Background Information on Sexual Orientation

- Understanding and becoming comfortable with one’s sexuality are major developmental tasks for all adolescents. Sexual orientation emerges for most people in early adolescence without any prior sexual experience.
- Sexual orientation is not a conscious choice. All people, whatever their sexual orientation, deserve respect and freedom from harassment. Education can lead to understanding and tolerance. The words that we choose can portray us as accepting and affirming or as rejecting and hostile.
- Most Canadian classrooms will likely have at least one or more students who are not heterosexual (Boyce et al, 2003, Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study).

Some Facts:

- Suicide is the leading cause of death for GLBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning) Youth.
- 28% of GLBTQ Youth drop out of school due to verbal and physical harassment.
- 27% of GLBTQ Students have been physically attacked or assaulted by another student.
- GLBTQ people are at least 7 times more likely to be victims of crime than heterosexual people.
- At least 75% of the crimes against GLBTQ people go unreported.
- GLBTQ Students hear anti-gay slurs up to 26 times per day.

The Following Terms May Be Helpful:

**Sexual Orientation:** The emotional and physical attraction felt by an individual toward members of the opposite sex, same sex, or both sexes. The three forms of sexual orientation are: heterosexual, gay/lesbian and bisexual.

**Sex/Gender:** The biological status of being male or female

**Gender Identity:** One’s feeling of being either male or female

**Gender Roles:** Behaviours which are learned and are culturally defined as masculine or feminine.
Background Information on Sexual Orientation

Transsexual: A male or a female whose gender identity is that of the opposite sex.

Transgendered: Having personal characteristics that transcend traditional gender boundaries and corresponding sexual norms.

Sexual Identity: How an individual presents to the world. i.e. heterosexual identity, gay/lesbian identity.

Heterosexual: An individual who is emotionally and physically attracted to members of the opposite sex. This can refer to a male or to a female.

Homosexual: An individual who is emotionally and physically attracted to persons of the same sex.

Gay: Another term for homosexual. Although it can refer to either a male or a female, it is now more frequently used to refer, primarily, to males.

Lesbian: A female homosexual. Most homosexual women prefer to be called lesbians.

Bisexual: An individual who is emotionally and physically attracted to members of both sexes.

Homophobia: Fear and hatred of homosexuals, often exhibited by prejudice, discrimination, harassment and acts of violence.

Internalized Homophobia: The inner feelings of fear or shame felt by a gay, lesbian or bisexual about their sexuality, often caused by negative attitudes and/or personal prejudice.

Transvestite: Someone who dresses in clothes of the opposite gender and for whom that dressing is sexually satisfying. Many transvestites are heterosexual men.

Cross Dresser: (Drag) Someone who dresses up in clothing of the opposite gender for fun. For example, a gay man who dresses up as a woman to attend a social function is called a "drag queen".

Female Impersonator: A man who dresses as a woman to perform professionally in public.
Background Information on Sexual Orientation

**Heterosexism:** The belief that heterosexuality is better than any other form of sexual orientation. The assumption that everyone is heterosexual unless otherwise indicated.

**Coming Out:** The developmental process through which gay and lesbian people recognize their sexual orientation and integrate this knowledge into their personal and social lives.

**Agencies which offer education and assistance to adolescents, adults, parents, educators:**

**Niagara Pride:**
An incorporated Board whose mandate is to provide resources & support for GLBTQ youth in Niagara. Initiated and sponsors the Rainbow Squad, the GLBTQ Outreach Project and the annual Niagara Pride Picnic.
[www.niagarapride.com](http://www.niagarapride.com)

**GLBTQ Outreach Project:**
Provides information, support, resources to agencies working with young people and to individuals regarding GLBTQ youth. Includes group presentation, loan of books & videos, and referral to other appropriate agencies.
[glbtq@contactniagara.org](mailto:glbtq@contactniagara.org)
905-684-3407

**PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)**
Support and information for parents and families, meets monthly. Also provides information to the general community, speakers available.
[www.pflagcanada.ca](http://www.pflagcanada.ca)
905-934-9933

**Niagara Region Public Health Department**
Sexual Health Program
905-688-3762
[www.regional.niagara.on.ca](http://www.regional.niagara.on.ca)