sexual and gender minorities. It was once a pejorative term that has now been reclaimed by the LGBTQ2S+ community.
- 2S or Two-spirited:** Some Indigenous people identify themselves as two-spirit rather than as bisexual, gay, lesbian, or transgender. Historically, in many Indigenous cultures, two-spirited people were respected leaders and medicine people with specific roles in communities. Before colonization, two-spirited people were often accorded special status based upon their unique abilities to understand both male and female perspectives.
- (+):** This symbol represents the many other terms that people use. The + welcomes new and evolving ways that people define themselves.
- GSA:** Short for Gay Straight Alliance or Genders and Sexualities Alliance. These are school-based groups that provide a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ2S+ youth and allies. Other acronyms are also in use.









# A Welcoming Environment for All Students

A welcoming environment in our schools is important for all students. All schools have LGBTQ2S+ students but may not know it yet. An LGBTQ2S+ student may perceive the environment to be unsafe and unwelcoming. It is not okay for these students to be invisible in our schools. TLDSB BD-2101 Equity and Inclusive Education Procedure explicitly states:

*To achieve an equitable and inclusive school environment, the school board and schools will strive to ensure that all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. We want all staff and students to value diversity and demonstrate respect for others and a commitment to establishing a just, caring society.*

There are many things school staff can do to be supportive and to provide a welcome and safe environment for all students, including LGBTQ2S+ students. Most changes are easy to implement, simple, and require no new resources.

It begins with creating awareness amongst staff and students, while working from a vision of providing quality, inclusive learning environments for all students. Encouraging communication from families while developing an inclusive plan for your school could be a great first step.

It is important to remember that all students have a right to privacy. Unless specifically directed by the student, schools must keep a student's information confidential. As such, only those who "need to know" to fulfill a specific accommodation will have this knowledge shared, or if the student requests that the information be shared.



# Common Beliefs about Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation determines who we are attracted to, who we love, and with whom we build our lives and families. Our school communities are comprised of parents, staff, and students whose sexual orientations are diverse and must be valued, included and supported in our schools. Over the past few decades, our society has recognized and improved the rights and protections available to gays and lesbians. However, homophobia and heteronormativity persist. To combat these harmful beliefs we must be conscious of the overt and covert assumptions and values we have about sexual orientation and how these affect our students' sense of safety and inclusion.

## MISCONCEPTIONS AND FACTS

**MISCONCEPTION:** We know what causes sexual orientation and/or people choose to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

**FACT:** The research so far has proven only one thing - we don't know what causes anybody's sexual orientation. It's not a choice or a "lifestyle," or a result of sexual abuse, or a lack of male/female role models.

**MISCONCEPTION:** All lesbian, gay, or bisexual people are unhappy and would change their orientation if they could.

**FACT:** Most lesbian, gay, or bisexual people are happy and proud to be who they are. Even if they could choose to be straight, they would not. Validation, approval, and celebration of who they are, by family and friends, are factors in their comfort, self-esteem, and pride.

**MISCONCEPTION:** Being lesbian, gay, or bisexual is just a phase.

**FACT:** A person's sexual orientation is deeply personal and should not be considered a "phase" or "experiment." If someone self-identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual they have known for a long time and those feelings are not going to change or go away. There is nothing temporary about bisexuality. Similarly, bisexuality is its own unique identity and not a phase to being gay or lesbian.

**MISCONCEPTION:** You can tell if someone is lesbian, gay, or bisexual by the way they dress or their mannerisms.

**FACT:** Lesbian, gay, or bisexual people come in many different shapes, sizes, and colours. Some can be identified by stereotypical mannerisms and characteristics, but there are many who are not.

**MISCONCEPTION:** People who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual do not make good parents.

**FACT:** Studies show that the opposite is true, and that children of lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents are more socially adjusted than their counterparts. Most people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual were raised by straight parents.

**MISCONCEPTION:** There is a "gay agenda" and lesbian, gay, or bisexual people are trying to recruit youth.

**FACT:** This myth may come from the fact that many lesbian, gay, or bisexual people don't come out until they are older and have met someone to whom they are attracted. This doesn't mean that they weren't lesbian, gay, or bisexual before, just that they hadn't come out yet. If there is a "gay agenda" it is directed at promoting equality, inclusion, and visibility.

