



**STAND  
OUT!**



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A huge thank you to the young people who are standing out against homophobia every day.



# STAND OUT AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA IN SCHOOLS

We are the young people who are making change in our schools, and this is your guide to challenging homophobia and transphobia in yours. Everyone deserves the opportunity to be equal, and that's what we're aiming for.

There are so many amazing things going on around Australian schools already, and we wanted to make this known. Standing out against homophobia can seem like a daunting task, but hopefully this guide will show you that it's easier than you might think.



## SAFE SCHOOLS COALITION VICTORIA

SSCV is a group of schools and individuals dedicated to making schools a safer place for same sex attracted and gender questioning students. SSCV is funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and delivered in partnership between Rainbow Network Victoria and the Foundation for Young Australians.

[safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au](http://safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au)

## MINUS18

Minus18 is Melbourne's largest network for same sex attracted and genderqueer (SSAGQ) high school students. The team of 40 high school aged crew members run underage dance parties, workshops and social events for other SSAGQ young people all around Victoria. Imagine a room with 500 other SSAGQ students, just like you. Amazing, no? You can find out all about the latest Minus18 events, and meet thousands of other young people at:

[minus18.org.au](http://minus18.org.au)

Read Online // [minus18.org.au/standout](http://minus18.org.au/standout)

 **MINUS18**





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# WHAT IS HOMOPHOBIA?

The word homophobia is used to describe a whole range of irrational negative feelings or behaviour towards anyone who is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or who is attracted to the same sex. Homophobia can also extend to people who others perceive to be same sex attracted, or even those who have family members or friends who are same sex attracted.

Likewise, transphobia is the fear and hatred of people who are transgender that often leads to discriminatory behaviour or abuse.

In schools, the most common form of these phobias that you'll probably have seen is the use of homophobic language, such as name-calling, homophobic "jokes", rumours and abusive words, such as "fag" or "dyke". Even phrases like "that's so gay" which compare sexuality to words like "crap" are homophobic and can have a really negative effect that might not seem obvious to everyone.

Homophobic behaviour can also include abusive threats or actual physical violence (such as "gay bashing"), sexual harassment or even socially excluding someone because of their sexuality.

Homophobia can occur in person, at school, on the weekends, online in social networking sites or even by text messages and phone calls. All homophobia directed towards another person, no matter where it occurs, is considered to be homophobic bullying, which is not only against school policies, but is illegal.

## THE STATS SHOW

**75%** of same sex attracted or genderqueer young people in Australia experience some form of homophobic abuse.

**61%** of same sex attracted or genderqueer young people in Australia experience verbal homophobic abuse.

**18%** of same sex attracted or genderqueer young people in Australia experience physical homophobic abuse.

**80%** of these homophobic incidents take place in schools.

It's pretty nasty stuff. But:

**10%** or more people in Australia are same sex attracted. This means that if your school has 1000 students, there are more than 100 who are same sex attracted.

So basically, you're not alone! A lot of the time people just don't think about being homophobic or haven't ever been challenged about it. Some don't even realise that a simple phrase like "that's so gay" can cause hurt to another person.

**REFERENCE:** Hillier, L., et al. (2010) Writing Themselves in 3, Melbourne, Australia: ARCSHS (La Trobe University).

# WHY CHALLENGE HOMOPHOBIA?

It might seem like an odd question to ask – but it's important to know the answer for when people ask you. Nobody likes bullying, right? We all have the right to be free from bullying and discrimination. The law states that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation at school is illegal (see: Your Legal Rights pg. 27).

Not only that, but homophobia can have very real consequences for people's physical and emotional health and wellbeing. For many who have been on the receiving end of homophobic bullying it can lead to low self-esteem, depression, skipping classes, and not being able to do their best at school.

We also know that there can also be some pretty serious health outcomes for same sex attracted young people who are affected by homophobia - things like unwanted pregnancy, being more likely to catch a sexually transmissible infection, take drugs, self harm and even suicide.

We can all be affected by ideas about gender too, things like the idea that girls should look a certain way and behave in different ways to boys. These kinds of ideas can feel very inflexible and make anyone who doesn't seem to fit feel pretty bad about themselves.

Homophobia has an effect on everyone, particularly in schools. You or your friends might be same sex attracted, or someone in your family, or even one of your teachers. Homophobia can make us all feel negative about being different. When we see homophobia we can often feel powerless or unclear about what to do.

So, that's the negative stuff.

