



Learning About Sexual Diversity at School What Is Age Appropriate?

In primary grades, children need to learn things such as these:

- P1. **There aren't any "girl colors and boy colors" or "girl games and boy games."** Those are stereotypes of what you have to like to be a girl or a boy. It's OK to be different.
- P2. **Families come in all different shapes and sizes, including, among many others, two-mommy and two-daddy families** and families with no kids at all (just grown-ups). Some people are born into their family and some are adopted or fostered or "just" loved into their family. Sometimes families live together and sometimes they don't. What makes a group of people a family is that they love and take care of one another.
- P3. **It is wrong to call people names or put them down ... for any reason, including being gay.** Everybody in our school deserves to be treated with kindness. It's important to stick up for yourself (in ways that don't hurt others). It's important to stick up for your friends. It's also OK to ask adults to help you when people use "put-downs." It is not "tattling" when you ask grown-ups to help you be safe. **EDUCATORS: If you hear students use words like "fag" or "dyke," it's perfectly appropriate to add:** Words like "fag" and "dyke" are mean. The respectful words are "gay" and "lesbian." A "gay" man is someone who loves another man best of all. A "lesbian" woman is someone who loves another woman best of all. "Heterosexuals" are people whose dearest love is of a different gender – a man who loves a woman or a woman who loves a man. People are "bisexual" or "bi" if they can fall in love with a woman or a man.

In intermediate grades, children **also** need to learn that:

11. **A "stereotype" is a mental picture you have of someone just because they belong to a certain group of people.** For example, you might think that all teenagers like a certain kind of music. That's ridiculous, but it probably isn't hurtful. Still, it's a stereotype. **A "prejudice" is a negative or hurtful stereotype.** If you believed that all teenagers shoplift, that would be hurtful thinking, so it is a prejudice.
12. **You can't tell if people are gay or lesbian by how they look or talk.** Only some people fit the stereotypes; that's what makes them stereotypes. Some people who *aren't* gay also fit stereotypes about gay people. It's OK to be a gay or lesbian person and fit those stereotypes, but many gay and lesbian people don't.
13. **If you hear somebody put down gay people – or any people – you can tell them you think it's mean** (unfair, unkind) and you can ask them to stop using "gay" as a put-down. If you see somebody getting picked on, you can let them know that you think they deserve to be treated better and, if necessary, you can ask an adult for help. **EDUCATORS: If you hear students use terms like "That's so gay!" it's perfectly appropriate to add:** You don't say things like "That's so gay!" to mean that you don't like something. It's wrong. It shows prejudice and it might hurt people ... maybe somebody whose mom or dad or another family member or friend is gay. We all probably know someone gay, even if we don't realize it.
14. **A lot of people are more masculine or feminine than the media says they're "supposed to" be.** It's perfectly OK – and very common – not to fit those stereotypes. **EDUCATORS: If students ask about transgender people, it's perfectly appropriate to add:** Someone who feels as if their body is completely the wrong sex might call themselves "transgender." And a boy or man who just can't act the way people think boys are supposed to act – or a girl or woman who isn't comfortable at all being the way people expect girls to be – might also call themselves *transgender*. These folks aren't necessarily gay or lesbian. Most gay and lesbian people don't think they are or want to be the other sex; remember, that's called being transgender.
15. **Most people have 2 sex chromosomes (XX if they're a girl and XY if they're a boy); some don't.** Most girls have certain hormones that come from their ovaries and most boys have other hormones that come from their testicles. Girls also have some male hormones and boys also have some female hormones, just not as much as girls have. But there's a lot of diversity in people's bodies and they aren't all exactly the typical way you see in puberty videos. **EDUCATORS: If students ask about intersex people, it's perfectly appropriate to add:** If a person's body isn't exactly the way doctors expect a boy's body to be or the way they expect a girl's body to be – if their chromosomes or hormones or reproductive system are different – they might be what's called "intersex."

In middle school, young teens **also** need to learn that:

- M1. **Gay, lesbian and bi people usually want the same kinds of things in relationships that heterosexual people want.** There's a stereotype that all they want from a partner is sex. Some do, of course, just like some straight people. But some gay, lesbian and bi teens have never had sex (with people of any gender). Your sexual orientation isn't what you do; it's how you feel. And anyone can choose to abstain.