**MISCONCEPTION:** All lesbians are man-haters.

**FACT:** Lesbians are women who form intimate relationships with women. Although not sexually attracted to men, many lesbians have male children and maintain close male friendships. Being a lesbian is how women feel about women, not how they feel about men.



**MISCONCEPTION:** The majority of pedophiles are gay.

**FACT:** Ninety per cent of all pedophiles self-identify as heterosexuals.

**MISCONCEPTION:** Bisexuals just can't make up their minds. They want it both ways.

**FACT:** Bisexuality, just like heterosexuality and homosexuality, is a sexual orientation. Bisexuals are no more indecisive about their sexuality than others. Bisexuals often experience biphobia from the gay, lesbian, and transgender communities, as well as from heterosexuals.

## Challenges for an LGBTQ2S+ Student

Homophobia impacts all students. Straight students who have gay family members may be targets of homophobic behaviour, or may feel like their family experience is not recognized or valued.

### CHALLENGES

- LGBTQ2S+ students experience verbal and physical harassment, assault, teasing, social exclusion, and have their property stolen or damaged at rates higher than any other student group. In addition, the more frequent harassment that trans students experience, the lower their grades and educational aspirations.
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth have to deal with bullying, harassment, threats, and violence directed at them almost on a daily basis.
- LGB youth are more likely to be called names, verbally harassed, or physically assaulted at school or in the community compared to their heterosexual peers.
- LGB youth often feel unsafe and under represented at school due to lack of role models and other adults who act as allies.
- Lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual youth can even face discrimination within the LGBTQ2S+ community. For instance, bisexuality is often dismissed as a “valid” sexual orientation.

EGALE Canada's (2011) school climate survey revealed:

- Almost two thirds (64%) of LGBTQ students and 61% of students with LGBTQ parents reported that they feel unsafe at school.
- 70% of all participating students, LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ, reported hearing homophobic expressions and comments every day in school.
- 32% of female sexual minority students, and 20% of male sexual minority students reported being verbally harassed daily or weekly about their sexual orientation.
- More than a third (37%) of youth with LGBTQ parents reported being verbally harassed about the sexual orientation of their parents.
- More than one in five (21%) LGBTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted due to their sexual orientation.

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➤ Levels of sexual harassment are high across the board for LGB students:

- 45% of students with LGBTQ parents
- 43% of female bisexual students & 42% of male bisexual students
- 40% of gay male students
- 33% of lesbian students

Another barrier faced by some LGBTQ2S+ students is the lack of support from home. Unlike other groups, where all members of the family are experiencing the same oppression or discrimination, LGBTQ2S+ students do not always receive empathy and may even be victims of homophobic or transphobic behaviour in their own home.

## Celebrations

While there are many challenges to overcome, there have also been positive LGBTQ2S+ gains that are worth noting that have happened provincially, nationally, as well as globally.

- In 2005, Canada enacted the Civil Marriage Act. We became the first country outside Europe and the 4th country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage.
- In 2012, the Accepting Schools Act was passed in Ontario. This act enabled the establishment of Gay Straight Alliance Clubs in all publically-funded schools.
- There are more 'out' politicians, celebrities, and sport stars than ever before.
- In 2016, Ontario enacted the All Families are Equal Act which states that the parents of a newborn child are the birth parent and the birth parent's partner. LGBT2SQ+ parents no longer need to adopt their own children.
- The average coming out age has declined from 20-something in the 1980s to somewhere around 16-years-old today.
- There are more PRIDE celebrations in Ontario every year, including Muskoka, Kawartha Lakes, and Minden.
- We are at an all-time high of representation of LGBT2SQ+ people in media.
- On June 1, 2016, the PRIDE flag was raised for the first time at the Parliament of Canada.



# Positive Spaces for LGBTQ2S+ Students in Trillium Lakelands District School Board

Everyone is protected from harassment based on sexual orientation.

The Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Human Rights Act make it against the law to discriminate against someone or to harass them because of their sexual orientation or identity. As a publicly funded school board, it is a shared responsibility with our school communities to welcome and accommodate the needs of LGBTQ2S+ people.





