

WHAT PARENTS WANT:

Talking About Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools

A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MODULE
FOR EDUCATORS

PARTICIPANT BOOKLET



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Suggested citation:

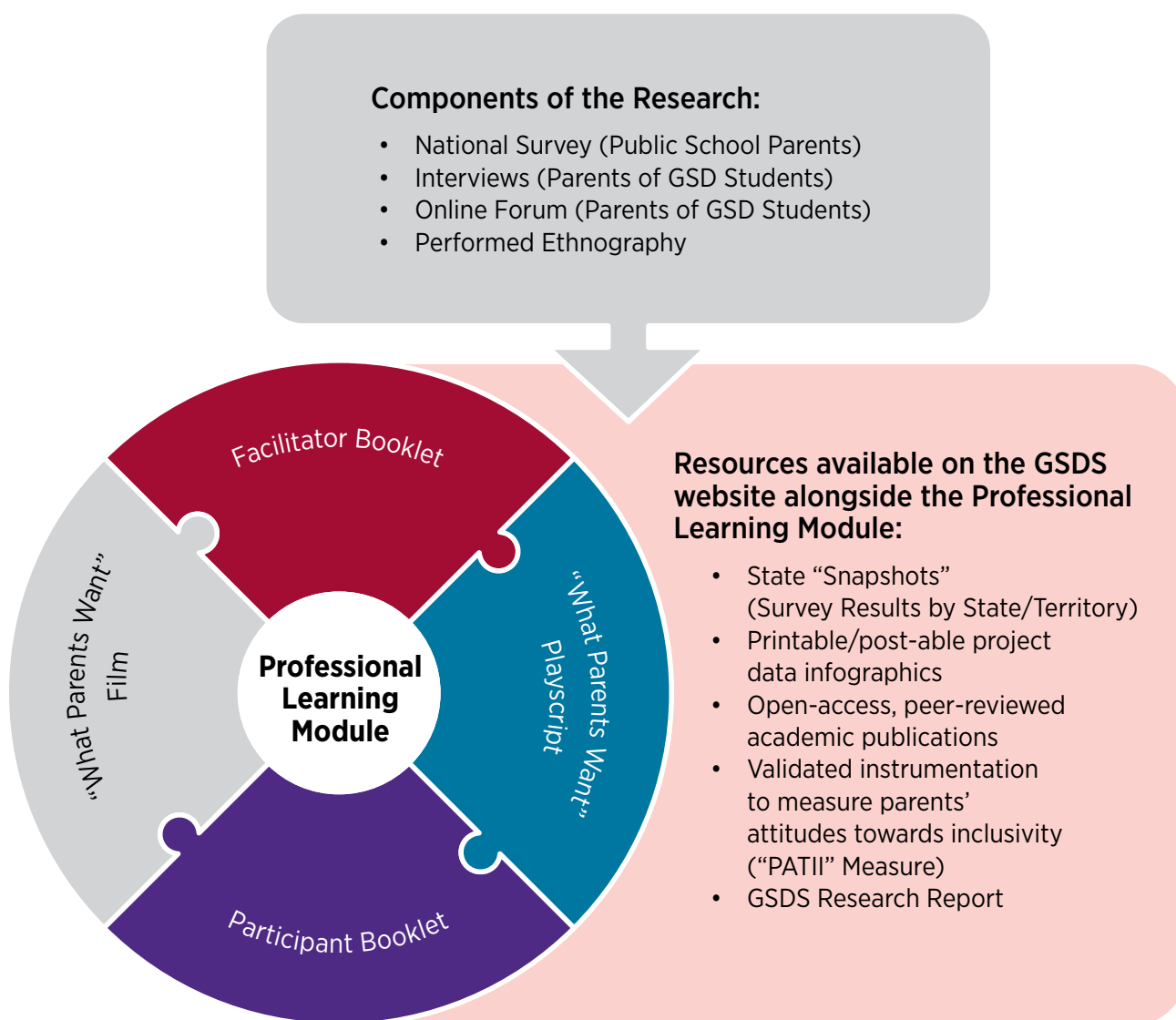
Ferfolja, T., & Ullman, J. (2023). *What Parents Want: Talking About Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools. A Professional Learning Module for Educators. Participant Booklet*. Centre for Educational Research, School of Education, Western Sydney University. Sydney, Australia.

DOI: 10.26183/tx2r-r632

<https://doi.org/10.26183/tx2r-r632>

This resource, like much of our work, is dedicated to all the gender and sexuality diverse young people who are trapped within systems that marginalise them, including schools, and to those we have lost in the struggle.

This Facilitator Booklet is one component of a professional learning module for educators and is part of a broader package of resources developed as a result of the findings of an Australian Research Council-funded project titled, 'Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools. Parental Experiences and Schooling Responses' (DP 180101676). The diagram below details the various components of the research on which this professional development model is based and on the structure of the professional development module itself. For more information about the research, professional development module, or to contact the researchers, visit: <https://westernsydney.edu.au/gsds>.



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the parents who gave freely of their time to share their stories and perspectives about the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in schools for this research; without your support, the research and the associated resources, including this professional learning module, would not have been possible.

We would also like to thank the numerous primary and secondary school educators who gave up their evenings and weekends to participate in workshops in the development of this professional learning module and who provided constructive feedback. It is people like you who make a significant difference to the lives of gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) young people in schools.

Thanks to the research assistants who helped to produce this module. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the contributions of Sarah Oluk, who assisted with the early drafts of this module. Thanks also to Kate Manlik for her keen eye in providing editorial assistance and to Yunyin Xuan for her skilled desktop publishing.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the Australian Research Council who funded the research, “Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools. Parental Experiences and Schooling Responses” (DP 180101676) on which this module is based.

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About this Professional Learning Module

This professional learning module has been written to accompany the film/playscript, *What Parents Want: Talking about Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools*. It is aimed at the professional learning of educators working in primary and/or secondary schools. It seeks to enhance educators' understandings about gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) young people and their experiences at school, and to generate discussion and action in terms of how educators can positively enhance the educational experience for these young people and their families.