What we hope to do with this guide is to make it clearer what you can do, what you have a right to do, and to help make sure that what you decide to do has a real impact. Hopefully by the end you will feel more confident, and ready to stand up and stand out.



**MAKE AN  
IMPACT**

# KNOW YOUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

The most important step in challenging homophobia is to work out who your supporters are, and who you can go to for support when you need it. The more people you have, the more you can achieve. Having supporters also helps you show others that standing out against homophobia is a cause that a lot of people are passionate about.

## FRIEND SUPPORT

Ask your friends and classmates to help you out, and get them to ask around to find people who are interested in getting active. Not all of your friends necessarily need to go to the same school as you - even having someone to talk to can be helpful.

If the idea of asking people face to face seems a little daunting, you can set up an online group for people at your school who want to challenge homophobia on a site like Facebook.

## STUDENT SUPPORT

Your student leaders, such as the School Captain or Student Representative Council (SRC), are also great people to have on board. Depending on your school, these are the people who help plan activities and talk directly to teachers about student issues – which could be pretty handy later on.

## TEACHER SUPPORT

It's also quite useful to have at least one teacher on board with your activities, as they're the ones who'll know the school rules, and be able to help you talk to other staff. Teachers who you have better relationships with, such as your homeroom teacher, the school counsellor or the wellbeing coordinator are good supporters to have on board. Tell your teachers about what you want to do and ask them for any ideas they might have.

# BE SEEN WITH POSTERS

A lot of homophobia comes from people have just never thought about sexuality or gender identity. One of the easiest and most effective ways to raise awareness of homophobia and get people thinking is by putting up posters throughout your school. Posters can remind students "it's OK to be gay", advertise support groups for same sex attracted and genderqueer young people, or take an active approach to letting students know that homophobia is not tolerated.

Here are some tips from students who have put up posters in their own schools:

- Getting hold of good posters that display a message you think is important and suit your own school is a good way to go. Posters are available from different groups and services. You can even download some from [minus18.org.au/standout](http://minus18.org.au/standout). But if you can't find anything you like, you can always make your own.
- Talk to a teacher before putting posters up – make sure they know what you're doing so they can tell other teachers about it. If you can, it's a good idea to get permission to put your posters up, so you avoid getting in trouble. If your school or teachers say no, ask for reasons and see if they make sense. If they don't seem reasonable, you may have to be creative on where you place them.
- Think about the location of the posters before you put them up. You may want to put them in as many places as possible for maximum exposure, or think about specific places where they'll have the most impact.
- Get some friends to help put them up – it's a lot less work this way. If you want to remain anonymous, meet with your friends before or after school to put them up in privacy.
- A lot of students who have put up posters in their schools have found that they are torn down or defaced by a few ignorant students. If this happens to you, don't give up! If your posters get taken down, or defaced, put more up in their place. Usually after a while of this the people removing them will get the message.
- Another way to make sure your posters aren't defaced is to put them behind glass or laminate them. This is where having a staff member on your side can be a huge benefit.



**SOME BOYS  
LIKE BOYS, AND  
SOME GIRLS  
LIKE GIRLS.  
SOME LIKE  
BOTH.  
K THANKS.**

**[MINUS18.ORG.AU/STANDOUT](https://MINUS18.ORG.AU/STANDOUT)**

# GET PEOPLE TALKING

Discussing homophobia with friends, classmates and teachers opens up a huge number of opportunities to talk about how it affects people, and what can be done to challenge it. But it's a little easier said than done.

Discussing homophobia on your own can be a fairly big task, so having teachers and friends who are also challenging homophobia can make it a lot easier. Some ways that you can get the conversation started are:

- Talk to a supportive teacher about discussing sexuality in class. It could be as simple as using positive examples of gay and lesbian people in their subject area.
- Use your own assignments to start conversations. A number of students choose to do their English oral presentations on gay rights or their Music or Studio Arts assignments on how artists express their sexuality through their work.
- Talk to teachers about inviting guests from various gay and lesbian organisations to speak at school assemblies. There are a number of organisations listed at the back of this guide that can help you out.

You may worry that if you start talking about homophobia, everyone will assume you're gay (whether you are or not). Again, this is where having a small group of students can help you out, or speak on your behalf.



# REPORT HOMOPHOBIA

Schools should be eager to stamp out bullying of all varieties – yet there is a lot that happens in schools that teachers and staff are unaware of. If a student is bullied without anyone knowing, then there's no way for that person to receive support.

