



WHAT IS SAFE SCHOOLS?

The Safe Schools program helps schools foster a safe environment that is supportive and inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) students. Creating this environment is key to tackling bullying, discrimination and harassment at schools, particularly arising from homophobia and transphobia.

Safe and inclusive schools benefit all students and are critical to students achieving their full potential. Students who don't feel safe or included at school cannot learn effectively.

Safe Schools is not part of the curriculum, nor is it prescriptive in any way. Schools have the discretion to use as many or as few of the resources, training materials, and other support that the program offers to help them create a safe and inclusive environment for all students.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA AT SCHOOL?

All young people have a right to feel safe at school but many LGBTI young people have negative experiences in Australian schools. LGBTI young people experience high rates of bullying and the vast majority of this abuse occurs at school.

Writing Themselves In 3, the third national study on the sexual health and wellbeing of same sex attracted and gender questioning young people found that:

- 61 per cent of LGBTI young people report experiencing verbal homophobic abuse;
- 18 per cent report physical homophobic abuse;
- 69 per cent report other types of homophobia, including exclusion and rumours; and
- 80 per cent of respondents experienced the reported abuse at school.

WHY SAFE SCHOOLS?

The Victorian Government wants to improve outcomes for every student, in every classroom, in every community. It also wants all students in Victoria to develop high levels of resilience.

For many people, the question of their gender or their sexuality is straightforward, however for some it is more contested as they don't fit neatly into the category assigned to them at birth or with the 'norm'. It is important for all children and young people to understand that not everyone is the same and to respect this.

National and international research shows that positive and inclusive school environments lead to students having better academic results, increased confidence and better attendance at school.

HOW DOES SAFE SCHOOLS WORK?

The Victorian Government has committed to all government secondary schools being Safe Schools by the end of 2018.

To be a Safe School, schools take the following steps:

1. Make a public commitment to create a safe and inclusive school environment, including for LGBTI students;
2. Identify actions the school will undertake to achieve the commitment;
3. Identify the intended outcome(s) of implementing the school's actions and commitment; and
4. Publicly communicate the commitment, proposed actions and intended outcome(s).

How these four steps are implemented is at the discretion of the school and should be tailored to suit the school environment.

Schools may wish to incorporate the four elements into existing policies or documents; new, standalone policies are not required.

WHAT SUPPORT CAN SCHOOLS ACCESS?

The Safe Schools Unit assists schools and Department staff with implementing the Safe Schools commitment, including:

1. Professional learning on topics such as LGBTI health and wellbeing, using Safe School resources, and supporting student-led groups.
2. Support to conduct a review of school policies and practice to assess and improve inclusion for LGBTI students
3. Consultation, advice and resources, including in relation to school-based support for individual students who are gender diverse or transitioning at school.
4. Networking and linkages, specifically to external support services that help with referrals for individual students, as well as links to other schools to provide learning networks and communities of practice.

Opportunities can be tailored for school and Department staff, as required. Support is available to all Victorian schools, including government, Catholic, independent at both primary and secondary levels.

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

The Safe Schools Unit can be contacted on:

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Email: safe.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au

Our website is: www.education.vic.gov.au/safeschools