

Core knowledge content

Emotional, Social and Cognitive Changes

Some changes that occur during puberty you can see and others you cannot. Emotional, social and cognitive changes occur because of the changes that are happening to the brains of children. It is now neither a child's brain nor an adult's brain but instead is a brain under construction. Construction won't be complete until the early twenties and these changes will result in emotional, social and cognitive changes as they mature.

Students may want to make decisions quicker than before but they might not always be healthiest decisions. They often want more independence which may influence the decisions they make about relationships, substance misuse, and smoking. In fact they may assume that by making certain decisions, they would be demonstrating their "grown up" status; however the exact opposite is happening. Students develop a greater desire to be accepted/liked by their peer group; fitting in becomes more important. Puberty is also a time when students may experience increased peer pressure. Some strategies to suggest include: be true to your values and beliefs; be clear about what values are important to you; and use assertive communication. During puberty some students start to become interested in dating. Having a romantic interest in another person is common. It can feel very exciting, but also confusing. These feelings are common and most students are experiencing the same thing.

Relationships

In a positive relationship, a person can still be their own person, as well as being part of a couple. To be in a healthy relationship you need to feel good about yourself:

- Each student has the right to live in a world that is free from danger, risk or injury - a world that feels safe.
- Each student is a special person, with many talents and qualities. Believe in yourself and accept yourself for who you are – we all have faults and no one is perfect.
- Good communication, decision-making skills, and problem solving skills are key to healthy relationships. Take the time to evaluate skills and feel free to ask for help.
- Each student has the right to seek help from a respected, trusted adult if they do not feel safe and supported.

Teaching Tool

Self-Concept and Healthy Relationships – Grade 6

A healthy relationship makes a person feel good about themselves and their partner. They can have fun together and still be themselves. All relationships are different, but healthy relationships share at least five things in common - the **S.H.A.R.E.** qualities.

Safety: In a healthy relationship, a person feels safe. They don't have to worry that their partner will harm them physically or emotionally, and they aren't tempted to harm them. A person can change their mind about something - like having sex - without being afraid of how their partner will respond.

Honesty: A person doesn't hide anything important from their partner, and can say what they think without fear of being ridiculed. They can admit to being wrong and working with their partner to resolve disagreements by talking honestly.

Acceptance: They accept each other as they are. They appreciate their partner's unique qualities, such as shyness or spaceyness, and don't try to "fix" them. If there are qualities a person doesn't like about their partner, then maybe they shouldn't be with that person.

Respect: Both partners think highly of each other. They do not feel superior or inferior to their partner in important ways. They respect each other's right to have separate opinions and ideas.

Enjoyment: A good relationship is not just about how two people treat each other - it also has to be enjoyable. In a healthy relationship, they can play, laugh together and have fun.

These principals can be used in all relationships: relationships with friends, parents, romantic partners, and everyone in our lives should contain the SHARE principals. Having a healthy relationship with someone means knowing who they are - their good and their not-so-good qualities. It's respecting and often communicating their values, choices and feelings. This means respecting space and time - knowing that the other person is emotionally there, even when they can't be physically beside you.

An unhealthy relationship is one in which a person doesn't feel that they can be themselves, or when they feel pressured into doing things they're not comfortable with or that they wouldn't normally do. To be able to know when a relationship is bad, a person needs to know who they are, what they want and what they're comfortable with.

One type of unhealthy relationship is an abusive relationship. Abusive relationships revolve around control, fear and lack of respect. Usually, one partner has control while the other cowers in resentment or fear. Abusive relationships can involve threats, name-calling, blaming, guilt-tripping,

jealous questioning, and violence. A social worker and/or counsellor can help map out a strategy for leaving an abusive relationship and getting one's own life back on track. Your health care provider can steer a person toward appropriate counselling services. Parents are an excellent resource, however it is important to note that students can also speak to teachers, health care providers, coaches, or other trusted adults in their lives.

LBTQ and Sexual Orientation

As part of a broadly based sexual health curriculum, it is important to speak openly about sex, gender expression, and sexual orientation. “Sexual orientation and gender expression are an important part of each student developing a positive self concept. During childhood, it is quite common for children to have many different kinds of sexual feelings and experiences. During adolescence and into adulthood, people are compelled to define themselves through their sexuality. Though academics generally agree that sexuality includes a spectrum of feelings and actions, adolescents report enormous pressure to characterize themselves as ‘straight’. No one is sure what percentage of the population identifies as gay or lesbian, but some studies suggest approximately ten percent of people are not heterosexual. This means that approximately ten percent or more of the students in your classes will defines themselves either now or at some time in their life as a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. These students deserve a safe and inclusive environment in which to learn about sexuality (Region of Peel, 2011)”.

Students who identify as LGBTQ or transgender have a disproportionately high rate of suicide attempts and self-reported suicidal ideation when compared to their straight and cisgender counterparts. The good news is that research also shows that connectedness to a school community is a protective factor for LBGTQ and transgender students. When LGBTQ and transgender issues are taught within the curriculum in a positive way, reports of school connectedness increase within the population of LBGTQ and transgender students. Figure 1 highlights that more than 50% of LBGTQ students responded positively to questions on school environment, when they had been exposed to positive LBGTQ curriculum at school.