- M2. Gay men and lesbians are usually just as respectful of children and others as heterosexuals are.** There's a stereotype that gay men molest children. That's nonsense. Most child molesters are heterosexual. Another stereotype is that gay people "recruit" or "come on" to heterosexuals. That's ridiculous. A person would just be setting themselves up for rejection if they flirted with someone who clearly wasn't interested.
- M3. We don't know why some people are gay, lesbian or bisexual and others are heterosexual.** Or why some of us are trans and some aren't. It may have something to do with your genes or your mom's hormones before you were born and it might be partly developed after birth. But we know it's *not* whether you got abused or how you feel about your parents that causes you to be gay or straight. And your parents' sexual orientations and gender identities have nothing to do with yours; if they're gay, that doesn't mean you necessarily will be.
- M4. All people who have sex – no matter what sex or gender or sexual orientation they are -- need to know how to make it safer.** Everybody is capable of choosing to abstain and everybody who doesn't abstain can still reduce their risks. Gay and bisexual guys are more likely than average to ever have an HIV-positive partner, and that partner may not know that he's HIV-positive, so they need to be *especially* careful about prevention. The same is true for people with partners from harder hit parts of the world or who've ever used injection drugs.
- M5. Some gay, lesbian, bi, trans and intersex (GLBTI) people have made incredible contributions to this world.** They've been scientists, diplomats, athletes, artists, soldiers and human rights activists. Some of the people in your history books were GLBTI, but you never learned that about them either because of the prejudices of the people who wrote those books or because the person lived at a time when people didn't understand or talk about sexual diversity.
EDUCATORS: Find out more about GLBTI role models at www.famousandgay.com
- M6. There are GLBTI people in all walks of life, of every race, rich and poor, old and young, all over the world.** You know some, although you may not realize it if they don't happen to fit stereotypes or act out like the people on daytime talk-shows. They're part of our schools, workplaces, families, communities of worship, sports teams, social service clubs, etc. They've always been a part of your life.

In high school, teens *also* need to learn that:

- H1.** Your **biological sex** is the way your body was made. Most people's bodies are male or female. Their chromosomes, their brains, their reproductive systems, their skeletons and their hormones are either male or female. But some people's bodies are different from the typical male or female; they're still male or female but they have important differences, too. They might have XXY chromosomes instead of the typical XX of a girl or XY of a boy. Or they might have been born with a reproductive system that looked different from other babies'. They're **intersex**. Human sexuality is beautifully complex.
- H2.** Your **gender identity** is who you feel as if you are on the *inside* (male, female, both, neither, flexible). Your **gender expression** has to do with how you act on the outside (how you walk, talk, sit, dress, etc. ... whether you're more masculine, feminine, some of both). Some folks call themselves **transgender** or **trans** because they were born biologically one sex, but emotionally and spiritually another. Other **trans** people have just never really fit people's expectations about how boys or girls are supposed to act.
- H3.** Your **sexual orientation** has to do with whom you mostly find sexually and emotionally and romantically attractive (guys, girls or both). **Heterosexual** (straight) people like or fall in love mostly with people of a different gender – guys who like girls and vice versa. If a guy likes other guys best, he may call himself **gay**. A girl who gets crushed mostly on other girls may consider herself **lesbian**. Somebody who could fall in love with a girl or a guy is **bisexual** or **bi**. It's not who you have sex with; it's who you think you'll want relationships with.
- H4. Most experts say that you can't change your sexual orientation through therapy.** Some people have changed their behavior, especially if they were bisexual to begin with and wanted to live heterosexual lives. But there's no proof that therapy can make a person's sexual *feelings* or feelings of *love* disappear. Of course, many people wouldn't want their feelings to disappear.
- H5. It is currently *not* against the law to discriminate against sexual minority people in most parts of the United States.** In 40 states a person can be fired, denied service in restaurants, or lose their homes just for being gay, lesbian or bisexual. In 46 states, a person can be fired for being Transgender. Like women, union workers, various communities of color and people with disabilities, there's a long proud history of struggle for equal rights for GLBT people.
- H6. Massachusetts is the only place in the United States, as of this printing, where same-sex couples can get legally married.** In some provinces in Canada and two European countries, same-sex couples can marry, too. For a while, couples in a few other places around the U.S. got legally married, but the courts have voided some of those marriages and are still deciding about others. Some couples all over the world do have ceremonies to celebrate their commitment to one another. Some clergy of various faiths conduct and bless those commitment ceremonies, but the unions are recognized by the church, not the government.

