

# Imagine Newsletter

A School Climate Approach to Bullying Prevention

Information for School Staff

Issue # 16A

## A Positive School Climate Fosters Respect for All



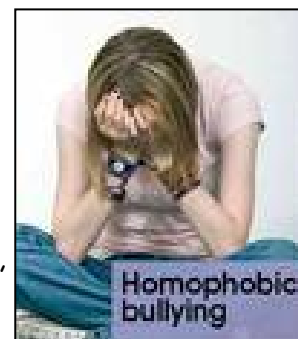
The Imagine Framework supports school communities to continue their development of a more positive school climate. This is a major focus in the bullying prevention/intervention plans for most schools.

*"Positive school climate is the sum total of all the personal relationships within a school. When these relationships are founded in mutual acceptance and inclusion, and modeled by all, a culture of respect becomes the norm. A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable and accepted."* (Waterloo Region District School Board Policy BP 6009) "Students and educators have the right to a safe, secure and inviting school environment free from all forms of harassment." (Waterloo Catholic District School Board Policy APC034).



A common verbal slur used by students is the word "gay", as in "He's so gay---he can't even catch the ball". These and other sexual identity-related remarks may or may not be used as an actual description of the person's sexual orientation, as it's common for students to describe things as being "gay", such as "this book is so gay" or "I hate this class—it's so gay". The intention of these words is to demean a person, situation or object in the eyes of the group who is listening.

Not only do these words hurt the person they are being directly used against, but they also harm anyone who might be in that same group or people who might care about someone in that group. For example, many students have friends, parents or other relatives that may have same-sex orientation or may be in another sexual minority group. Hearing these slurs over and over again can foster a belief that people from a sexual minority group are bad, stupid or less worthy. This belief changes the balance of power. If students hear these derogatory remarks year after year, and the remarks are not stopped or labelled by adults as hurtful, students may internalize this belief, which may cause them to think they have a right to "put down" others. This situation often leads to the bullying of students who either are of a sexual minority group or are perceived to be in a sexual minority group. This belief may also cause self hatred if someone eventually discovers they identify with a sexual minority group.



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"Adults are responsible for creating positive environments that promote children's ability to create and maintain healthy relationships." (Peplar and Craig, *Binoculars on Bullying: A New Solution to Protect and Connect Children* in *Voices for Children*, February 2007) As adults, we need to address these slurs when they are used by adults or children in the school community, just as we would stop racist or sexist comments.

**How can school staff help students stop the "That's so gay" talk:**

- Have staff discussions about how to handle these homophobic remarks, as well as racist and sexist remarks.



- Set expectations with students early and remind them throughout the school year as to what language and behaviour is acceptable/unacceptable on school grounds.
- Stop demeaning comments at the moment they are said. "Unless we speak up to teach children in the moment, those involved in bullying others or those children who are victimized will walk away with the message that we condone and

accept the behaviour" (Peplar and Craig, *Binoculars on Bullying: A New Solution to Protect and Connect Children* in *Voices for Children*, February 2007). Explain to students in developmentally appropriate ways why homophobic, racist and sexist language is disrespectful and has no place in healthy relationships.

- Take opportunities to reinforce teaching and expectations about respectful relationships during any class or activity e.g. a story in English or social studies, discussion of sportsmanship at a playday, during a lesson on character development, etc.
- Follow up with students who are verbally bullied. Ensure they have a safety plan that is working for them; refer for further support when necessary e.g. administration, child and youth worker, faith community, counselling, etc.
- Follow up with students who repeatedly use derogatory comments to help them learn more appropriate ways of expressing themselves while respecting others; refer for further support when necessary e.g. administration, child and youth worker, counselling, etc.

**Let's support each other in creating a more positive school climate where all are welcome to learn, work and grow free from the fear of being bullied.**



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## Resources for Educators



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Waterloo Catholic District School Board Administrative Procedures Memorandum APC034

Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-sex Orientation, Ontario College of Bishops.

