



Tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying for disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs

A SHORT GUIDE FOR SCHOOL STAFF



Working with children,
for children

What would help to tackle bullying for LGBT+ disabled young people and those with SEN?

We spoke to disabled young people and those with special educational needs (SEN) to find out how schools can improve sex and relationships education (SRE) and how they can tackle bullying of LGBT+ ¹ disabled young people.

Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying

The disabled young people we spoke to told us:

- That being a disabled young person meant they were often not believed when reporting bullying and when they said they were LGBT+
- That teachers in school had a poor understanding about disability and LGBT+ issues, which affected young people's willingness and ability to report bullying.
- That they experienced both HBT and disablist bullying in school. "It's a double whammy"
- That they often have to come out twice. Once as a disabled person and as LGBT+.
- That they had seen HBT and disablist bullying ignored in school and that it affected their confidence and their willingness to report bullying.
- That the use of HBT and/or disablist language in school was rife and that it was rarely challenged in schools.
- That they were made to feel that bullying was their own fault because of being disabled or LGBT+.
- That bullying made them not feel able to come out and/or try to hide their impairment.

"It happens both ways. Whether you're gay or not, they say 'You're so gay'. I think they think it's easier to say that than to say something to us about being disabled. Then you hear people saying to gay people 'You're so retarded'".

"They say 'You bring it on yourself' because you look or act different. Instead of doing something to stop it, they just said I needed to learn to fit in."

VIEWPOINT

"It's like people think you can be disabled or LGBT+ – but not both."



¹ By LGBT+ we include lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and the + signifies other gender or sexuality identities such as queer, intersex and asexual

What does the research tell us?²

- The limited research available suggests that disabled children and those with SEN are at an increased risk of experiencing HBT bullying.
- A survey of UK LGBT youth found two thirds (66%) of disabled children and those with SEN had experienced homophobic bullying, compared to 55% among the sample as a whole.
- A study found that among LGBT adolescents in the US, almost 20% had been verbally bullied because of a real or perceived disability, and 7% physically harassed.
- Some smaller studies have also found that among victims of homophobic bullying, over a third reported being bullied because of a disability or SEN.

What should schools do?

As well as their suggestions for improving sex and relationships education, young people told us about their ideas for tackling HBT bullying for disabled young people.

1. Include information about sex, relationships and being LGBT+ around the school and make sure this includes positive images of LGBT+ disabled people.

“Have visible information around the school.”

“Combat the fear of the unknown - empathy comes from being able to relate to people.”

2. Develop forums for LGBT+ disabled staff and students to enable them to reflect on their experiences, to plan how to improve the experiences of LGBT+ disabled staff and students, and to work with the senior leadership team to plan a whole school approach.

“Part of the problem for teachers and students is that no one talks about it.”

3. Understand the level of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and disablist bullying
4. Make sure that information about bullying is displayed around the school and that this includes information about homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and disablist bullying.
5. Make sure that the support available for all students who are being bullied is well publicised.

“You need to know there is someone to talk to and that they will understand about being gay and about disability”

6. Make sure that responses to bullying challenge and change the bullying behaviours, not the behaviour of the person being bullied.

A lot of LGBT+ disabled young people told us that they had been told ‘to act differently’ and then bullying will stop. The bullying behaviours should be challenged and changed, not the behaviour of the young person who is being bullied.

“No victim blaming. Believe young people about the bullying and believe how they identify as LGBT+.”

7. Challenge homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and disablist language and jokes in schools. Talk to students and school staff so they know what they can say or do to challenge language. ABA has lots of school resources on our website.

“Challenge young people when they say things like ‘That’s so gay’ or ‘That’s so retarded.’ It hurts to hear that. If someone challenges it, it shows you they care about it and it makes you feel more confident.”

8. Make school systems and structures are more inclusive and supportive of trans and non-binary young people. For example, make sure there are gender neutral toilets and address school uniform policies so that they are the same for all students, regardless of gender.
9. Support school staff to understand homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and disability. This is important so that they understand:
 - that disabled young people can be LGBT+ too.
 - what the issues are for LGBT+ disabled young people.
 - what to look out for and how to approach a young person that is struggling or being bullied.
 - what they can say or do to tackle bullying or challenge homophobic, biphobic, transphobic or disablist language.

² For references please see the longer version of this guide available on the Anti-Bullying Alliance website

How to improve sex and relationships education

The disabled young people we spoke to told us:

- They had received little or no SRE at school.
- They were often withdrawn from SRE lessons to be given additional learning or health support.
- They are often assumed to be asexual and this affected their self esteem and confidence.
- That not hearing about or learning about LGBT+, and especially not hearing about LGBT+ disabled people, made them feel invisible.

“People think disabled people are asexual as it is, so they don’t talk to you about any relationships, let alone about being or acknowledging that you are LGBT.”

“Why shouldn’t disabled young people know about relationships and know that we can have all the same kind of relationships as anyone else?”

What does the research tell us?

- Although SRE is provided to disabled children and those with SEN, it largely focuses on heterosexuality and offers few chances for them to develop positive LGBT+ identities.
- SRE programmes that provide tailored and appropriate advice for disabled children and those with SEN, and are inclusive of all genders and sexual orientations, may be a potential route for reducing rates of HBT bullying, and can also help children cope with the effects of being bullied.
- We know that more disabled young people than non-disabled young people say they have not received any SRE.

What should schools do?

Young people told us that making sex and relationships education inclusive of LGBT+ and disability was important to raise awareness, challenge stigma, make LGBT+ and disability visible, and to enable them to develop a positive self identify. Young people’s ideas to improve SRE for LGBT+ disabled young people include:

1. Make sure all disabled young people have access to SRE and are not removed from lessons for other types of support.
2. Include information about being LGBT+ in and positive images of disabled people in SRE. Make sure this is woven throughout the curriculum, rather than one off lessons, and ensure “that LGB&T issues are taken seriously and not made into a joke”.
3. Make sure disabled young people are shown where they can access other sources of information, advice and support for LGBT+ young people.

“It’s important for disabled young people to learn about LGBTQ too. They might not be able to access information in the same way as non-disabled young people.”

4. Use local youth, LGBT+ or disability organisations to facilitate some SRE sessions to enable young people to hear directly from other LGBT+ disabled people.

“I had no one to talk to at school. I found a local LGBT youth group and the leader was disabled. It was so important to see someone like me. It made such a difference to know I wasn’t the only one; that being a gay disabled person was ok.”

5. Make sure SRE covers issues that are important to disabled young people. This may include peer advice or support, so that they can learn and ask questions about some of the specific issues disabled people may experience. For example, this may include body confidence and self-esteem, or managing relationships when you have a personal assistant.



**You can read an extended version
of this guide on our website:
[www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/
HBTbullying](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/HBTbullying)**



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