

## Homophobic Bullying Guidance

All bullying is unacceptable and homophobic bullying should be challenged as any form of discriminatory, anti-social and oppressive behaviour should be.

Homophobic bullying is different as it relies on heterosexist (the perception that being heterosexual is the only and 'right' way to be) assumptions so victims may feel less inclined to report incidents, for fear of the reaction from the people they confide in.

### What forms can it take?

Verbal: 'poof', 'batty boy', 'lezzy', 'queer' etc and/ or pertaining to someone's sexual orientation or gender as 'wrong' in some way i.e. 'butch' or 'effeminate'

Physical: attack because the victim is, or is perceived to be, gay

Psychological: either or both of the above

### How can I challenge it?

- Verbally:
  - don't accept anti-gay language as forms of abuse (see verbal bullying above)
  - don't accept the term 'gay' used in a derogatory way e.g. 'this computer's so gay'. This can be more difficult as the term has become a pervasive and pernicious part of teenage culture and therefore language and young people often use it unconsciously. Bring it to their attention that saying something is 'gay' in this way, they are using the word negatively and are simultaneously saying that being gay is 'rubbish' or 'wrong'. Their response maybe that they didn't mean it like that but were just using it in a joking way. You can acknowledge this but it doesn't change the fact that it's offensive.
  - Use humour – ask if they meant it in an ironic way. After all 'gay' traditionally meant 'bright and showy'; some synonyms for bright are: shining, vivid, brilliant, splendid, glorious, quick-witted and intelligent. Of course the response maybe that they don't care or that they think being gay is wrong in which case you can say that while people are entitled to their opinions, to say them publicly may cause offence or may even be unlawful.  
Thirdly, irrespective of the response, it maybe possible to open up the discourse and either have, or arrange to have, a session on the subject (see session ideas).
  - If people hear and observe a no tolerance approach to homophobia, attitudes can shift and victims may feel more able to speak out.
  
- Responding to a disclosure/ incident:
  - Respond to the incident as you would any other form of bullying; focus on what the young person is telling you rather than the nature of the attack. Questions about the person's sexuality are irrelevant unless they of course want to seek further support around that.

- Challenging the language - they don't know what they are saying. Lots of words that are used to bully, originally meant something quite different:

- "Poof"

- **noun** Brit. informal, derogatory an effeminate or homosexual man.  
— DERIVATIVES **poofy** adjective.  
— ORIGIN perhaps an alteration of *puff* in the obsolete sense braggart.<sup>1</sup>

- "Queer"

- **adjective** **1** strange; odd. **2** informal, derogatory (of a man) homosexual. **3** Brit. informal, dated slightly ill.

— USAGE The word **queer** was first used to mean 'homosexual' in the early 20th century. It was originally, and usually still is, a deliberately derogatory term when used by heterosexual people. In recent years, however, gay people have taken the word **queer** and deliberately used it in place of **gay** or **homosexual**, in an attempt, by using the word positively, to deprive it of its negative power.<sup>2</sup>

- "Gay"

- **adjective (gayer, gayest)** **1** (especially of a man) homosexual. **2** relating to homosexuals. **3** dated light-hearted and carefree. **4** dated brightly coloured; showy.

- **noun** a homosexual person, especially a man.  
— DERIVATIVES **gayness** noun.  
— USAGE **Gay** is now a standard term for 'homosexual', and is the term preferred by homosexual men to describe themselves. As a result, it is now very difficult to use **gay** in its earlier meanings 'carefree' or 'bright and showy' without arousing a sense of double entendre. **Gay** in its modern sense typically refers to men, **lesbian** being the standard term for homosexual women.<sup>3</sup>

Also a lot of words are used pejoratively to refer to anal sex ('batty boy' (Caribbean slang for 'buttocks'), 'shirt lifter', 'bugger' etc) specifically as a gay male preference when in fact, not all gay/ bisexual men have anal sex and around 30% of heterosexuals have tried it and 8% do it on a regular basis.

#### References:

1-3: Ask Oxford. Available from: <http://www.askoxford.com> [accessed 22/12/08]