

# Alberta

# Homophobic Bullying Prevention Tips for Youth

## What is homophobic bullying?

Homophobic bullying is defined as bullying behaviours that are motivated by prejudice against a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation. Anyone can be the victim of homophobic bullying - anywhere and at any time.

## What can you do if you are the target of homophobic bullying?

If you are the target of homophobic bullying:

1. **Tell someone you trust** – Talk to a trusted adult or friend who respects your confidentiality. This may be a teacher, parent, relative, youth worker, counsellor, coach, police officer, faith leader or whomever you feel safest talking with. 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 policies or student code of conduct. Your school has a legal responsibility to protect you from 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 sexual orientation, gender identity.
3. **Stay safe** – Don't fight back. Try to diffuse the situation, rather than escalating it by calling the bullies names. Is there a safe place nearby? Remember, bullies want attention and fighting back only gives them what they want. If you fight back, you may get hurt or make the situation worse. If you are a bystander, go for help and provide moral and emotional support to the person being bullied. Become an ally and speak out whenever you see, hear, or experience bullying.
4. **Document everything** – Treat all bullying incidents seriously. Keep a record of the incident, including the date, time, location, witnesses and what was said or done. If you are being bullied online or via text message, don't delete the message. You don't have to read it, but keep it as evidence. The police or school authorities can use this information to help protect you from further abuse.
5. **Remain calm** – It's common to feel angry, upset, scared, ashamed, embarrassed or hopeless when you've been the target of homophobic bullying. You don't have to reveal your sexual orientation or 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 a sexual or gender minority (LGBTQ\*). You don't have to deal with bullying on your own. Caring and trusted adults are available to help and support you. If the first adult you turn to doesn't support you, keep trying until someone listens!
6. **Know the law** – Physical and sexual assault are crimes that should be reported to the police. Find out if your police service or RCMP detachment has a specialized hate crime unit or diversity officer. After you report the incident, contact the unit and indicate that you feel the crime was motivated by hate, based on your actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Describe in detail any hateful words expressed and what caused you to be afraid.

**Tell someone you trust... Know your rights... Stay safe... Document everything... Remain calm... Know the law... Find support in your community... Take a stand against homophobia and transphobia.**

7. **Find support in your community** – Reach out for help! You can call the provincial toll-free **Bullying Helpline 1-888-456-2323** for information and support. Check to see if there is a local LGBTQ youth group where you can meet like-minded peers. Consider enrolling in a school that has a gay-straight student alliance or diversity club. Often these schools will be welcoming spaces for sexual and gender minority, questioning, and allied youth.
  
8. **Take a stand against homophobia and transphobia** – Speak out when it is safe to do so, and challenge homophobic and transphobic bullying. In fact, allied youth might be in the safest place to speak out against discrimination without fear of ridicule or harm.

Remember, being bullied or attacked is not your fault. Regardless of how you identify, you deserve to be able to express, and feel good about, yourself without fear of violence or prejudice. You're not the problem – it's the culture of homophobia and transphobia that needs to change!

\*LGBTQ is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, queer and questioning identities. Sexual and gender minority is a synonymous term.