Throughout this professional learning module and associated resources, we use the term *gender and sexuality diverse* (or GSD) as an inclusive term to describe the expansive diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations, without the need to name each of these. We use the acronym GSD (rather than gender and/or sexuality diverse) for the sake of simplicity; however, it is important to be aware that individuals may identify as both gender diverse and sexuality diverse or simply as one of these. The term GSD also mindfully includes individuals who may not wish to label themselves or align with a particular identity. This label is particularly useful when working with young people who may be aware that they are not heterosexual ("straight") or that their gender does not match the sex they were assigned at birth, but are unsure about how, or if, they wish to identify themselves beyond that.

The words used in the film/playscript are those used by parents verbatim as they shared their journey with their gender and sexuality diverse child at a particular point in time. A core value of this project was to validate and centre their voices.

It is critical to acknowledge that language used in this space, particularly around identity, is rapidly evolving. Thus, some of the language used by parents to describe their child's experience at the point of project participation has also evolved. As language can have a big impact on the well-being of gender and sexuality diverse people, all educators are encouraged to consult with local organisations who support gender and sexuality diversity to ensure that they are using the most appropriate terminology when working with young people and their families.

Despite changes in the legal and social landscape of Australia, many GSD young people still experience stigma and discrimination, particularly in schools. The intention of this professional learning module is to help educators understand the experiences of GSD students in order to provide safe and supportive environments for students' academic success and wellbeing.

This professional learning module is centred around three key goals: first, to raise educators' awareness about gender and sexuality diversity; second, to make space for this form of diversity in primary and secondary schools; and third, to ensure the wellbeing of all students. To achieve this, there are three parts to this professional learning module, which correspond to the three parts of the accompanying film/playscript:

- Part 1: This is Us. Introducing our Children.
- Part 2: School Encounters. Parents Talk about their Child's School Experiences.
- Part 3: Ways Forward. Parents Talk about what Schools can do.

Research Project Background

This professional learning module has been developed from a nationally representative research study conducted across Australia. There were two major components to the research: the first, was a comprehensive survey of parents (N = 2,093) of children in primary and secondary public schooling which sought parents' perspectives about the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity-related curriculum in school education. Nationally representative findings from this part of the study are available on our project website:

<https://westernsydney.edu.au/glds/outcomes-publications>.

In addition to providing the first nationally representative data detailing what Australian public-school parents want with respect to the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum, the survey also asked about the prevalence of GSD children in their households. Findings highlighted that GSD children come from a diverse range of families, including families living in cities, regional and remote areas of Australia; families where parents were born in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas and speak a variety of different languages at home; families where parents identify as Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim and as not religious.

An additional element of the research project involved interviews with, and an online forum for, parents of GSD children. This element explored parents' experiences of navigating the schooling system with/for their GSD child. This group of participating parents mostly identified as mothers and it is their voices that form the basis of the film, the associated playscript, and the stimulus resources within this accompanying professional learning module.

Performed Ethnography

The film/playscript that accompanies this professional learning module is based on a performed ethnography script. Performed ethnography uses the voices of research participants in the form of quotes and excerpts, which are woven together to create a verbatim playscript. In Parts 1 and 2 of the film, professional actors have taken on the voices of six interviewees. In Part 3, the researchers have amalgamated some of the data from other participants from both the interviews and forum into the voices of these six characters to form 'composite' characters. We have made these adaptations so that the many ideas for school inclusion as expressed by parents in the research more broadly could be incorporated into the film/playscript and this professional learning module.

Why is this Professional Learning Module important?

There are few professional learning modules available in Australia that directly aim to help educators support GSD students and their families in schools; however, there is considerable Australian research that illustrates why raising educators' awareness is critical for the safety, wellbeing and academic development of GSD young people. The existing Australian research in this area provides an opportunity for educators to reflect on the experiences of GSD students and raises awareness of the possible recommendations and provisions that encourage inclusivity in education settings.

Australian Student Wellbeing Framework

All Australian schools are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework. The Framework was developed using research evidence demonstrating the strong connection between students' safety, their wellbeing and, ultimately, their learning (see <https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/framework/>).

One of the five principles of the Framework is "Inclusion", or the creation of an "inclusive and connected school culture" that "values diversity, and fosters positive, respectful relationships." You can read more about how educators can support inclusion using the Framework here: <https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/framework/>.

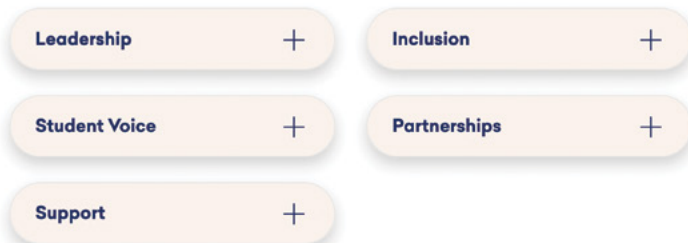
The Framework validates the need for educators' awareness-raising on the topic of gender and sexuality diversity in order to support the wellbeing of GSD students.

AUSTRALIAN STUDENT WELLBEING FRAMEWORK

The **Australian Student Wellbeing Framework** supports Australian schools to provide every student with the strongest foundation possible for them to reach their aspirations in learning and in life.

The vision of the Framework is that Australian schools are learning communities that promote student wellbeing, safety and positive relationships so that students can reach their full potential.

The Framework is based on evidence that demonstrates the strong association between safety, wellbeing and learning.



Source: <https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/framework/>

Educator Duty of Care

Educators and schooling institutions have a duty of care to students, which includes the protection of students' mental health and the prevention of discrimination and harassment. While the language used to articulate this varies somewhat across Australian states and territories, the general essence is the same: a directive for educators to provide safe and supportive schooling environments for all students in their care. More information and links to relevant legal documents, guidance and legislation across states and territories can be found here: <http://www.aussieeducator.org.au/education/dutyofcare.html>

Legal Expectations for Public School Educators

It is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of a number of protected attributes in certain areas of public life, including education and employment; these protected attributes include, but are not limited to, sex, intersex status, gender identity and sexual orientation. (See <https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/human-rights-and-anti-discrimination/australias-anti-discrimination-law>.)

There are also Australian government guidelines which recognise sex and gender. These acknowledge that individuals may identify as “a gender other than the sex they were assigned at birth, or may not identify as exclusively male or female”. See the following site for more information about Australian Government guidelines on the recognition of sex and gender: <https://www.ag.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/AustralianGovernmentGuidelinesontheRecognitionofSexandGender.pdf>.

The Real Story: About the Film/Playscript

The parents whose voices are used in this film and the playscript are from real families from across Australia. They volunteered to participate in this research because they affirmed their child's gender and sexuality diversity and they wanted to have an opportunity to share their and their child's experiences with educators.

In this film/playscript, parents are identified by the name of their child (e.g. "Mother of Asha") and all names used are pseudonyms. Additionally, in the film, actors are playing the parts of the parents.

It is essential to note that not all parents of GSD students are supportive of their child's gender and/or sexuality diversity and some home situations for GSD young people are hostile. Schools may be the only place where GSD young people can be affirmed; this is one reason why it is critical for educators to know about gender and sexuality diversity and to understand the importance of supporting these areas of diversity within their school communities.

While watching the film or reading the playscript, you have met:



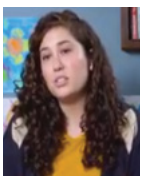
Shondelle Pratt as:
Mother of Asha (bisexual son)



Anna Cheney as:
Mother of River (gender fluid child)



Caritta Gronroos as:
Mother of Emma (transgender daughter)



Tricia Morosin as:
Mother of Meg (transgender daughter)



Tsu Shan Chambers as:
Mother of Bridget (transgender daughter)



Suz Mawer as:
Mother of Jordie (sexuality diverse daughter)

Module Overview

What Parents Want: Talking About Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools is divided into three parts. Both the full-length film and its various parts (three) can be found on the project YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@genderandsexualitydiversit2500/featured>.

Part 1: This is Us. Introducing our Children introduces the audience to six parent participants who talk about their child's experiences of coming out and identifying as gender and/or sexuality diverse (GSD). You'll notice the parents in this section all identify as mothers; most of the people who participated in the research interviews and online forum identified as mothers. Part 1 will help you understand a little about these young people and their histories before hearing about their stories of schooling as described by their parent.

Part 2: School Encounters. Parents Talk about their Child's School Experiences shares parents' experiences of the school system in relation to their GSD child. In Part 2, we hear again from the same six parents from Part 1 who talk about their child's interactions with their peers and educators. We learn about what schools are doing well and what schools could do better in supporting GSD students.

Part 3: Ways Forward. Parents Talk about what Schools can do focuses on parents' ideas about what schools can do to support their child and other GSD young people into the future. The voices that you hear in this part are an amalgamation of voices from participants across the research.

Glossary of Terms

The following terms are useful for educators to know and have been provided for your information. Most of these terms have been used by the parents in the film/playscript and are in general circulation.

androgynous	Describes people who may not have distinctly masculine or feminine characteristics or who may display a combination of both masculine and feminine characteristics.
bisexual	Describes people who have sexual and/or romantic attraction to more than one gender. (See also pansexual.)**
came out/come out	We live in a world where heterosexuality and rigid gender norms are not only expected, but also presumed. The term “coming out” usually refers to the process by which a person’s sexual identity is disclosed to others. The term also refers to people sharing their gender identity or gender history.**
cisgender	Individuals whose personal gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.
gay	Describes people who have the romantic and sexual capacity primarily for people of the same sex or gender, i.e. same-sex attracted. Historically the term “gay” has been used more for men in Australia but sometimes includes women.**
gender confirmation surgery	<p>Gender confirmation surgery (also known as “gender affirmation surgery”) refers to procedures that help people transition to their self-identified gender. It is important to note that not all gender diverse people (see definition below) will want to have gender confirmation surgery and may transition in other ways.</p> <p>Gender confirmation surgery is not available to young people under the age of 18 in Australia. These young people may elect to take other, medically assisted and approved, approaches to assist their gender affirmation, including hormone therapy. What is possible for young people, with respect to the forms of these approaches and the various legal requirements, differs by state/territory.</p>
gender diversity/diverse	Individuals whose gender identities/expressions do not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.
gender dysphoria	A diagnosis of “gender dysphoria” may be used in the fields of medicine and psychology to explain feelings of distress or discomfort that may be experienced by an individual when their gender identity does not align with their biological sex. It is important to note that not all gender diverse and/or transgender individuals experience these feelings of distress or discomfort. Gender dysphoria has been superseded by the term “gender incongruence”.
gender fluid	Describes people who do not identify themselves as having a fixed gender identity.
gender identity	A person’s deeply felt sense of who they are, whether a woman, a man, both, neither, or something else.**

gender non-conforming	Behaviour or expression of an individual that does not align with traditional, binary gender norms.
gender non-binary	Individuals who do not identify within the male/female, or masculine/feminine gender binary.
gender-queer	Describes people who do not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identify with neither, both, or a combination of the gender identities of man or woman or masculine or feminine.
heteronormativity	The construction of heterosexuality as the only natural, normal and superior sexuality, wherein all other forms of sexuality are positioned as deviant and abnormal. Heteronormativity includes the practices, policies and perspectives that privilege heterosexuality and position this form of sexuality as the normative standard.
lesbian	Describes women who are same-sex or gender attracted. Some non-binary individuals also use the term “lesbian” to describe their sexuality.
microaggression	Describes a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalised group such as GSD individuals.
misgender/misgendering	An occurrence where a person is described or addressed using language that does not match their gender identity (National LGBT Health Alliance, 2013b). This can include the incorrect use of pronouns (she/he/they), familial titles (father, sister, uncle) and, at times, other words that traditionally have gendered applications (pretty, handsome, etc.). It is best to ask the person, at a relevant moment, which pronouns they use.**
pansexual	Describes people who are sexually and/or romantically attracted to people across all the spectrums of sex and gender, and where sex and gender are irrelevant in the attraction. The term “pan” means “all”. (See also bisexual.)**
pronouns	Pronouns are the terms people use to indicate others’ gender identities when speaking or writing about them (e.g. he/she/they, his/hers/theirs, etc.).
sexuality diverse	Sexuality diverse can be used as an inclusive term to describe people who do not identify as heterosexual.
trans*/transgender	An individual whose gender identities/expressions do not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.
transition/transitioning	The personal process or processes a trans or gender-diverse person undertakes in recognising, accepting, and expressing their gender identity, including social, legal and/or medical aspects. It might include changes to appearance (clothing, hairstyle, etc.), and/or asking people to use a different name and pronoun (he/she/they, his/hers/theirs, etc.). It can often include the use of hormones and in some cases gender affirmation surgery.**

**These definitions are reproduced with permission from the “GSA Connect” resources developed by Twenty10, NSW Teachers Federation and Wear It Purple.
<https://www.gsaconnect.org.au/about/>.

Inclusive Language Guide¹

When working with other people, whether they are students, staff or parents/community members, it is critical to use inclusive and respectful language. Inclusive language should be used for personal communications, as well as in written documentation such as policies, programs, curricula and educational resources. Using inclusive language increases feelings of trust, safety and belonging and is a way to address the prejudice and discrimination that GSD people, including young people in schools, encounter.

Inclusive language recognises that bodies, genders, relationships and sexualities are diverse, and these aspects of identity may be expressed in different ways. Inclusive language should be used even when referring to someone who is not physically present as this is respectful of them and acknowledges the diversity present within every school.

The information below provides the basics for understanding inclusive language used to describe gender and sexuality diversity. For the sake of brevity, only key points are included below. More information can be found online on numerous government/education department websites (such as <https://www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide#what-are-the-basics>) or by engaging with local organisations who support gender and sexuality diversity.

What are the basics?

- Language in the area of gender and sexuality diversity is evolving and can be different across cultures and generations.
- The term “queer” may be seen as offensive by some older GSD people, whereas some younger people have reclaimed this term to define themselves.
- Where some transgender people or their family members describe the experience of being trans as being “born in the wrong body”, others may view this language as problematic, and refer to “presumptions” or “assumptions” about gender at birth, preferring not to label the body as “right” or “wrong”.
- Terms may also become outdated. For instance, the term “gender dysphoria” has been superseded by “gender incongruence”.
- Some people can feel overwhelmed by evolving language; do your best to be inclusive and if you make a mistake, apologise and move on.
- Do not assume a person is heterosexual or that they are in a heterosexual relationship. Use words such as “partner”, rather than “wife”/“husband”/“boyfriend” etc.
- Families are varied and complex. Do not assume your students live in a “nuclear” family or make assumptions about your students’ caregivers. Use terms such as “parent” or “carer”. It is best to ask your students about how they refer to their family composition and the language they use if you’re unsure.

¹ Adapted from <https://www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide#what-are-the-basics>.

- Be aware of the differences between gender, sex and sexuality. **Gender** is a part of how you see yourself and how you interact with others. Not everybody sees themselves as male or female and may understand their gender as a combination or neither of these. **Sex** refers to a person's biological sex characteristics and natural variations to sex characteristics are not uncommon. **Sexuality** refers to a person's romantic and/or sexual attraction to other people. Gender and sexuality diversity isn't a choice or preference – it is just how people are. (See the “Glossary of Terms” earlier in this booklet for the definitions of other terms used by parents in this research).
- Be guided by the individual. Do not assume a GSD individual wants to be or should be ‘out’ – that is – known as gender and/or sexuality diverse to others.
- As an educator, support for young people can be provided by using the pronouns they employ. Be open and make a space for students to share their pronouns with you, particularly if these have shifted for them or do not match school records. In general, if you need to know what pronoun a person uses, ask them respectfully what pronoun they *use* (not what pronoun they *prefer* – which suggests a choice and may be offensive).

Trigger Warning

Some of the parents' narratives refer to children's self-harm, suicide ideation, and experiences of discrimination. At times, the film/playscript contains stories that some viewers/readers may find difficult. Support is available Australia-wide through Employment Assistant Program Schemes, Lifeline (ph. 13 11 14), or QLife LGBTIQ+ (ph. 1800 184 527).

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do educators need to understand gender and sexuality diversity?

As outlined earlier, identifying as GSD is protected by several Federal and State laws including the Federal Anti-Discrimination Act. Educators have a duty of care to all students and their families. Thus, it is critical that educators are well-informed about the experiences of GSD young people and their families to ensure that they have access to a full and inclusive education that meets their needs, including a curriculum that reflects their lives and is of relevance to them. Students' learning is enhanced when their educators understand their needs and identities.

All young people have a right to be educated.

The challenges faced by GSD students can be immense. Research shows that there are negative social, emotional, and educational implications for GSD young people, particularly for those students who are unsupported. For some GSD children and youth, schools are the only potentially supportive spaces for them if they have been rejected by parents/family. Not all parents of GSD young people are supportive, and it is not uncommon for GSD young people to experience homelessness, family rejection and/or family violence. Students' wellbeing is linked to their engagement with school; accordingly, educators are in an ideal position to provide essential support and safe spaces for GSD children and young people.

Population-level research has shown that a significant number of Australians report same gender attraction and behaviour, including roughly 9% of men and 19% of women.² Approximately 1% of the adult population identifies as transgender.² Prevalence data for Australian young people is estimated to be higher, with the most recent large-scale survey of Australian teens showing 2.3% identifying as transgender or gender diverse, and roughly 1 in 4 identifying as either (1) gay or lesbian (4.7%); (2) bisexual (16.4%); or (3) not sure about their sexual orientation (5.2%).³

Despite the changing demographics of our society, gender and sexuality diversity is largely invisible in Australian schools and silenced in policy, curricula, pedagogy, and practice. Moreover, some school cultures are openly hostile towards students who identify as GSD. These realities can make schools unwelcoming places for GSD students, or those who are perceived to be GSD by others. Discrimination can result in myriad problems for young people's safety, educational engagement, and wellbeing.^{4,5} It is mandatory for all young people to attend school; thus, it is critical that educators understand their role in ensuring GSD students' time at school is supportive and affirming. This need is compounded by the fact that some parents are not supportive of gender and sexuality diversity. This means that some young people live in environments where their identity is not accepted or where they may be subject to overt physical and emotional hostility from parents, family members and friends.

2 A summary of the population-level data on the prevalence of GSD individuals comes from the "Research Matters" fact sheet created by Rainbow Health Victoria (2020), available here: <https://www.rainbowhealthvic.org.au/media/pages/research-resources/research-matters-how-many-people-are-lgbtqi/4170611962-1612761890/researchmatters-numbers-lgbtqi.pdf>.

3 The most current national survey of Australian secondary students (N = 6327) was published by La Trobe in 2019 and is available here: https://www.latrobe.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1031899/National-Survey-of-Secondary-Students-and-Sexual-Health-2018.pdf.

4 The Public Health Association's 2022 policy position statement on comprehensive relationships and sexuality education links to the most current research from the field on the experiences of GSD students in Australian schools, available here: <https://www.phaa.net.au/documents/item/5635>.

5 *The Free2Be...Yet?* (Ullman, 2021) national survey of GSD high school students is the largest Australian survey of this cohort (N = 2367) and highlights the relationship between a discriminatory schooling environment and poorer school wellbeing outcomes, including lowered educational aspirations. The full report is available here: <https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/library/documents/free2be-yet-second-national-study-australian-high-school-students-who-identify>.

Why are we doing this when no students in our school identify as GSD?

In lieu of representative, population-level data on the prevalence of GSD school-aged children and young people in Australia, multiple sources of research offer usable estimates. Recent research found that 1 in 4 Australian high school students sampled identified their sexual orientation as other than heterosexual; and 1 in 45 identified as gender diverse.³ Educators do not necessarily know who these students are; young people often do not disclose these aspects of their identity. It is important for educators in primary and secondary schools to know that they are likely to have GSD students in their classes. Just because an aspect of an individual's identity may not be outwardly visible, it does not mean that it is any less impactful on their life or their sense of self.

Additionally, young people need to be prepared for the world in which they are living. The advent of marriage equality in 2017 means that same-sex attraction is visible and important to understand. This reality is compounded in popular culture and social media where gender and sexuality diversity are frequently acknowledged. There has been increasing legal and social recognition of GSD people in Australia, particularly over the last decade or two, during which time many laws have been modified to be more inclusive of these forms of diversity.

What if parents don't approve of the mention or affirmation of gender and sexuality diversity in schools?

This professional learning module is aimed at developing educators' understandings and awareness of gender and sexuality diversity in schools so that they can support GSD young people as part of their duty of care. Educators often assume parents are resistant to gender and sexuality diversity in schools; however, this assumption is not based in research. Our nationally representative Australian research examining public school parents' perceptions of the inclusion/exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in schools found that, on average, 82% of parents wanted to see gender and sexuality diversity introduced across the primary and secondary school curriculum in an age-appropriate way.^{6,7} If, while supporting the wellbeing of GSD students, educators receive negative feedback or commentary from parents, this should be referred to school leadership personnel who will be very familiar with the federal Australian Wellbeing Framework's directives for inclusivity of diversity and educators' legal responsibilities with respect to the prevention of discrimination and harassment of students.

6 While the *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS)* project website links to all publications and other resources associated with this Australian Research Council-funded national project, the published paper which overviews results from the national survey (Ullman et al., 2021) is available here: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14681811.2021.1949975>.

7 The full GSDS project report which outlines findings from across the five phases of research (Ferfolja et al., 2023) is available here: <https://westernsydney.edu.au/gsd/outcomes-publications>.

Aren't primary school children too young to know about their gender identity?

According to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, about 1.2% of Australian school children are thought to identify as transgender.⁸ Transgender and gender diverse children tend to first express their gender identity – through things like preferences for toys, clothing and interests – at the same time as all other children, around two or three years old. As is illustrated in Part 2 of the film and playscript, it is not uncommon for gender diverse and transgender children to want to express their gender and have their gender be affirmed by others during the primary school years or earlier.

Likewise, 2018 research based in the United States, which surveyed a representative sample of 9- and 10-year-olds and their parents, found that 0.4% of children aged 9 and 10 self-identified as transgender; 1.2% of the parents surveyed indicated that their child might identify as transgender.⁹ Even using these more conservative statistics, a primary school of 400 students, for example, may have one or two gender diverse or transgender students in any given year.

How prevalent is self-harming in children and young people?

A 2020 longitudinal survey of primary school students from a stratified random sample of 43 primary schools in Victoria found that 2.6% of children aged 11 and 12 years old reported self-harm behaviours.¹⁰ Further, this research showed that experiencing difficulties with peer relationships earlier in primary school was strongly associated with self-harm behaviours in late primary school (with 11- and 12-year-olds).

As outlined in LGBTIQ+ Health Australia's 2021 *Snapshot of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Statistics for LGBTIQ+ People*, compared to the general population, GSD young people are over four times as likely to engage in self-harm behaviours.¹¹ 2021 Australian national research indicated that 77% of their sample of gender diverse and transgender young people, aged 14 to 21 years old, had engaged in self-harm behaviours in their lifetime.¹²

8 The Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne produces a number of fact sheets, including the following on gender dysphoria: https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Gender_dysphoria/#:-:text=About%201.2%20per%20cent%20of,natural%20spectrum%20of%20human%20diversity.

9 This finding from a representative cohort investigating adolescent brain cognitive development (Calzo & Blashill, 2018) is available here: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6584307/>.

10 This Australian National Health and Medical Research Council-funded cohort study (Borschmann et al., 2020) assessed $N = 1239$ children annually from ages 8–9 to ages 11–12. The full findings are available here: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0242802>.

11 LGBTIQ+ Health Australia has produced a "snapshot" document (2021) of research on mental health and suicide prevention statistics for this cohort, available here: https://assets.nationbuilder.com/lgbtihealth/pages/549/attachments/original/1648014801/24.10.21_Snapshot_of_MHSP_Statistics_for_LGBTIQ_People_-_Revised.pdf?1648014801.

12 The *Writing Themselves In 4* (Hill et al., 2021) report outlines the experiences of GSD young people, aged 14–21 years old, and is available here: https://www.latrobe.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1198945/Writing-Themselves-In-4-National-report.pdf.

Review: Part 1. This is Us. Introducing our Children

This professional learning module seeks to familiarise participants about the experiences of GSD young people attending primary and secondary public schools across Australia. It draws on an Australian national research study where parents of GSD children shared their experiences of navigating the school system with and for their child. What the parents said in interviews and posts in an online forum was used by the researchers to develop a playscript and subsequent film entitled, *What Parents Want: Talking about Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools*. The words that are expressed in the film/playscript are thus the words and experiences of real parents.

This research also included a survey component which resulted in nationally representative findings about the attitudes of Australian public-school parents towards gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum. Notably, over 80% of parents want gender and sexuality diversity included in primary and secondary public-school education, delivered in age-appropriate ways.¹³ Interviews and forum contributions with parents of GSD young people found that these parents wanted greater inclusion, visibility, and education around these topics for the wellbeing of their child. The film/playscript centres on their experiences.