Basically, a school that knows when homophobia is occurring is more likely to support students who are standing out against it. A couple of ideas that make it easier to report homophobia are:

## KEEPING A RECORD

Keep a log of every instance of homophobic bullying you see. Record the time, who was involved, what homophobia occurred and who saw it. Record all incidents, even homophobia you might consider 'small', such as name-calling. When you and your friends have a number of incidents, take them to a trusted teacher, or year level coordinator and inform them of what is going on.

## ASSESSING YOUR SCHOOL

You can assess how supportive your school is by completing the Safe Schools Student Survey. You can complete this online version through the Safe Schools Coalition Victoria website. This is basically a short questionnaire that asks a series of questions about your school which you can use to show teachers what they can do to maximise their support for same sex attracted and genderqueer students. It's a great starting point and will give you specific areas that your school may need to improve in.

Remember, everyone is affected by discrimination and bullying when it happens. Challenging homophobia is part of creating a safe school for everyone.

**CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU.**



# CHALLENGE HOMOPHOBIC LANGUAGE AND REMARKS

Challenging homophobic language of classmates can have an enormous impact on homophobia in general, particularly if done with a group of supporters. By challenging language, you are actively standing out against homophobia, and helping other students realise that homophobic language can be hurtful and insulting.

The more that homophobic language is challenged, the more everyone will realise that it is not acceptable. It would be great if everyone challenged homophobia, but we know this doesn't happen yet.

If another student makes a homophobic comment you have the right to challenge them, or to ask your teacher to challenge them. This can happen in lots of different ways.

It's also important to remember that you won't always get the response that you want. That's pretty normal. Being persistent is a key factor here. By continuing to challenge homophobia, and in particular, calling others out on their homophobic language, attitudes or actions, the message is more likely to eventually sink in.

Here are two of the ways that students in Australia found to be great at challenging other students >>



# HOMOPHOBE

One way to challenge homophobia is by placing the responsibility back on the person being homophobic. Being labelled as a “homophobe” (someone who is homophobic) isn’t a very nice title to have, and isn’t something many of us want to be seen as.

By following up someone else’s remarks or actions with phrases like “stop being such a homophobe” or “you’re being really homophobic” can make the person aware that their actions aren’t appropriate. With enough people on board, it’s possible to make the word “homophobe” a really undesired title to have, and place peer pressure on your classmates to stand out against homophobia.

If your teacher uses homophobic language or makes a homophobic remark, then it’s a more serious issue, and an abuse of their position of authority.

If you feel comfortable challenging them directly, you should do so in a polite but assertive way. If not, write down what they said, where and when. You can then make a complaint by talking to another teacher, your coordinator, someone in the student welfare team, or someone in the student leadership team, such as a School Captain or SRC member.

# THAT’S SO GAY

The phrase “that’s so gay” is often said without any thought about what it actually means. In reality, what a person is actually saying is “that’s so homosexual” – which doesn’t exactly make a lot of sense. Some people argue that they don’t mean it as an insult to gay people – but the fact is, using the word “gay” in the place of words like “crap” and “stupid” is saying that gay people are all those things.

There are so many responses to phrases like “that book is so gay”. You can point out the fact that “the book doesn’t actually have gay feelings for other books” or tell the person that they might actually want to “think before they speak, because gay isn’t a bad word”. You can even explain to them that when they use “gay” in place of words that mean “bad”, they sound ignorant and homophobic.

There are so many different approaches you can take – the main thing is to keep your cool, and to try and choose the best comeback for that situation. Sometimes you won’t convince the person to stop doing it, but don’t give up! Even if they don’t stop, other people around can see what you’re doing and will be getting the message too. You never know who is listening and what a positive difference it can make to them.

If all else fails and you still feel that no one has responded appropriately to homophobic remarks or actions in your school, you can check out one of the support organisations as the back of this guide.

# FIND AND SHARE SOME RESOURCES

Remember, there may be some students who are not 'out' about their sexuality, or unsure of what gender and sexual identity is all about. It can be really useful for other students to have access to information and resources on important sexuality and gender topics, such as coming out, what sexuality is and even places you can go to for support.

## BOOKS

Are there any books in your library that talk about sexuality or gender identity?

If not, you can suggest to your librarian that it would be worth ordering some. There are a number of fiction and non-fiction books with a focus on sexuality. A good starting point can even be to order youth-focused sexuality magazines if your library has a magazine rack.