# Create a Welcoming Environment

- ▶ Ensure that everyone in our schools know that all students have access to a washroom/change room that best corresponds to the student's lived gender experience and that sexual orientation is not a relevant factor. We will not require separate facilities because of the preferences or negative attitudes of others.
- ▶ Have LGBTQ2S+ related fiction and non-fiction books in the school library, guidance offices, and main office.
- ▶ Promote and highlight the work and initiatives of the school GSA. Make sure that LGBTQ2S+ students know that they are welcome to join the GSA or participate in GSA-run activities.
- ▶ React immediately to harassment of a LGBTQ2S+ youth and identify the specific behaviour as being homophobic or transphobic.
- ▶ Use correct terminology and language in referring to LGBTQ2S+ youth.
- ▶ Avoid using gender as a way to create groups, lineups, or taking turns. This will alleviate the need to conform to specific gender roles.
- ▶ Review existing dress codes to ensure they are respectful and inclusive of the gender identities and gender expressions of all members of the school community (e.g., rules apply equally and fairly to all students and are not gender-exclusive, such as implying that a certain type of clothing, such as skirts, will be worn by one gender only).
- ▶ Meet, discuss, and support students and their families in creating a plan that will work for the individual. Not all needs are the same and not all plans work for everyone, therefore plans are made on a case by case basis. When appropriate, invite an open dialogue with the student to make a personalized plan.
- ▶ Be willing to have professional, albeit challenging, conversations with students and parents about TLDSB inclusive policies and practices.



# Learning for Your School Community

- ▶ Become familiar with and share the TLDSB BD-2100 and BD-2101 Equity and Inclusive Education Policy and Procedure.
- ▶ Integrate LGBTQ2S+ sensitivity and advocacy training into staff professional development curricula. Train staff to identify and confront homophobia in the school.
- ▶ If unsure, seek out other staff members to support you and/or your students (for example: GSA leads, ILS, SERTs, guidance counsellors, Positive Space Committee members).
- ▶ Integrate LGBTQ2S+ content into school curriculum through diverse texts, topics and discussions.
- ▶ Have your GSA students present to your staff and Parent Council to share perspectives.
- ▶ Invite LGBTQ2S+ identified guest speakers into your classroom or school.
- ▶ Do an equity walk of your classrooms, resources, documents, and policies to identify and ensure inclusive language and representation. An equity walk is similar to the walk-throughs that we do for SEF visits - the difference involves looking at the physical setup of the classroom and the school building through a lens of inclusiveness.
- ▶ Prepare your staff and greater school community with the language to navigate professional, yet challenging conversations.



# Important Definitions

**Ally:** A person who actively supports and respects members of the LGBTQ2S+ community.

**Asexual:** A sexual orientation that describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction and/or sexual desire for sexual contact with others.

**Biological sex:** The sex assigned at birth based on external genitalia but also includes internal reproductive structures and chromosomes.

**Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity aligns with their biological sex (e.g. a person who is biologically female and identifies as a woman).

**Heteronormative:** A worldview that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation.

**Heterosexism:** Behaviour that grants preferential treatment to heterosexual people, reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is better or more right than queerness and/or makes other sexualities invisible.

**Homophobia:** Hatred, suspicion or fear of anyone whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual.

**Intersex:** A person who has male and female genetic and/or physical sex characteristics.

**Pansexual:** People who are attracted to others regardless of their gender identity, or biological sex. A pansexual could be open to someone who is male, female, transgender, intersex, or gender non-binary or gender fluid.

**Pronouns:** Students may choose to use traditional pronouns such as he, she, or they may prefer to use gender-neutral pronouns such as ze, zir, hir, they, or them.

**Questioning:** An individual who, or a time when, someone is unsure about or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Sexual orientation:** A description of how a person experiences sexual and romantic attraction. Sexual orientations can include asexual (not experiencing sexual attraction), heterosexual (experiencing attraction to another sex), lesbian and gay (experiencing attraction to the same sex), bisexual (experiencing attraction to more than one sex) and more. It's important to remember that all of us have both a sexual orientation and a gender identity. Knowing a person's trans status does not give you any information on their sexual orientation.

**Trans:** An umbrella term that describes people with diverse gender identities and gender expressions that do not conform to stereotypical ideas of what it means to be a boy/man or girl/woman.

**Transgender-man/boy:** Someone who was born female and identifies as male.

**Transgender-woman/girl:** Someone who was born male and identifies as female.





**Transphobia:** Hatred, suspicion, or fear of anyone whose gender identity and gender expression does not conform to society's expectations for their biological sex.