Part 1 of the film/playscript demonstrated how the parents' narratives about their GSD child differed across schools. The parents' voices illustrated that their child's 'coming out' was an emotional and, at times, challenging experience, both for the young person and their parents. As educators, we need to consider how these experiences add another layer of complexity to the lives of GSD students and their families that is not necessarily experienced in the same ways by others in schools.

As a result, recall in the film/playscript how some parents talked about how some schools made accommodations to support their child at school. These accommodations included relatively small changes through to more significant adjustments. Some of the main accommodations for students/their families included:

- Helping with the social transitioning of the child;
- Reviewing classroom practices;
- Rethinking gender assumptions;
- Changing pronoun use;
- Making accommodations related to toilets and changeroom facilities;
- Making accommodations related to the school uniform; and,
- Increasing visibility of gender and sexuality diversity in the school environment.

There are other accommodations that you or your colleagues may have identified during your participation in this professional development module, particularly in relation to your school and your own practices as an educator. You were asked to consider what challenges could be associated with making these accommodations and how these might be overcome.



¹³ This link provides access to an easy-reading synopsis of the survey findings from the GSDS project, published in *The Conversation*: <https://theconversation.com/4-out-of-5-parents-support-teaching-gender-and-sexuality-diversity-in-australian-schools-176787>.

Review: Part 2. School Encounters. Parents Talk about their Child's School Experiences

In this section of the film/playscript, parents talk about their child's interactions at school with peers, educators, and the educational system. The bulleted list below summarises some of the experiences of schooling as reported by the parents in the film/playscript, including what worked well in relation to educator/school responses and what did not.

- Schools'/educators' reinforcement of 'traditional' masculine/feminine traits;
- Classroom/school activities which caused the child to be singled out as 'different';
- Bullying, teasing, and peer harassment;
- Schools' positioning social wellbeing as intertwined in education;
- Subtle and overt discrimination against GSD people/identities;
- Exclusion from classroom/school activities;
- GSD student support groups;
- GSD students' sense of belonging;
- Educators' provision of safe spaces for the GSD student;
- No appropriate resources (e.g., books addressing gender and sexuality diversity);
- Moving classes/adjusting student's timetable;
- Celebrating gender and sexuality diversity through *Wear It Purple Day*;
- Inclusive practices/education about GSD identities;
- GSD students finding supportive, like-minded peers;
- Reading GSD-inclusive books to classes;
- Problems with outdated name ("dead name") on enrolment forms and other administration;
- Reluctance to share information about GSD identities; and,
- Staff wanting GSD student's experience to be student led.

During your participation in Part 2, you and your colleagues reflected on these experiences in relation to your school and your own practices as educators. You were asked to consider what you do well in relation to supporting GSD students and their families and what you might be able to do better.

Review: Part 3. Ways Forward. Parents Talk about what Schools can do

In Part 3, parent voices from across the research have been amalgamated into the voices of the six mothers who participants met in Parts 1 and 2. Once again, participants are engaging with the actual experiences and words of parents of GSD young people. Parents make suggestions as to what they think schools/educators currently do well or what schools/educators could do differently or better into the future to support the educational and social needs of GSD students.

It is important to understand what parents want in relation to gender and sexuality diversity inclusions and to be aware of the importance of a supportive education for GSD students. In the research on which this film/playscript is based, Australian public-school parents overwhelmingly reported that they want policy, pedagogical practices and curriculum to include and support the emotional, physical, social and educational wellbeing of GSD children. Parents want children to be safe and supported at school. This research, which was nationally representative – meaning that findings can be reasonably assumed to be representative of the actual beliefs of parents – found that over 80% of Australian parents who have a child attending an Australian public school want gender and sexuality diversity addressed in the school curriculum at an age-appropriate level. Most parents want this to be included from Stage 3 (Years 5 & 6) onwards.¹⁴

Importantly, other large-scale research with Australian students shows that having a formalised commitment to supporting the safety and wellbeing of GSD students, through inclusive policy and curriculum, greatly improves their sense of connectedness to school. There is now solid evidence that when schools do not have effective policy and support for GSD students, these students are more likely to be discriminated against, disengaged from school, and fail to thrive academically and socially. This research also demonstrates the importance of acknowledging, addressing, and teaching about the impact of homophobic and transphobic language, harassment and bullying in schools.¹⁵

The activities in Part 3 provided an opportunity to examine school policy documents, relevant state/territory policy documents, as well as pedagogical approaches and practices in relation to gender and sexuality diversity. In this section of the workshop, the following themes formed the basis for discussion. These themes were highlighted in *What Parents Want: Talking about Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools* and, particularly, what parents raised in Part 3 of the film/playscript.

¹⁴ This research is cited within the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of this document on pages 14–16. Additionally, the GSDS project website provides access to all related publications at: <https://westernsydney.edu.au/gds/outcomes-publications>.

¹⁵ Recent research from the field is cited within the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of this document on pages 14–16. The *Free2Be...Yet?* research (Ullman, 2021) focuses specifically on school climate and outcomes for GSD high school students, and is available here: <https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/library/documents/free2be-yet-second-national-study-australian-high-school-students-who-identify>.

Theme 1: Policy Impacting Practice and Communicating School Values

Research shows that curricular and policy inclusions have a significant influence on the wellbeing and academic outcomes of GSD students at school.

GSD students in schools with inclusive policies report significantly higher levels of school-based wellbeing, including higher school belonging and an increased sense that their teachers are personally invested in them.¹⁶

Theme 2: Pedagogy to Support Wellbeing, and Counter Bullying/Harassment

Australian research with GSD high school students shows a startling 93% of this cohort has heard homophobic language at school, with 37% of these young people reporting that they hear this language daily. Of those who reported peers using this language within earshot of school staff, merely 6% reported that school staff always intervened to put a stop to its use.¹⁶

While transphobic language was reported with less frequency, 71% of GSD high school students reported ever hearing such language at school. Nearly 57% of these students reported that their teachers never, or hardly ever, intervened.¹⁶

Theme 3: Social, Emotional and Physical Wellbeing

Research shows that GSD students engage more fully and feel more connected to school when they have an advocate at school and a sense that their educators are interested in their wellbeing.¹⁶ The promotion of a positive school climate with respect to gender and sexuality diversity – one that offers positive visibility, inclusion and celebration of GSD identities – has a critical part to play in the wellbeing of these young people at school.