If you're not sure of books to recommend, there is a book list on the Safe Schools website listed at the end of this guide.

## ONLINE INFORMATION

Can you access websites from school computers that give information about sexuality or gender diversity?

Try accessing the website of [minus18.org.au](http://minus18.org.au) or some of the groups listed at the back of this guide. Are any of them blocked? If so, for what reason? All of the groups and services listed in this guide are supported by the Victorian Government for the work they do with young people. You can speak to a coordinator about the importance of allowing students to access them at school, and let them know why they are useful for students.

## RESOURCES

Does your school welfare office have information on sexuality and gender?

If so, you can personally look at it to see how relevant and up to date it is. If not, you can encourage them to order some, or find them yourself. There are heaps of free information booklets from local groups and organisations listed in this guide. It would also be a good opportunity for you put a poster up in the office, to show other students it's a safe place to discuss their sexuality.

## SERVICES

Does your school provide information on sexuality and gender identity services in your community?

It's a good idea for services to be promoted to all students, and this can be done in a few different ways. Posters and information packs can usually be ordered from services such as youth groups, counselling providers and youth events.

When you get hold of this information, place it in easily accessible locations, such as your welfare office or school library. You never know who this information might help.

# GET YOUR SCHOOL POLICY RIGHT

Each school has policies which are written guides for the school, and what's expected of staff, students and families. Parts of your school's policies will normally be found in the front of your school diary. Have a read of these, and ask a coordinator if you can read the whole policy. Make notes if it helps. From here, you will be able to see what it covers and what's missing.

Does your school's policy specifically mention homophobia or gender or sexual diversity? If not, challenge your school and ask them why these points are excluded from their policy. You can use examples of other Australian high schools incorporating these elements into their policy, and ask why it is taking your school so long to 'catch up'.

Sometimes schools will use the excuse that "there's no homophobia" so there's no need to mention it. This is where your homophobic incident logs come in handy, as you can show your school just how much homophobia is occurring without them knowing.

It's really important that the policy specifically mentions that homophobic bullying is wrong and will not be tolerated at your school. If homophobia is not mentioned specifically, it is much easier for staff and students to make excuses about not doing anything about it.

Ask a member of staff what the process is for changing a policy and see if you can get a group of people together, such as School Captains or SRC members who can help you out.

You can also suggest that in addition to updating the school policy, that your school keeps a specific record of homophobic incidents as well. It's a great way for them to show other staff and students whether any improvements are being made.



# HOLD AN EVENT

Having an event at your school to raise awareness of homophobia and sexual and gender diversity is a great way to get more people involved. It can also be a useful way to start a group and find out who else is interested in standing out against homophobia.

There are heaps of different events you can run. Some can be a lot of work though, so the more students and teachers you have on board, the easier it will be. Start by having a meeting with everyone who is helping out – this could be just your friends, your supporters, or include teachers, School Captains and other student leaders. As a group, work out what type of event you're going to run.

# TYPE OF EVENTS

Your group could decide it wants to run a fundraiser for a local charity, a school event that raises awareness for sexual and gender diversity or both! Brainstorm ideas about how the event will take place, and whether or not it will cost money. There are a lot of low-cost events that your group can run, such as:

## **Casual Clothes Days**

Students make a gold coin donation and are allowed to wear casual clothes for the day. The money can go towards a local group for SSAGQ young people.

## **Sausage Sizzle**

Get some friends together at lunch time and have a sausage sizzle. Proceeds can go towards a charity organisation, or help your school challenge homophobia. Make signs to let people know what the money is going towards.

## **International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO)**

May 17 is IDAHO, and your school can participate by inviting guest speakers from sexuality and gender organisations or run activities throughout the day.

## **International Day of Silence**

Encourage students to participate in the International Day of Silence, where each person takes a vow of silence to raise awareness for the name calling and homophobia that goes unnoticed in schools.

## **Spirit Day**

Students donate a gold coin to wear purple for the day and even decorate their classrooms in purple to raise awareness of the high incidents of same sex attracted and genderqueer youth suicide. By rallying together, students show their support for sexual and gender diverse students by donating money, which is then given to a charity.

Whatever you do, make sure it's fun, easy for everyone to get involved in and that it sends a strong message to the entire school. Raising awareness of homophobia is a fantastic place to start.



# FORMING A SEXUALITY AND GENDER DIVERSITY GROUP

## SOME STEPS FOR SETTING UP YOUR GROUP

There are a number of schools in Australia that have started sexuality groups in their school. These groups are sometimes called 'Gay-Straight-Alliances', 'Diversity Groups' or have their own individual names.

