

Transphobic Bullying

Transphobic bullying is prejudiced behaviour against a person's actual or perceived gender identity or gender expression.

Transphobia and homophobia often exists hand-in-hand.

Gender minority (transgender, trans-identified, two-spirited) people are often incorrectly assumed to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Transphobic and anti-gay slurs perpetuate harmful, negative stereotypes about sexual and gender minority individuals.

They attack the validity of a person's identity. These behaviours and words serve as a way to keep people in specific "gender boxes" by reinforcing stereotypes of what it means to be considered male or female.

Transphobia can become the language of bullying which targets anyone who is perceived as being different.

Who experiences transphobic bullying?

Transphobic bullying can affect anyone and may be targeted at people who:

- Are perceived to be gender minorities or non-heterosexual.
- Are in the process of a gender transition (changing their name, pronouns, dress, etc., to align with their gender identity; this may include hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery).

78% of all Canadian gender minority students surveyed feel unsafe at school.

- Don't conform to conventional gender norms or stereotypes.
- Self-identify as gender minorities.
- Self-identify as non-heterosexual.
- Have gender minority family members, friends, or relatives.
- Are teachers, parents, coaches, or community members who are gender minorities.

Transphobic bullying may include:

- Mean-spirited name-calling about a person's actual or perceived gender identity or gender expression.
- Obscene and/or sexualized gestures.
- Sexualized harassment, teasing, taunting, frothing, hazing, or threats.
- Spreading rumors or gossip about a person's gender identity.
- Unwanted disclosure of someone's gender identity.
- Physical aggression such as hitting, pushing, kicking, punching, choking and stalking.
- Isolating or excluding someone from their friends or peer group.
- Using texts, messaging or social networking sites like Facebook to intimidate, put down, spread rumors, gossip, make fun of, threaten or exclude someone because of their actual or perceived gender identity or gender expression.

74% of all Canadian gender minority students surveyed are verbally harassed about their gender expression.

All statistical information provided in this fact sheet can be obtained in the 2011 "Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final Report." This report was funded by Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

Gender Identity Research and Education Society. (2009). *Guidance on combatting transphobic bullying in schools*. Retrieved from www.gires.org.uk.

Wells, K., Roberts, G., & Allan, C. (2012). *Supporting transgender and transsexual students in K-12 schools: A guide for educators*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Teachers' Federation.

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2010). *Questions & answers: Gender identity in schools*. Retrieved from www.phac-aspc.gc.ca.

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For more information, visit b-free.ca
Call the Bullying Helpline 1-888-456-2323 toll-free anytime.
Trained staff are available to help in more than 170 languages.

Bullies who hide behind transphobic beliefs and attitudes are still bullies. Transphobic name-calling and trans bashing are bullying with gender-based themes. Discrimination on the basis of gender identity is a violation of human rights legislation. In fact, law enforcement may consider transphobic bullying to be a hate incident – something that’s against the law.

If you find yourself the target of transphobic bullying, you may feel:

- Alone.
- Embarrassed or ashamed.
- Pressured to fit into stereotypical gender norms (e.g. to act more masculine or more feminine).
- Depressed and uncertain about yourself or your future.
- Angry - you want to turn the tables and become a bully yourself.
- Unsafe at school or in your community.
- Stressed - you often think about skipping school or activities to avoid the bullies.
- Isolated - wanting to withdraw from social activities and hide away.

These are all normal and natural feelings. But remember: you can always reach out for help.

If you, or someone you know, is experiencing transphobic bullying:

1. **Tell someone you trust** – Talk to a friend or trusted adult who respects your confidentiality. This may be a teacher, parent, relative, youth worker, police officer, counsellor, coach or faith leader. Remember, you don’t have to suffer in silence. Keep telling until someone helps you. No one deserves to be bullied.
2. **Know your rights** – Check out your school’s bullying prevention guidelines, anti-harassment policies, or student code of conduct. Your school is responsible for protecting you from gender-based bullying, discrimination and abuse. You have the right to be respected and feel safe at your school and in your community, regardless of your actual or perceived gender identity or gender expression.

90% of Canadian gender minority youth surveyed, hear transphobic comments daily or weekly from their peers.

3. **Stay safe** – Don’t fight back. Bullies want attention and fighting back gives them what they want. If you fight back, you may get hurt or make the situation worse. If you are a bystander or witness, become an ally. Go for help and provide moral and emotional support to the person being bullied.

4. **Write down everything** – Keep a record about the incident, including:

- the date,
- the time,
- the location and
- what was said or done.

If you are being bullied online or in a text, don’t delete the message. You don’t have to read it, but keep it. It’s your evidence. The police, your parents/guardians, or your school authorities can use this information to help protect you from further abuse.

5. **Remain calm** – You do not have to reveal your actual gender identity to seek help. Unless you are at risk for self-harm, your teacher or school counsellor does not have to tell your family or caregiver that you are transgender, transsexual, or two-spirited. Remember, you don’t have to deal with bullying on your own. Caring and trusted adults are available to help and support you.

6. **Find support in your community** – Check to see if there is a local lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, trans-identify, two spirit and queer (LGBTQ) youth group where you can meet like-minded youth. Consider enrolling in a school that has a gay-straight student alliance or diversity club. Often, these schools are welcoming spaces for sexual and gender minority, questioning and allied youth.

Help Break the Silence: Take a Stand Against Transphobia!

Transphobic and homophobic verbal bullying are heard every day by students in school. Yet these types of bullying are the least responded to by adults and youth.

If transphobic bullying is not addressed appropriately, it reinforces to everyone affected that it’s okay to discriminate. These behaviours and words can have devastating results for everyone involved.

By speaking out, or intervening in transphobic bullying, you send a message: you don’t tolerate transphobia or transphobic bullying in our society.

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