Learning About Sexual Diversity at School In Every Discipline

CONCEPT	Health EALR & Benchmark	Social Studies EALR Benchmark & Evidence of Learning
P1. There aren't any "girl colors and boy colors" or "girl games and boy games."	3.3.1a Form safe and respectful relationships.	C4.1.1a: Identify the roles and responsibilities of community members.
P2. Families come in all different shapes and sizes.	3.3.1a Form safe and respectful relationships.	H1.1.1a: Describe who can be in a family drawing from personal experiences as well as from experiences of others.
P3. It is wrong to call people names or put them down.	3.3.1a Express emotions constructively.	C4.1.1a Describe situations that are fair in relation to him/herself and others.
I1. Define "stereotype" and "prejudice."	3.2.1a [Distinguish] fact vs. myth.	2.1.3c Identify bias of subject; 3.1.4a Identify multiple perspectives.
I2. You can't tell if people are gay or lesbian by how they look.	3.2.1a [Distinguish] fact vs. myth.	2.1.3c Identify bias of subject; 3.1.4a Identify multiple perspectives.
I3. If you hear put downs, you can tell them you think it's mean (unfair, unkind).	2.3.1a Explain one's right to personal and physical safety.	2.1.1a Communicate own feelings and beliefs; listen to [others'] viewpoints.
I4. Evaluate media messages re: what's "masculine/feminine."	3.2.1a Determine reliable sources of health information	3.1.2f Assume and portray others' points of view.
I5. Most people have 2 sex chromosomes; some don't.	2.1.1a Describe the structure and function of human body systems.	
M1. GLB people* usually want the same things relationships as heterosexual people.	3.3a [Demonstrate] respect for self and others.	3.1.4b Recognize stereotypes, clichés, bias.
M2. GLB people are usually respectful (not molesters/recruiters)	2.3b: [Recognize, prevent, seek adult help with] harassment/sexual harassment (intimidation, threatening behavior, degradation).	3.1.4b Evaluate accuracy ... of information; analyze credibility and authenticity.
M3. We don't know the origins of sexual orientation.	2.1b [Explain the] physical, emotional, intellectual, & social changes [of] puberty (hormonal attractions, expressing ... feelings, sense of connectedness, empowerment).	1.1.3d Evaluate reliability, credibility, and validity of information from a variety of ... sources.

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M4. All people who have sex need to know how to make it safer.	2.2b [Explain the] prevention, detection, treatment, monitoring [of] STDs; 2.3a risks of HIV/STDs (transmission, effective prevention).	
M5. Some GLBTI people have made incredible contributions to this world.		WH 1.2 Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the United States, world, and Washington State history.
M6. There are GLBTI people in all walks of life.		WH 1.2 Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the United States, world, and Washington State history.
H1. Define "biological sex" and "intersex."	2.1a Identify and plan for coping with situations related to the physical, social, and emotional transition from adolescence to adulthood, as related to reproductive health.	
H2. Define "gender identity," "gender expression," "transgender," and "trans."	2.1a Identify and plan for coping with situations related to the physical, social, and emotional transition from adolescence to adulthood, as related to reproductive health.	
H3. Define "sexual orientation," "heterosexual" (straight), "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual" and "bi."	2.1a Identify and plan for coping with situations related to the physical, social, and emotional transition from adolescence to adulthood, as related to reproductive health.	
H4. Most experts say that you can't change your sexual orientation through therapy.	3.2a Evaluate the accuracy and usefulness of health information for selection of products and services; 3.4 Warning signs of depression and suicide, community resources, avoiding unhealthy coping mechanisms.	
H5. It is legal to discriminate against sexual minority people in most parts of the U.S.		H 1.2.3 Identify and analyze major concepts, people, and events in world history from 1400 to the present including challenges to democracy and human rights (1900-present).
H6. Massachusetts is the only state where same-sex couples can get legally married.		G3.3.3b Analyze how peoples' responses to policy debates are shaped by cultural influences.

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The point is not an "add-on" unit or a "heroes & holidays" attitude. Rather, the goal is GLBTI* inclusiveness infused in the life of the school, just as other kinds of diversity belong in all disciplines at all grade levels.

MATH: Math units can reinforce health concepts. Students can graph the number of people in their families. They can make pie charts and Venn diagrams of how many women, how many people of color and how many GLBT people are visible in their textbooks. They can determine what proportion of soldiers are women, what percentage of professional athletes are openly GLBT, what fraction of people at their school have been harassed using anti-gay slurs. In exploring mathematics as a career, they can learn of the contributions of mathematicians such as **Alan Turing**, the "founding father of computer science," who was gay.

LANGUAGE ARTS: Vocabulary units can reinforce social studies concepts. Students can read GLBT-inclusive children's books about families and about gender non-conforming kids. Students can journal, write research papers, and participate in class discussions about current and historical events relevant to sexual diversity. They can write and perform plays that teach bullying prevention skills. When they read the works of **Langston Hughes**, **Walt Whitman**, and **Lorraine Hansberry**, they can explore how these authors' sexual minority status may have influenced their writing.

SCIENCE: Students should explore the biology of sexual diversity, the epidemiology of HIV, the chemistry of love and infatuation, and the anthropology of cross-cultural attitudes about gender. And, in learning that science and technology are human endeavors, interrelated to each other, to society, and to the workplace, they can learn about the work of GLBTI scientists such as **Margaret Mead**, **George Washington Carver** and **Leonardo da Vinci**.

ARTS: The arts can reinforce health and social studies learnings. Students can draw their families, paint portraits of men and women in non-traditional careers, photograph images of concepts such as "love" and "gender." They can critique films such as *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin*. They can study the proud history of protest music for social change (from slave spirituals, to the works of Woody Guthrie and **Romanofsky and Phillips**). They can perform plays from *Dramatic Changes: Talking About Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity with High School Students Through Drama* or from *Cootie Shots: Theatrical Inoculations Against Bigotry for Children, Parents and Teachers*.

See bibliographies, lesson plans and whole curricula at www.SafeSchoolsCoalition.org

* GLBTI = Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex