

DIFFERENT FAMILIES, SAME LOVE

When someone, with the authority of a teacher say, describes the world and you're not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing.

Adrienne Rich

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY IN THE SPHE CURRICULUM

Families are central to the formation of children's identity and are the primary lens through which they view their world. 'Myself and My Family' is a core strand unit of the Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum, as outlined by the Department of Education and Skills (DES, 1999). It is **vitaly important for all children to see their families represented** in the course of these lessons. It is also essential to create a positive school climate that fosters respect and acceptance of all family structures. **Families in Ireland today are diverse**, consisting of mother- and father-headed families, single parent families, families headed by members of the extended family, step-parent families, adoptive and foster families, families headed by cohabiting couples, bereaved families, adult-only families, families from different cultures, and lesbian- and gay-headed families. However, LGBT young people and children from families with same-sex parents often experience homophobic and transphobic bullying and prejudice in their schools and communities. Addressing different families through age-appropriate discussions and activities can help promote a more respectful environment in your classroom and in your school. The poster aims to stimulate conversation about LGBT people and families in a safe learning environment and encourage correct and positive language around LGBT people and families. This teaching resource can be used by all class teachers as an additional preventative strategy to **combat homophobic and transphobic bullying**.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING?

Homophobic and transphobic bullying has been found to be widespread in Irish schools (Minton, 2013). It affects those who are LGBT, those perceived to be LGBT, those raised in families headed by LGBT parents, those with LGBT friends or relatives, those perceived to be outside the norms that constitute "feminine" and "masculine" behaviour and those that witness the bullying as bystanders. Research has shown that **bullying impacts negatively on a child's learning, their attendance at school, their mental health and their well-being** (Mayock et al., 2009; Norman et al., 2006). Experiencing bullying behaviour and minority stress (experiences of stigmatisation, discrimination, social exclusion and harassment) can be attributed to the development of low self-esteem, self-harm and suicidal behaviour (Mayock et al., 2009). **A clear correlation between homophobic and transphobic bullying and serious mental health difficulties** was found among LGBT people to the extent that:

- 27% of LGBT people surveyed had self-harmed at least once in their life.
- Over 50% of LGBT people (under 25) surveyed had seriously thought of ending their lives.
- Just under 20% of LGBT people (under 25) surveyed had attempted suicide.

(DES, 2013a, p. 35)

An important finding from the Ombudsman for Children in 2012 indicated that students felt that they would have been **more comfortable reporting homophobic bullying if the issue of homophobia had been discussed** (DES, 2013a, p. 23). However, homophobic and transphobic bullying often goes unchallenged by teachers because of a lack of understanding about what constitutes homophobia and transphobia, and because perceptions about heterosexism and heteronormativity continue to dominate. Significantly, it has been noted by Mayock et al (2009) that the greater the support, inclusion, and equality for LGBT people, the less affected they are by minority stress.

WHAT CAN TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS DO?

Teachers can influence attitudes by representing different identities in a positive light through classroom discussions and activities in SPHE as well as in other curricular subjects (O'Moore & Stevens, 2013, pp. 274-275). This should complement the new *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary Schools and Post-Primary Schools*, which have been designed to give direction and guidance to school personnel in preventing and tackling bullying behaviour amongst its students. In addition,

Every school must document in its anti-bullying policy the specific education and preventative strategies that the school will implement. This must include documenting the measures being taken by the school to explicitly address the issues of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying.

(DES, 2013b, p.25)

Schools have to be proactive in preventing cyber-bullying, homophobic and transphobic bullying and strive to make all children and young people feel included. A **zero-tolerance policy on homophobic and transphobic language** should be adopted. If teachers fail to challenge homophobic or transphobic bullying, they may unwittingly contribute to a climate of fear and uncertainty in their school.

DIFFERENT FAMILIES, SAME LOVE: A TOOL FOR INCLUSIVITY

You do not need to be an expert on LGBT issues, homophobia or transphobia to use this poster. Your main role is to facilitate discussion and activities that **celebrate and respect similarities and differences amongst your students and their families**. Including all children and young people as equal members of our school community promotes the value of diversity, addresses prejudice and stereotyping, and highlights the unacceptability of bullying behaviour (DES, 2013b, p. 27). All primary schools aspire to create a safe place where their pupils feel welcome and happy. By using this poster and other LGBT resources, implementing comprehensive anti-bullying policies, and focusing on

inclusive language, you can help to safeguard a positive learning environment for all children in your school. As teachers and educators we want to promote an inclusive learning environment – one that **empowers students, teachers and staff to celebrate difference and challenge prejudice.**

APPROPRIATE USE OF LANGUAGE

If children use the word 'gay' in a pejorative way to call another child a name e.g. 'You're so gay,' tell them that this is inappropriate. Explain to them that words that people use to describe themselves are acceptable (e.g. gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) but it is not acceptable to use these words in a derogatory way to try to hurt people.

