Issues affecting the LGBTI community

Lesson Ideas
December 2019
Introduction

The overall aim of this lesson idea is to raise awareness of human rights and to be an educational resource for use in a post primary setting in Northern Ireland. Use of the lesson ideas is at the discretion of the education provider.

It is important at the outset to prepare students to discuss sensitive or controversial issues. A safe and positive learning environment which enables students to participate with confidence can be empowering. Agree strategies to use to ensure respectful yet challenging discussions:

See sheffield.ac.uk/lets/toolkit/teaching/sensitive for more ideas and guidance on creating good learning environments for teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. When dealing with mental health issues, provide guidance on safety, confidentiality and where to get additional and professional help whilst following your schools guidance and policies relating to child protection.

NI Curriculum Links:

**LLW Strands**
Human rights and social responsibility, Equality and Social justice

**Local and Global Citizenship**
Identify and exercise their rights and social responsibilities in relation to local issues

Develop their understanding of the role of society and government in safeguarding individual and collective rights

Some of your students may have personal experience of the issue under discussion and may find participation in these discussions difficult. Create a safe and positive environment. Agree strategies in advance. See notes on teaching sensitive issues.
Issues affecting members of the LGBTI communities

This section gives you a breakdown of the relevant human rights, and any laws associated with this particular human rights issue. It also provides background information you may find useful.

Relevant Rights:

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 13 - Freedom of Expression) Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.

What the law says:

Article 8: Human Rights Act - Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Teachers' Notes and Background Information

Human rights law says it’s okay to express your identity in a way that makes you feel happy. You might be gay, straight, bisexual. You may be transgender or intersex – meaning your gender is different from the one assigned to you at birth. You may be intersex meaning that someone’s body isn’t entirely female or entirely male. It could have characteristics of both or neither. It is also fine if you’re not sure who you fancy or what your gender is yet.

No-one has the right to tell you what you should think, or how you should be. No-one else knows how you feel inside. The Government is required by human rights law to respect and protect the needs of the LGBTI community here. This includes putting in place measures to address discrimination. Discrimination is when someone is treated differently because of perceptions about them. This can happen in school, the workplace or wider society. Human rights laws say everyone must be treated with dignity and respect. These rights are recognised in courts in Northern Ireland. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) rights have evolved dramatically over time. LGB rights first came to prominence following the decriminalisation of sexual activity between men in 1967 in England and Wales and later in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
Issues affecting members of the LGBTI communities

This section gives you a breakdown of the relevant human rights, and any laws associated with this particular human rights issue. It also provides background information you may find useful.

Watch the following short animation about LGBTI rights in Northern Ireland

youtube.com/watch?v=g1R30dmBYqs&t=4s

However, despite this drive for equality, homophobic language and bullying are still widespread in the workplace and in UK and Irish schools, affecting young people’s well-being as well as their attendance and attainment.

Schools are required by law to deal with bullying which can be verbal, mental or physical and may constitute a criminal offence. Pupils should be encouraged to report bullying to an adult they trust.

Department of Education NI research in 2017 into post-primary school experiences of 16-21 year old people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGB&T) found that:

- 62.8% of respondents reported a negative impact on emotional well-being.
- 66.5% of respondents that they did not feel welcomed or valued within school as a young LGB&T person
- 92.1%, of respondents indicated that there was insufficient information available in relation to LGB&T issues within their post-primary school.

Further reading:

schoolsout.org.uk/furthertools/docs/the%20education%20equality%20curriculum%20guide.pdf

The Education Equality Curriculum Guide: Supporting teachers in tackling homophobia in school by Joanna Cowley. First published October 2011 by Cara-Friend and the Rainbow Project. This is a cross curricular resource to support teachers in planning for, teaching and addressing LGBT issues.
The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission’s job is to make sure government and public bodies protect the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. We advocate that Northern Ireland should maintain the highest standard of human rights.

We also consider the policies and plans that government and other organisations develop and tell them if we think there could be a problem and we try to help them improve it. We are experts in human rights law, we monitor international treaties and listen to discussions in places like the United Nations.

We promote awareness of human rights through education, training and research.

In its Annual Statement to Government each year the NIHRC raises issues relating to the LGBTI community. We also report on this issue to the United Nations including to the

- United Nations Human Rights Committee in relation to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
Activities

Learning Intentions: to know and understand

- That LGBTI issues are also human rights issues
- Our identities are unique and complex
- The role of NIHRC in promoting and safeguarding our human rights

Activity One - What’s That?

Aim: To enable pupils to know and understand a glossary of terms commonly used when exploring LGBTI rights

What’s needed: Terminology worksheet provided

Chances are you will have used/heard some of these words before, but do you know what they really mean? In pairs match up each term on the left with its corresponding definition on the right. It can sometimes be difficult to know what language or terminology is appropriate and what is or isn’t offensive. For example ‘that’s so gay’ is a commonly used phrase - is it offensive?

Answers:

Activity Two - Who Am I?

Aim: to understand that labels do not reveal people’s identity

What’s needed: Example Identity Box sheet provided.

We all have identities. We perceive our own identity. Others perceive an identity and associate it with us. These may or may not be the same thing.

How is our identity formed? To what extent are we defined by our talents, tastes, and interests? By our membership in a particular ethnic group? Our religion? By the nation where we were born? Our heritage? Our race? Our gender? Our sexual orientation?

- Invite students to explore their identity by creating an identity box or board reflecting various elements of their own identity. They can choose to include images, words, objects, artifacts, pieces of music, photographs, and items of significance (or images of them) to represent them. Students may share elements of this with their classmates as they choose. Encourage them to share at least one thing from their box. If using boxes students can keep more private elements inside. (this can be done in smaller groups too if they prefer)

Discuss: How is our identity formed? To what extent are we defined by our talents, tastes, and interests? By our membership of an ethnic group? Our religion? By the nation where we were born? Our heritage? Our race? Our gender? Our sexual orientation? Recognise that our identities are complex and we’re more than just a single label!
Activities (continued)

Activity Three - Bully for You!

Aim: To increase understanding of the effects of bullying and homophobic bullying and its consequences.

What’s needed: Three A3 sheets of paper/markers, post-its and the Bullying Statements provided.

• Ask the group to give a definition of bullying.
• Explain that one definition of bullying/cyber bullying is when the hurtful or abusive behaviour is done on purpose. Ask them to keep this definition in mind when running this exercise.

• Split the group in half. Hand out three large pieces of paper to each group ask them to write the term ‘Bullying’ across the top of one sheet and ‘Not bullying’ on another, write ‘Depends’ on the third sheet.

• Explain to the group that you are going to hand out a number of pieces of paper that have different situations on them (give one group the Bullying situations and the other group the Cyber Bullying situations). In their groups they will have to decide whether or not the situations are examples of bullying or not and place them on the appropriate piece of paper.

• Ask the groups to spend some time exploring each of the statements and their reasons for where the situations are placed. If the group are left undecided on whether a situation is a form of bullying, ask them to place them on to the third sheet of paper.

• Ask the groups to swap over so they can have a look through each other’s statements and discuss if they agree with where they have been placed.

Note: This activity is about general bullying, not specifically homophobic, although it is covered.

Cyber bullying: is any form of bullying which takes place online or through smartphones and tablets. Social networking sites, messaging apps, gaming sites and chat rooms such as Facebook, XBox Live, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and other chat rooms.

Bullying: There is no legal definition of bullying. But it is usually defined as repeated behaviour which is intended to hurt someone either emotionally or physically, and is often aimed at certain people because of their race, religion, gender or sexual orientation or any other aspect such as appearance or disability.

• Bring the groups together as one and lead a discussion on reasons for why they decided where to place the statements and where they had conflicting opinions. Really push for people to explain and justify any they have put on the ‘Depends’ sheet. Some might be difficult to decide as it all depend on the context and situation. Perhaps you need further information.

• Bullying is a serious issue with possibly severe consequences to the affected person. What sort of consequences are we talking about? Do you know what to do if you witness bullying? Or if you find yourself in this situation? Find out what your school policy says.
Activity Four - Dealing with Difference

**Aim:** to examine our attitudes, and learn from each other.

**Discuss:** We all carry with us our own prejudices, assumptions and stereotyping and it’s not until we are challenged with these that we will get the opportunity to examine our attitudes.

There have been times in all our lives that we’ve been the excluders. Perhaps there has been someone we didn’t know very well, and we excluded them from a conversation, perhaps they come from a different town etc. Did we intend to exclude, or did it just happen? Did we witness someone being bullied? Did you look away or did you try and help? Ask ourselves, how do we practice more inclusion in our everyday lives?

**Suggested Extension Activities/Actions:**

- Watch clips from the campaign “It gets better” on YouTube. These are short uplifting videos to send messages of support to LGBTI teens who are experiencing homophobic bullying.

- Promote diversity and inclusion by inviting people who work for NGO’s and charities promoting inclusion, equality and social justice into school for a presentation/workshop.

- Celebrate LGBTI history month each February [lgbthistorymonth.org.uk](http://lgbthistorymonth.org.uk)

- Celebrate and reward ‘Kindness’ within school.

- Display solidarity posters like the ones below.

- Hold a student debate to highlight issues such as Same Sex Marriage.