**Transition:** A process some transgender people go through when they decide to live as the gender with which they identify, not the one assigned at birth. This may or may not include changes to appearance, identity documents, hormone therapy, sex-reassignment surgery, and other medical components.

**Transsexual:** A term for a person who undergoes a medical gender reassignment process to change their birth-assigned sex. However, this term is outdated and should not be used. This term falsely implies that transgender issues are issues of sexuality and not of gender.

**Two-spirit:** Some Indigenous people identify themselves as two-spirit rather than as bisexual, gay, lesbian, or transgender. Historically, in many Indigenous cultures, two-spirit persons were respected leaders and medicine people with specific roles in communities. Before colonization, two-spirit persons were often accorded special status based upon their unique abilities to understand both male and female perspectives.

# Acknowledgements

Thank you as well to those who contributed their experience and knowledge of diverse gender identities and gender expressions in the development of these guidelines.

TLDSB is committed to creating welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments across our board.



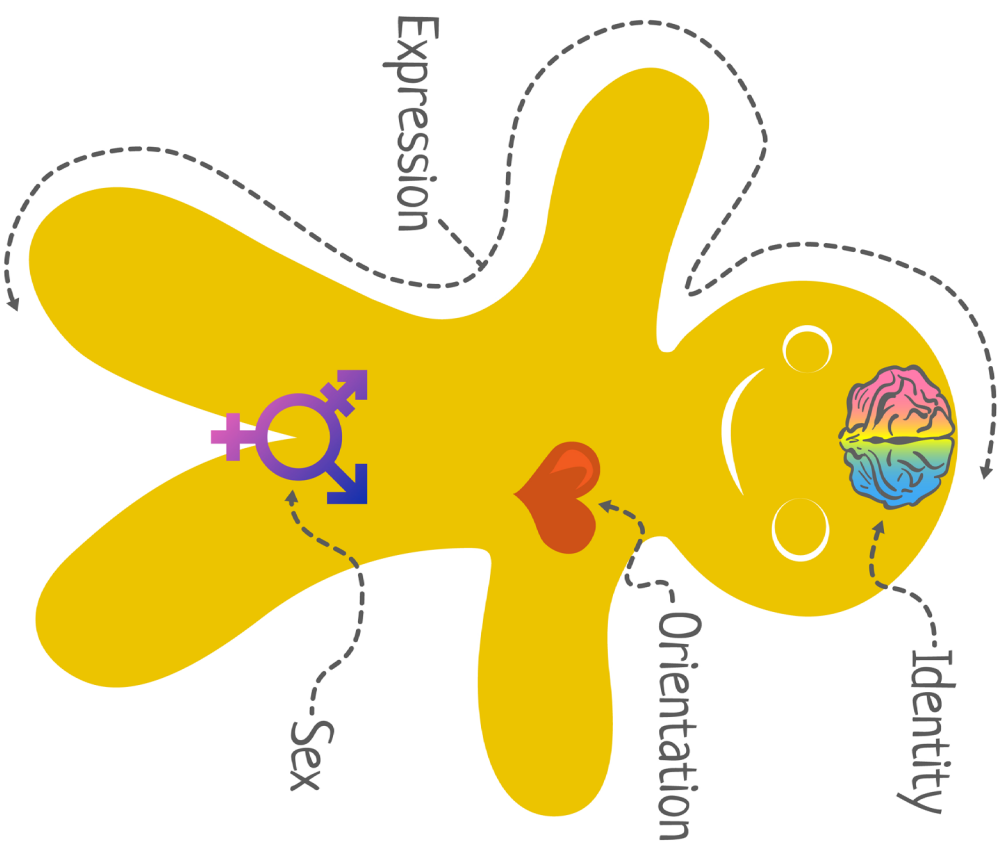


# Appendices



# The Genderbread Person

by [www.ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com](http://www.ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com)



**Gender Identity**

**Woman** **Genderqueer** **Man**

Gender identity is how you, in your head, think about yourself. It's the chemistry that composes you (e.g., hormonal levels) and how you interpret what that means.



**Gender Expression**

**Feminine** **Androgynous** **Masculine**

Gender expression is how you demonstrate your gender (based on traditional gender roles) through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact.



**Biological Sex**

**Female** **Intersex** **Male**

Biological sex refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones, and chromosomes. Female = vagina, ovaries, XX chromosomes; male = penis, testes, XY chromosomes; intersex = a combination of the two.