Many GSD young people experience harassment and violence at or on their way to school. For instance, over 60% of participants in a national study of GSD young people said that they had felt unsafe or uncomfortable in the past 12 months at secondary school due to their sexuality or gender identity.¹⁷ Safety concerns are compounded for students who are gender diverse.

It is important to note that young people do not have to identify as GSD to experience harassment and discrimination; often young people are harassed because others assume that they are GSD. Homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and related bias-based discrimination are used to regulate individuals' gender expression and sexuality and to limit the options for, and experiences of, all people.

¹⁶ See the *Free2Be...Yet?* research (Ullman, 2021) for more detail, available here: <https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/library/documents/free2be-yet-second-national-study-australian-high-school-students-who-identify>.

¹⁷ These findings come from the *Writing Themselves In 4* research (Hill et al., 2021), available here: https://www.latrobe.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1198945/Writing-Themselves-In-4-National-report.pdf.

Theme 4: Curriculum

Most GSD young people hear little, if anything, about gender and sexuality diversity in the school curriculum. For instance, merely 6% of students reported that it was “definitely true” that they had learned about GSD identities during their health and physical education instruction at school. Less than one in ten (8.5%) reported that their teachers had definitively discussed diversity of gender expression.¹⁶

Additionally, GSD students in schools with a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum and where teachers are reported to be positively oriented towards GSD individuals feel more connected to their schools and are more likely to report having an advocate at school.¹⁶

Nearly all school curriculum ignores gender and sexuality diversity. Instead, heterosexual and cisgender identities are normalised and omnipresent. This means that GSD young people are not represented, and therefore do not see themselves in the curriculum. This can have long term implications for the social, emotional, physical and educational wellbeing of GSD young people.

Part 3 activities included reflecting on your local school policies in light of the *Australian Student Wellbeing Framework* (see page 5) and your state/territory’s policy guidance for the support of GSD students. You and your colleagues were asked to identify ways that your school policies could be modified to enhance awareness, visibility and support of GSD students and their families.

Ways Forward

The checklist below provides suggestions that could be used to identify ways to be more inclusive of GSD students and their families into the future. It is important to include how these suggestions will be undertaken, by whom, and when. These ideas are not exhaustive; please feel free to add other ideas to the list.

Ways Forward: Checklist of Suggestions for Gender and Sexuality Diversity Inclusion

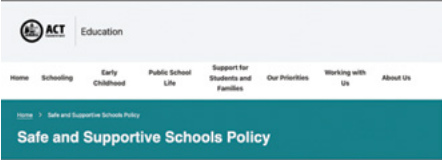





Suggestions	Who? When? How?
<input type="checkbox"/> Review your local school policy to ensure it articulates provisions for gender diverse students (including students who identify as transgender, non-binary, gender fluid and transitioning) in relation to uniform, toilet and changeroom options, as well as administrative facilities.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Critically evaluate (if available) or design and implement policy that specifically addresses homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and other related bias-based discriminatory language.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Implement practical and meaningful ways to educate staff and students to raise awareness, visibility and normalisation about gender and sexuality diversity.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Create a pool of teaching resources/ideas that are age-appropriate and inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity for teacher use.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Invite parents into the process of creating policy and resources.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure parents are educated about gender and sexuality diversity.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Develop a staff/parent/allies committee in the school to generate ideas and support for GSD students, families and staff.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Identify ways that the school can create safe spaces/options for GSD (and other marginalised or vulnerable) students.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Identify one or more teachers who can act as a “Rainbow Coordinator” who will support GSD students, families and staff and advocate for their needs.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Report bias or inappropriate behaviours and respond effectively through education and monitoring.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide gender and sexuality diversity training for all staff, including teachers, executive, and administrative staff, as well as school nurses and counsellors.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Teach about equity and justice.	


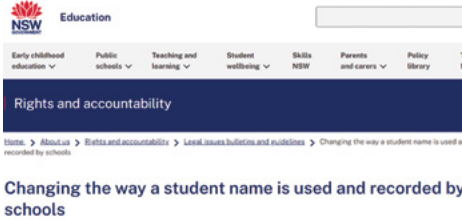


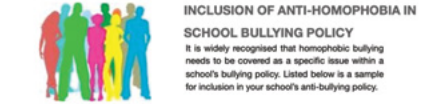
Suggestions	Who? When? How?
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure students are aware that educators will not tolerate bullying/harassment within either the classroom or the broader school environment. Educators must work as a team to consistently demonstrate this through classroom/school practices. School policy needs to support this work.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Critically teach about respect on a whole school level; integrate this into the everyday experiences of the school and its culture.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Establish a classroom climate where GSD students feel safe, both in terms of curricular inclusions and to report marginalisation from peers or adults in the school.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Encourage respectful conversation about gender and sexuality diversity and clearly outline the parameters of appropriate and inappropriate language to describe GSD identities.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Consistently demonstrate that gender and sexuality diversity-focused slurs or discriminatory language will not be accepted under any circumstances through education.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Use visual stimuli to indicate support for diversity in the classroom or other areas of the school (e.g., supportive posters, using a rainbow lanyard, etc.).	
<input type="checkbox"/> Use 'teachable moments' to educate about gender and sexuality diversity.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Integrate gender and sexuality diversity-related topics/ references in ways that 'normalise' gender and sexuality diversity, rather than making it a 'special' or 'taboo' topic.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Develop other more equitable ways of allocating students to tasks/activities than by binary gender.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Consider how your school will embrace GSD families in the planning of school events.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure the availability of single-occupant toilets and changing facilities for gender diverse/transgender students who may wish to use these.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledge that transgender students often wish to use the communal facilities commensurate with their gender identity and ensure this occurs.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that all students receive inclusive, relevant and age-appropriate physical and sexual health information which is a right of all young people.	

Suggestions	Who? When? How?
<input type="checkbox"/> Solicit, address, and work consistently to allay educators' concerns and fears about the parameters of relevant inclusions (e.g., which topics may be discussed, at which times and in what ways) and highlight the areas of the existing school curriculum in which there are clear provisions for inclusive material.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Refer to your state department of education guidelines and support documentation to assist you in making curriculum relevant to all students, including those who are GSD.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other?	