Sexual Orientation

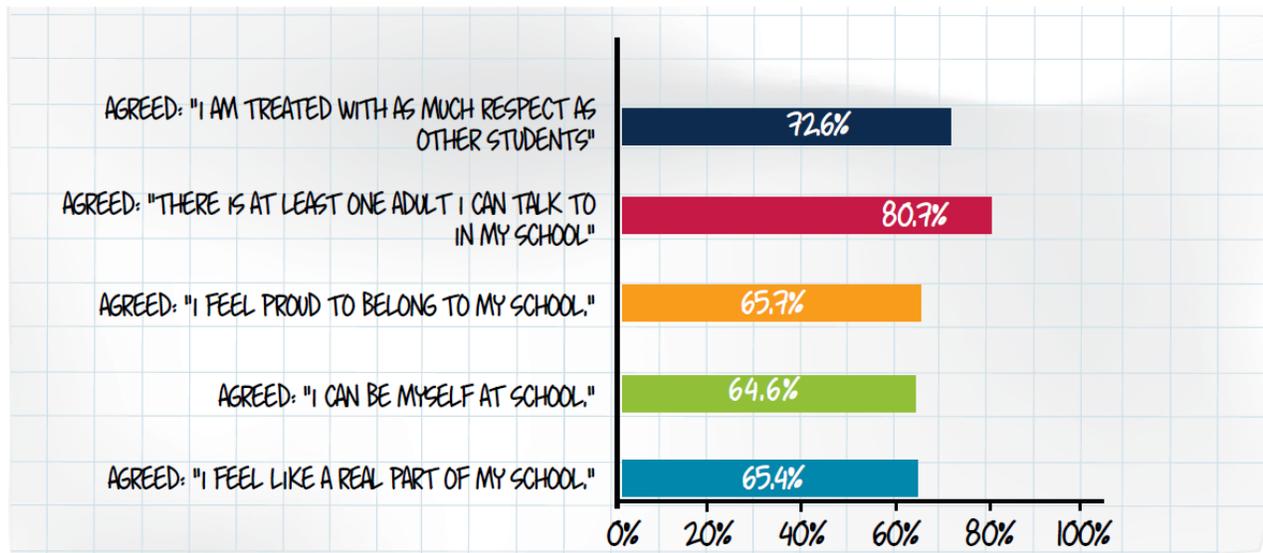


Figure 1: Positive LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum (Taylor et. Al. 2011)

Supplemental Knowledge

Glossary of Terms

Anti-Discrimination and harassment: includes bullying awareness and prevention programming

Bi-sexual: refers to an individual with the potential to be emotionally and/ or sexually attracted to members of any sex.

Cis-gendered: refers to an individual who's gender or sense of identity corresponds to their biological sex

Equity: refers to the right of the individual to a fair share of the goods and services in society.

Gay: refers to an individual who is emotionally and/ or sexually attracted to a person of the same sex; often interchangeable with the term homosexual.

Gender Identity: refers to how we view ourselves as masculine or feminine. For many, gender identify matches their physical body. For some, the way they see themselves as masculine or feminine is different form their physical body.

Heterosexual: Refers to an individual who is emotionally and/ or sexually attracted to members of a different/ another sex.

Heterosexism: the belief in the inherent superiority and ‘normalcy’ of heterosexuality. It is the foundation for homophobia.

Homosexual: refers to an individual who is emotionally and/ or sexually attracted to members of the same sex.

Intersex: a medical term for someone who is biologically not clearly male or female; generally more accurate and more acceptable than hermaphrodite.

Lesbian: refers to a female who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to the same sex. Lesbian is the preferred term for women.

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two-Spirited, Queer, and Questioning

Queer: a term used in a number of different ways, i.e. as an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and other non-heterosexual identities. It is also used as a way of reclaiming and co-opting a once negative term; to remove ‘queer’ as a term of abuse. However, not everyone finds the term empowering; some resist it because of its use among homophobic people. Queer is a term that is increasingly gaining acceptance as an academic term.

Questioning: refers to a person who is exploring the possibilities of, or who is in the process of figuring out their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexual Orientation: encompasses the range of human sexuality from gay, lesbian, bi-sexual to heterosexual.

Transgender(ed): Trans-identified is a broad term that describes people who feel that their anatomical sex does not match their gender identity, and/or whose appearance and behaviours do not conform to the societal roles as expected of their sex.

Transexual: a person who experiences intense personal and emotional discomfort with their assigned birth gender and may undergo treatment (e.g. hormones, and/or surgery) to transition genders.

Two-spirited: refers to a member of the Aboriginal community who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Individual Aboriginal peoples have their own works in their own languages that describe different gender identities and sexual orientations.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Please refer to the [FAQ section of the American Psychological Association website](#) for commonly asked questions and evidence based responses.

Resources

Alberta Health Services. *Teaching Sexual Health*. (www.teachingsexualhealth.ca)

Kids Help Phone. (<https://kidshelpphone.ca/> or 1-800-668-6868)

Niagara Region Sexual Health Centers.

(https://www.niagararegion.ca/living/health_wellness/sexualhealth/sexual-health-centres.aspx)

Physical & Health Education Canada. *Always Changing*. (https://phecanada.ca/programs/always-changing_.)

Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, *Sex & U*. (<http://www.sexandu.ca>)

References

District School Board of Niagara. (2012). *Supporting Sexual and Gender Diverse Students in the Learning Environment*

Region of Peel Public Health (2011). *Changes in Me: A Puberty and Adolescent Development Resource for Educators Junior Grade Level, Second Edition*. Retrieved from: <https://www.peelregion.ca/health/commhlth/bodyimg/changes-in-me/pdf/ChangesInMe.pdf>

Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report*. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada HumanRights Trust.