**Sexual Orientation**

**Heterosexual** **Bisexual** **Homosexual**

Sexual orientation is who you are physically, spiritually, and emotionally attracted to, based on their sex/gender in relation to your own.



## Curricular Resources

The Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-Inclusive Education in Canada's K-12 Schools  
<http://www.etfo.ca/buildingajustsociety/lgbtq/pages/theeveryteacherproject.aspx>

LGBT Inclusive curriculum <https://www.glsen.org/educate/resources/curriculum>

My GSA; Equity and Education Inclusive Resource Kit for Ontario High Schools  
[https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/MyGSA\\_ON\\_Resource\\_CompleteKit.pdf](https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/MyGSA_ON_Resource_CompleteKit.pdf)



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **How do I know if a person is LGBT2SQ+?**

The only way to know if a person is lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or queer is if the person tells you they are. It is not appropriate to ask. An individual is to be considered the final authority on their own sexual orientation.

### **What should I do with the information that a person is LGBT2SQ+?**

Unless otherwise directed by the individual, information about a person's sexual orientation should be treated as confidential.

### **How do I answer questions from other parents or adults, or other students about a LGBT2SQ+ student?**

School boards have the responsibility to treat everyone's personal information as confidential. However, if they have specific questions related to what it means to be LGBT2SQ+ you can refer them to resources in this document. Every student has a right to privacy, however discussing rights and information about LGBTQ2S+ issues in general, is encouraged. Other resources are also available in your school.

### **If a student in my class discloses that they are a LGBTQ2S+ person, what can I do to be supportive?**

TLDSB schools strive to be safe environments where homophobia is addressed. Refer your student to the GSA/Equity club for support, or consider establishing such a group in your school. If necessary, develop a plan to ensure students' safety and well-being.

### **What do I do if someone says something that is homophobic?**

This is an opportunity for learning. Respond in the moment to the homophobic comment and state that this is offensive and inappropriate. If the comment is directed towards a specific individual, label this behaviour as harassment and be sensitive to the privacy of the targeted individual.

### **What if the parents/guardian of a student in my class are concerned about their child and does not want their child using the washroom/changeroom with an LGBT2SQ+ student?**

You may use the following phrase, "If you have concerns, or your child is uncomfortable, they have the right to use the single-use facilities."

### **At what age is it appropriate to teach about LGBT2SQ+?**

Inclusive education is always age-appropriate. We are not teaching about sex. Our emphasis is on acceptance of diversity in families and relationships.

### **Are these words appropriate to use in school?**

The words lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, two-spirited are not "swear words". They are words that are used to describe people in our community – like the words straight, African-Canadian, and Indigenous. When these words are used as a slur, address the appropriate use and meaning of the terms.



## Links and Resources

**Creating a Positive Space: Supporting Our Transgender Students** is a TLDSB document with more detailed information to provide support for transgender people.

**EGALE Canada Human Rights Trust** [www.egale.ca](http://www.egale.ca)

**Gender Creative Kids** is a Canadian web portal of information and resources for trans youth and adults who support them. Visit: [www.gendercreativekids.ca](http://www.gendercreativekids.ca)

**Gilbert Centre** - Simcoe Muskoka LGBTQ2S+ Resource [www.gilbertcentre.ca](http://www.gilbertcentre.ca)

**It's Pronounced Metrosexual** is a site where advocates of social justice can find helpful articles, fun graphics, and other resources designed to be shared in an effort to advance social equity. It's a site that helps people help people be better people. The author of the site is the creator of the Genderbread person referenced in Appendix A [www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com](http://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com)

**LGBTQ Youth Line** offers peer support and referrals to LGBTQ youth. Visit: [www.youthline.ca](http://www.youthline.ca)

**PFLAG Canada** is Canada's national organization that helps Canadians with issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Visit: [www.pflagcanada.ca/en/index.html](http://www.pflagcanada.ca/en/index.html).

**PARN** - Peterborough Aids Resource Network - LGBTQ2S+ resources - includes Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton. Visit [www.parn.ca](http://www.parn.ca)

**Rainbow Health Ontario** keeps a database of supportive material about gender independence. Some resources are accessible online, others can be ordered. They ship anywhere in Canada. Visit: [www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/?s=gender+independent&post\\_type=product](http://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/?s=gender+independent&post_type=product)