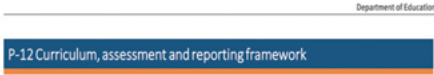

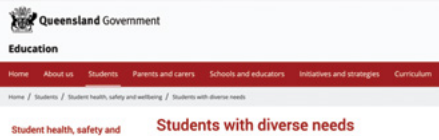



The remaining pages of this resource list the state/territory government Departmentally-sponsored materials relevant to the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in public schools. We encourage you to engage to with the state/territory materials relevant to your location. You may also like to see how other states/territories advise their educators in terms of GSD inclusivity. Please also be aware of the federal *Australian Student Wellbeing Framework* discussed in the opening section of this Booklet, as a framework to guide educators' support and affirmation of GSD students.

Federal and State/Territory Department of Education and Affiliate Policy Resources

Australian Capital Territory	
ACT Education Directorate	
<u>ACT Safe and Supportive Schools Policy and Procedure</u> 	<u>Changes to Dress Standards and Uniforms in Canberra Public Schools</u> 
<u>Dress Standards and Uniforms in Canberra Public Schools Policy</u> 	<u>Every Chance to Learn: Curriculum Framework for ACT Schools</u> 
<u>Fact Sheet for Schools Offering Students Equitable Uniform Options</u> 	
Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative, partnership with ACT Education Directorate	
<u>Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative</u> 	

New South Wales NSW Department of Education Bulletin 55: Transgender Students in Schools	
 <p>Rights and accountability</p> <p>Transgender students in schools, legal issues bulletin 55, LBS55. This advice was last reviewed in December 2014. A minor amendment was made to the resources section at the end of the bulletin in August 2022.</p>	 <p>Use/Recording of Student's Name</p> <p>Rights and accountability</p> <p>Changing the way a student name is used and recorded by schools</p>
NSW Teachers Federation*	
Gender, Sexuality and Identity Policy 	TR14 Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia  <p>TR14.1 Introduction</p> <p>This information leaflet is provided to assist members in dealing with and preventing homophobic, biphobic and/or transphobic behaviour, and is intended as an overview rather than a comprehensive document.</p> <p>Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia have been identified as reasons why some people who identify as, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and/or queer (LGBTIQ) experience bullying, harassment, violence, discrimination and/or vilification. It can be the act of someone who is not consciously or intentionally acting in this manner, such as a passing comment or joke. On the other hand, it can be the deliberate act of someone to make another person uncomfortable, intimidated, hurt or injured such as name calling or graffiti.</p>
Inclusion of Anti-Homophobia in School Bullying Program 	

* Materials from the NSW Teachers Federation are not publicly accessible. Federation members will need to login in order to access the LGBTIQ+ Special Interest Group site (<https://members.nswtf.org.au/documents/lgbtiq/>) for access to these, and other, relevant materials.

Queensland	
Queensland Department of Education	
Department of Education P-12 Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework	Inclusive Education Policy
	
Students with Diverse Needs	Diversity in Queensland Schools
	
Queensland Human Rights Commission	
Trans @ School: A Guide for Schools, Educators, and Families of Trans and Gender Diverse Children and Young People	
	
True Relationships and Reproductive Health, independent non-profit organisation, linked from multiple QLD Dept. of Education pages	
Supporting Trans and Gender Diverse Students in Your School Community	
	

South Australia	
South Australia Department for Education	
Gender Diverse and Intersex Children and Young People Support Procedure	Gender Diverse, Intersex and Sexually Diverse Children and Young People
 <p>Gender diverse and intersex children and young people support procedure</p> <p>This is a mandated procedure under the department's operational policy framework. Any edits to this procedure must follow the process outlined on the creating, updating and deleting operational policies page.</p>	 <p>Department for Education South Australia</p> <p>For parents and families Working with us For schools and educators For students The department</p> <p>Gender diverse, intersex and sexually diverse children and young people</p>
SHINE South Australia, working in partnership with the South Australia Department for Education	
Education and Schools: Relationships and Sexual Health Education	Focus Schools Program: Comprehensive Relationships and Sexual Health Education in SA Schools
 <p>SHINE SA Health Services Information For Professionals News & Advice 8300 5300</p> <p>Educators and Schools - Relationships & Sexual Health Education</p>	 <p>SHINE SA Health Services Information For Professionals News & Advice 8300 5300 Book by Appointment</p> <p>Focus Schools Program - Comprehensive Relationships and Sexual Health Education in SA Schools</p>
Northern Territory	
Northern Territory Government	
Student Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour Policy	Teacher Registration Board's Code of Ethics
 <p>Student Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour Policy</p>	 <p>TRB TEACHER REGISTRATION BOARD of the Northern Territory</p> <p>CODE OF ETHICS FOR NORTHERN TERRITORY TEACHERS</p>

Tasmania

Tasmanian Department for Education, Children, and Young People

[Inclusive Language Guidelines](#)



[LGBTIQ+ Equality and Inclusion in Education](#)



[LGBTIQ+ Equality in Tasmanian Government Schools](#)



[Professional Learning Institute: Affirmative Planning](#)



[Respectful Relationships](#)



[Supporting Sexual and Gender Diversity in Schools and Colleges Guidelines](#)



Working it Out, working in partnership with the Tasmanian Department for Education, Children, and Young People

[Working it Out](#)



Victoria

Victoria Department of Education and Training

Guide to Making Your School Safe and Inclusive for LGBTI Students



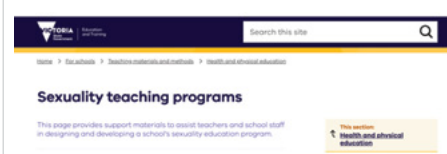
LGBTIQ Student Support Policy



Safe Schools



Sexuality Teaching Programs



FUSE, Curriculum Resources and Advice

Catching on Early: Sexuality Education for Victorian Primary Schools



Catching on Later: Sexuality Education for Secondary Students



Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships



Western Australia

Equal Opportunity Commission of Western Australia

Guidelines for supporting sexual and gender diversity in schools: Sexuality discrimination & homophobic bullying



Commissioner for Children and Young People

Supporting Trans and Gender Diverse Students in WA Schools



LGBTI Children and Young People