These groups are about bringing together students who are same sex attracted with their supporters to challenge homophobia and support gender and sexual diversity in their school. They bring all types of students together, not just same sex attracted students, to support each other, and work together to run activities and challenge homophobia.

There is no one right way to organise a group, but the following tips might help you get started.

- **Find out the rules** – ask a teacher what the process is for setting up any kind of club or group in the school. Do this with a friend if you can so that you can both ask questions and make sure you're getting all the info you need. You may need to go away and prepare before you take the next step.
- **Find a supportive staff member** – it's going to be much easier to do anything if you have a least one or more teachers on your side. They can help you work with other staff members, school leaders, community groups, and the school council.
- **Talk to your student welfare team** – it's a good idea to set up a link between the group and your student welfare coordinator, counsellor or chaplain. This can help with finding new students who want to come to the group, or referring group members to student welfare.
- **Pick a place to meet** – think about what room you could use in the school to meet up in. It might be good to pick somewhere that offers some privacy for people, but make sure everyone is able to find it.
- **Pick a time to meet** – some groups decide to meet during school time, others after school for privacy. Ask members what suits them best and be prepared to be flexible around times and frequency of meetings.
- **Get some food and drink** – you know it makes sense. Ask the school if any funding is available to help with this and other resources.
- **Let people know about the group** – figure out what the best way to advertise is in your school. Try out a range of different things that could include announcements in assembly or classes, listing in the school bulletin/newsletter, posters, flyers, Facebook group or event, word of mouth, chalking on pavements, or more. Be creative!
- **Form a group agreement / ground rules** – it's a good idea to think about how you want your group to run.
- **Have a meeting** – sounds obvious, but this can be a scary step, go for it! Are you there just to support each other and create a safe space to talk? Or do you want to help each other actively stand out against homophobia too?

## 12 IDEAS FOR YOUR GROUP TO CONSIDER

1. Give your group a stand out name. You could do this by having a mini competition or vote. You can also create logos or fact sheets about why you've created your group.
2. Encourage your school to participate in activism events, such as Pride March in February or Equal Love Same Sex Marriage Rallies.
3. Run lunchtime and after school activities, such as a queer movie afternoon, followed by a discussion.
4. Make publicity materials, anything that will help spread an anti-homophobia message or advertise your group. Think badges, posters, leaflets, etc.
5. Set up a website, blog, or Facebook page for your group. Ask a supportive staff member whether your site can get linked from your school's website.
6. Organise guest speakers from community organisations to come and talk to your group about their experiences in high school and the work they do which is relevant to same sex attracted students.
7. Set up an info table at lunch or at a school event in a visible place – use opportunities where there are crowds to get more people involved in your group.
8. Get an article about your group in the school newsletter. This could be about your group or a wider community issue that relates to homophobia or sexual diversity.
9. Have an open meeting that you advertise widely where you have a guest speaker. Use the meeting to give an introduction about what your group does and how students should become involved.
10. See if you can give presentations about your group at the meetings of other student groups or invite them to make presentations at your meetings. If your school has an SRC it would be good to get them involved.
11. Put together a panel of speakers for a special event about challenging homophobia, or to celebrate a particular date or historic event. For example, you could mark International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO).
12. Do an audit to find out how supportive of gender and sexual diversity your school is. Use the templates provided by Safe Schools Coalition Victoria or make your own. Do an audit of resources – what is there in the library? Online?

# SSAYF

## MAC.ROBERTSON GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

### SSAYF - Same Sex Attracted Youth and Friends

**Why was SSAYF created?** We created SSAYF after being inspired by other schools and what they're doing. We really thought it would be beneficial to have a sexual diversity group in our school environment. We didn't really have that much of a problem with homophobia but we really felt there was a bit of ignorance. Sexuality wasn't talked about much and we thought it needed to be out there. We also thought that as an all girls school, we wanted to be a powerful image of women, and accepting of all different ways of life.

**What difficulties have SSAYF faced?** Definitely striking a balance between privacy and activism. So, when SSAYF started we wanted it to be a safe, welcoming environment for everyone, and we didn't want people to be afraid about coming. So we made it a little bit private but still welcoming for those who wanted to come. This year, we've tried to become more of a presence in the school. We've "come out" a bit, and wanted to really have an impact.

**What's a typical SSAYF meeting like?** Some of the things we do in SSAYF are sit around and chat, usually we have after school meetings with beanbags and food, and what we like to do to start off our meeting is go around, talk about our week, and usually that leads into some form of discussion. So really what we do is talk as friends. When issues come up, it's so good to be able to discuss them with people who are accepting of you.

**What advice would you have for others?** It really helps to have people around to support you – so friends, people at school, or even people outside of school who are there to encourage you. One of the things we were surprised about at SSAYF was how many people were actually supportive. Once it started, people were coming to me saying "this is really great – I wouldn't have thought of it before – I'm so glad this is happening".

Try not to be too afraid; it's difficult, but once you're there, it changes the school environment, and feels really fantastic.



# SOFA

## MELBOURNE HIGH SCHOOL

### **SOFA - Same Sex Attracted, Other and Friends Alliance**

Chris, Anthony, Smoley and Peter

**How did SOFA all come together?** We set SOFA up to provide support for queer students at our school so they could feel comfortable being themselves. The homophobia experienced around the school was verbal, but extended to attitude as well, phrases like "that's so gay" or "do this, or you're a faggot". The sort of thing that's pretty typical.

**What difficulties have you faced?** Some of the difficulties we faced when we tried to start SOFA, was people saying that there wasn't really a need for gay students to have their own group. We started putting up anti-homophobia posters around school. Some were torn down, but they also started conversations, and the support that we had in our school grew.

**What impact has SOFA made on Melbourne High School?** When we started up SOFA, we invited a speaker from Minus18 to our school assembly. The guy who spoke had only recently left high school, and spoke about his experiences with homophobia and how things have changed after only being out of school for a few years. It was such a personal story - it changed the students' way of thinking about homophobia and really clicked with them that homophobia is actually something that can cause a lot of hurt.

**The most amazing aspect of SOFA?** By far the stand out moment for SOFA was attending Pride March this year where lots of students from the school, in the group and even teachers came along to support us. It was amazing - we got the largest cheers. We had the support of the entire queer community, but also from the school community.

**Do you have any advice for other students?** Get teachers to support you. We have so many supportive teachers here, and they've us helped us out more than we could have imagined.



# ALICE

## JUST GRADUATED MELBOURNE

### Co-creator of sexual diversity group Spectrum

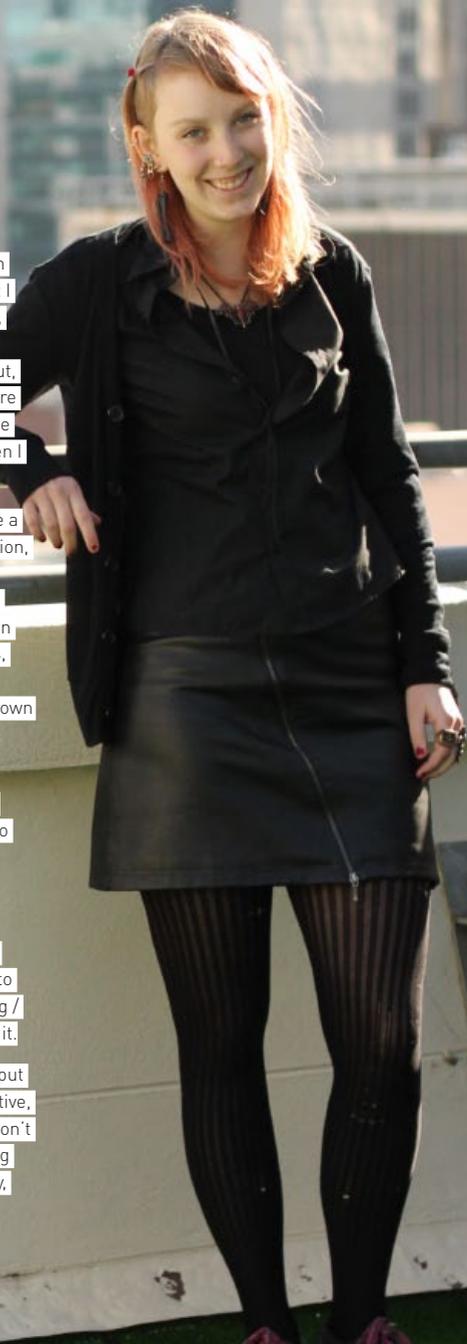
**What made you want to start Spectrum?** I didn't feel there was an overwhelming desperation for a group to be formed at school, but I definitely witnessed a lot of casual homophobia. My friends Finley, Michael and I set up Spectrum to create a safe space within the school for people who were unsure of their sexuality, or coming out, or whatever, and give them a place to talk openly about what they're going through. Especially getting support from people who've gone through the same things...I know that's exactly what I needed when I first came out.

