



# Harassment in Schools

Many young same-sex attracted people report experiencing homophobic harassment and abuse at school. Students who have gay or lesbian parents or who are perceived to be gay or lesbian are also at risk of homophobic harassment.

## Examples of homophobic harassment that may happen at school or when travelling to and from school include:

- Verbal abuse such as name-calling, bullying or teasing.
- Ignoring you or leaving you out of things on the basis of your sexuality.
- Threats of physical violence or threats to out you as gay or lesbian.
- Physical violence such as pushing, punching and kicking.
- Stealing your belongings such as your school bag.
- Damaging your property such as books, clothes or bag.
- Displaying homophobic material including graffiti, posters, email etc.

*“Whenever I would come out of choir practice a group of boys would be waiting outside. They would start taunting me calling me a ‘girly fag’. Sometimes they would take my school bag and run away.” David, 20, Revesby.*

If this is happening at your school, you might feel scared and frightened. You might also feel embarrassed, hurt or angry.

**Remember that homophobic violence is wrong and is against the law. It is a crime that can be reported to the Police. Some other types of harassment such as threats and property damage may be considered crimes too.**



## The Law in NSW

In NSW it is against the law to discriminate, harass or vilify a person based on their homosexuality in public education. To **discriminate** means to treat someone unfairly because they belong to a particular group. This means that it is against the law in government schools to be treated unfairly just because

- you are gay or lesbian (or thought to be gay or lesbian), or
- your parents, friends or other family members are gay or lesbian.

Some types of bullying and harassment might be called **vilification**. To vilify someone because they are gay or lesbian might mean using words or doing things in public to stir up hate or serious ridicule. In many situations, vilification is against the law.

In NSW **government schools** should have anti-discrimination contact officers who can provide information and education about all forms of discrimination including homophobia. Government schools have discipline and welfare policies that support the wellbeing of all students and that should clearly state that discrimination harassment, bullying, intimidation or violence is unacceptable. In January 2005, the NSW Department of Education published a new policy that requires every government school to develop and implement an *Anti-Bullying Plan*.

Every **non-government school** should have a policy about violence and harassment. They should also have an assigned staff member who looks after student welfare who you might contact if you are being harassed. The NSW anti-discrimination laws do not cover non-government schools but vilification laws apply to all schools.

# LIVING FREE FROM FEAR

## STOPPING HOMOPHOBIC HARASSMENT





## Here are some tips for dealing with harassment at school

- If you are being bullied or harassed try to stay calm. You might want to:
  - Tell them to stop bullying or hassling you.
  - Walk away from them to a safe place.
  - Let a supportive friend or teacher know what has happened.
- Remember that if you are in fear for your safety you should always contact the Police. In an emergency call 000 otherwise call (02) 9281 0000 for the Police Switchboard. See the factsheet on 'Making a Report to Police'.
- Being harassed can be a very stressful experience. You may need to let supportive family and friends know that you are being harassed. For more information on how to look after yourself see the 'Finding help and support' fact sheet.

*"I told my best friend that I was a lesbian. I told her I was sick of being teased and she started sticking up for me. It felt great to have her support."* Tamara, 21 Newtown.

- Look for support from someone you trust at your school. This could be your classroom teacher, other support teachers, year adviser, school counsellor, anti-discrimination contact officer, head teacher (welfare), deputy principal or principal.
- Check out whether your school has a 'Bullying Policy' or policy about violence and harassment. There should be an assigned staff member who looks after student welfare who you can contact if you are being harassed.

*"My school headmaster had a really strong anti-bullying stance. It made me feel safer knowing that he thought bullying was wrong."* Akshay, 19 Strathfield.

- Every government school in New South Wales is a part of a regional group of schools. If your problem has not been suitably dealt with at the school level, contact the Student Welfare Consultant at your regional office for assistance.
- You could also contact the Federation of Parents and Citizens Association - an advocacy group that works for the interests of parents and students in government schools in New South Wales.
- You can contact the Anti-Discrimination Board on (02) 9268 5555, or 1800 670 812 (toll free – NSW only), TTY (02) 9268 5522 or fax (02) 9268 5500.
- Before you contact anyone, remember to make notes about
  - what happened
  - when and where it happened
  - who did it
  - who saw it, if anyone
  - how it made you feel, and
  - what action you would like to be taken.

For more information on this see our fact sheet on '*Keeping an harassment diary*'.