**How did it go from there?** We first started meeting one lunch time a week and mainly discussed various issues like media representation, marriage, coming out, religion (which was surprisingly positive), legal issues in Australia and the rest of the world, Don't Ask Don't Tell and all about homophobia. Pretty much anything! We set up an anonymous suggestion/question box in the library for all students, we made posters and a banner together which we used at Pride March and at a few Equal Love marriage rallies. We even had our own bulletin board.

**What's the most amazing thing about standing out?** Just one thing? Haha. We had 40 people turn up to our first meeting which was completely mind-blowing. Teachers approached us wanting to help out, and everyone was quick to come out of their shells and talk openly about who they are and how they feel. A real sense of belonging was established both in and outside the group.

**What advice do you have for those wanting to stand out?** I'd have to say try and start as soon as possible, especially if you're trying to start up a group. It took us three months of meetings and planning/organising with the school and each other but it was totally worth it.

Also, I'd say don't give up! If your posters are torn down by idiots, put up twice as many. If your school isn't being very helpful or supportive, that should give you more reasons to make positive change. You don't have to change the thinking of every single student either - helping just one person is enough to make a massive difference. Seriously, every little bit counts.



# MICHAEL

## YEAR 12 GEELONG

### Anti-Homophobia Task Force

**What made you challenge homophobia at your school?** In year 11 I went to talk to the school counselor to check what resources we had at the school on sexuality and gender. As it turned out, you only ever got resources on sexuality if you specifically asked for them – they weren't on display with the other resources. I thought this was a bit crap - and so did the Counsellor - so she and I had a meeting with the Vice-Principal, getting conversations started on what the school was doing to support sexual diversity.

**What happened from those conversations?** From there, the three of us started an "anti-homophobia task force" around the school with students and staff. We made posters, and put them up around the school, which was pretty awesome, since up until this point there had been nothing around.

We also did a presentation on International Day Against Homophobia at a full school assembly, which all the students and teachers thought was really moving. Everyone got behind it, it was pretty amazing.

**What sort of impact have you made so far?** I sort of noticed that what we were doing was working, when other students came up to us who were asking for help with their sexuality. It just felt really good – especially when guys on the football team got behind the initiatives. That sort of stuff is just so important, cause it shows that sexuality doesn't matter any more, and that everyone can get along – as cheesy as that sounds.

**What advice would you give to other students?** Be confident about whatever you do - the more you believe in what you're doing, the more everyone else will. And don't even worry about the kids who won't appreciate what you're doing. They're probably douchebags anyway.





**SOME  
EXTRA  
SUPPORT**

# YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity is prohibited under law. The Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic) makes it is unlawful for a school to:

- discriminate against a student on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in any way
- fail to take reasonable precautions to prevent staff or students from discriminating or harrassing others.

## DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination can be direct or indirect. Direct discrimination occurs when a student is treated less equally compared to other students because of their sexual or gender identity.

Indirect discrimination occurs when a school imposes a requirement, rule or practice:

- that a student with specified attributes cannot comply with;
- that a higher proportion of students without the specified attributes can comply with;
- that is not reasonable having regard to the circumstances of the case.

Discrimination is not allowed, even if your school discriminates unintentionally.

Examples of discrimination include, not allowing a student to stay overnight at a school camp, not being allowed to start a school club, even when following school rules, or expelling a student on the basis of the their sexual or gender identity.

## HARRASSMENT

It's also a school's responsibility to ensure that you are safe from harrassment, such as students or teachers making negative jokes, threats, or offensive remarks based on someone's sexual or gender identity.

## REPORTING YOUR SCHOOL

A person who believes they have been victim of unlawful discrimination may lodge a written complaint with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. Once a complaint is lodged, the matter will:

- be investigated by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.
- (if unresolved), go to a more formal hearing process before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

If a school is found liable for unlawful discrimination, it may be ordered to:

- refrain from committing any further discrimination and/or
- pay the affected student compensation, or do a specific act to address the loss, such as make a public apology.

You can find out more information about your legal rights at [humanrightscormission.vic.gov.au](http://humanrightscormission.vic.gov.au)

# RELIGION

Getting religious schools to challenge homophobia can be a difficult task in itself, yet there are students in Australia standing out in their religious school.

One of the most effective ways to make a stand in a religious school is through the values of **diversity** and **acceptance** of all students, irrespective of their identity. By showing that these values also extend to gender and sexual identity, you can still make an impact in your school.

Examples of this are all schools agree that bullying of any kind is harmful and not accepted. So when a student is bullied due to homophobia, it's important that the school treat this bullying in the same way.

Additionally, a "diversity group" set up within a school to promote the acceptance of each student's differences (including those who are same sex attracted) should certainly be encouraged.

For some people their religious beliefs about homosexuality being wrong will not change. In these cases, try to talk about challenging homophobia as an issue that is about being safe and being allowed to be happy and healthy. Everyone from every religion can agree that we all should have the right to be healthy and happy, so challenging homophobia is about achieving that shared aim.



# GLOSSARY

## SAME SEX ATTRACTED (SSA)

If someone identifies as same sex attracted they are simply saying that they have the capacity to be romantically attracted to and/or have a relationship with someone of the same sex. This includes those who are exclusively same-sex attracted, those who may identify as bisexual, or heterosexual people who have these feelings at some time.

Research tells us that around 10% of people are same sex attracted.

## GENDERQUEER (GQ)

Genderqueer (or sometimes, Gender Diverse) is most commonly used to describe a person who feels that their gender identity does not fit into the “categories” associated with their biological sex. For example, someone who is born a female may feel as though the categories of female/feminine are restrictive, frustrating or meaningless. Questioning your gender is normal - and some people identify as genderqueer, rather than (or as well as) male or female.

## GLBTIQ / SSAGQ

These are alternative abbreviations used to refer to the gay community.

GLBTIQ stands for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer.

SSAGQ stands for Same Sex Attracted and Genderqueer.

## QUESTIONING

Someone who is unsure of their sexuality or their gender. Nearly everyone questions their sexuality at one point in their life. Sometimes students in particular aren't 100% sure of their sexuality - and guess what - it's OK. You should never feel pressured into 'deciding' what label best suits you. Instead, you should focus on doing what makes you happy.

## HOMOPHOBIA

The fear and hatred of someone who is same sex attracted and of their sexual feelings and practices that often leads to discriminatory behaviour or abuse. Homophobia can also affect gender questioning or transgender people.

## TRANSPHOBIA:

A fear and hatred of people who are genderqueer, gender diverse, transgender and transexual that often leads to discriminatory behaviour or abuse.

# PERSONAL SUPPORT

You may have got to this point where you want to stand out and make an impact on your school, but aren't getting the support you need. It might be that your school doesn't support you, teachers are homophobic, or that your friends won't help you.

All is not lost! If you feel you aren't getting anywhere there are people out there who will support you. If you need to talk to someone right now, or need support with a personal problem:

## Lifeline

13 11 14

Lifeline is a phone hotline for crisis support. Available 24/7 for the cost of a local call.

## Gay and Lesbian Switchboard

(03) 9663 2939

The G&L Switchboard is a support hotline for anyone with questions or in need of support. Available - Mon-Thurs: 6 - 10pm Weds: 2 - 10pm Fri-Sun: 6-9pm

## Headspace

[headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

Headspace is a youth mental health service with online counselling and face-to-face support.

# SCHOOL / SOCIAL SUPPORT

## Safe Schools Coalition Victoria

(03) 9285 5131

[safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au](http://safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au)

SSCV is a group of schools and individuals dedicated to making schools a safer place for same sex attracted and gender questioning students. You can encourage your school to sign up to the SSCV to show that they are committed to challenging homophobia. They also offer training and support for teachers.

## Minus18

(03) 9660 3900

[minus18.org.au](http://minus18.org.au)

Minus18 is Australia's largest same sex attracted and genderqueer youth network. Minus18 is run completely by young people, with events and online networking and chat. The Minus18 website lets you meet other SSAGQ young people from all over Australia, and gives you access to resources, videos and posters you can download.

## Rainbow Network Victoria

(03) 9285 5131

[rainbownetwork.net.au](http://rainbownetwork.net.au)

This is the state-wide network for anyone who works with transgender and/or same sex attracted young people. Their website also contains a list of SSAGQ youth support groups across Victoria.

## Y Gender

[ygender.com](http://ygender.com)

Y Gender is a social group for Trans, Genderqueer, Gender Questioning young people and their supportive friends. They have regular meetings, and run smaller projects that you can get involved in.

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