If children use the word 'gay' in a negative way to mean that something is rubbish e.g. 'That's so gay,' tell them that this is inappropriate. Explain to them that words that people use to describe themselves are acceptable (e.g. gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) but it is not acceptable to use these words in a derogatory way. This could be hurtful to gay people who hear it or to those who have a gay relative or friend. Ask them to think of a word that actually means what they intended. Discuss the importance of treating others with respect.

DIVERSITY OF FAMILIES

Families come in all shapes and sizes. Some families have a mother, some have a father, some have a mother and father, some have two mothers, some have two fathers, some children live with other family members like grandparents or aunts and uncles while some families have no kids (just grown-ups). Some children are born into their family while others are adopted or fostered. Sometimes families live together and sometimes they might live in different places. A family is when people love and take care of each other.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL: GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

1. An inclusive curriculum starts in Junior Infants. Ensure all types of families and relationships are represented in your class discussions, lessons and resources.
2. Check that your enrolment form caters for all types of families (for example by using the terms 'Parent/Guardian' and 'Relationship to Child' instead of 'Mother/Father').
3. Ensure that all parents, teachers and staff members are respected, valued and welcomed in the school.
4. Be aware that children in your school come from a variety of family backgrounds including same-sex families, single parent families, grandparent-led families, foster families, adoptive families, as well as many others.
5. Ensure the school environment is rich with resources that celebrate all family types, for example, posters, displays and library books.
6. Respond effectively to homophobic or transphobic language. When pupils use phrases such as 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' they may not realise the negative impact of their language on others. It is essential for the teacher to challenge such language. Be clear that 'gay' is not a 'bad word' and should be used in the correct context.
7. Tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying. Implement rigorous and explicit bullying policies in accordance with the Department of Education and Skills' Anti-Bullying Procedures. Ensure that you have educational and preventative strategies in place that are reviewed and updated frequently.
8. Explore the positive contributions of LGBT individuals to Irish and global society.
9. Enable the children to recognise and challenge gender stereotypes. Remind them that girls and boys can like and do many things.
10. Embrace the individuality of all children. Encourage the children to respect and celebrate the uniqueness of one another.

USING THE POSTER: LESSON IDEAS

JUNIOR INFANTS AND SENIOR INFANTS

Strand: Myself and Others

Strand Unit: Myself and My Family

- *identify and name the people who constitute a family and appreciate that all family units are not the same*

(SPHE Curriculum, p. 20)

KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE POSTER:

- *Who's in your family?*
- *How does your family spend time with each other?*
- *What are the families in the poster doing together?*
- *How does your family take care of each other?*
- *How might the families in the poster take care of each other?*
- *Are all families the same?*
- *What's your favourite thing about your family?*

LESSON IDEAS:

- Create a class mural of family drawings.
- *Different Families, Same Love* Family Tree: Children paint a tree and stick photos of special people in their family among the branches.
- Fruit salad: Children sit in a circle. Call out a statement e.g. Move if you have a pet/have a brother/your family likes to...
- Focus on a family in the poster. Discuss appearance, personality, activities, and composition of that family.
- Families can live in a house, apartment, hotel, caravan/trailer, cottage, bungalow, terraced house, accommodation centre etc. How might some of the families in the poster have decorated their home?
- Guess Who? Teacher says a statement e.g. 'It's my birthday today', 'I like to dig in the sand. I have two mummies', 'I have red hair', 'I have a dog who helps me'. Children guess the character being described.
- Kim's Game: Teacher covers one of the families and the children describe the missing family.
- Phonics/Rhyming game: Find something in the poster that rhymes with .../begins with ...
- Encourage the children to create families out of LEGO, marla etc.
- Look at the babies in the poster. Can you tell if they are girls/boys? Is there such a thing as 'boy' or 'girl' colours? Challenge any gender stereotypes displayed by the children.

1ST CLASS AND SECOND CLASS

Strand: Myself and Others

Strand Unit: Myself and My Family

- *identify and talk about those who live at home and recognise that homes and families can vary*

(SPHE Curriculum, p. 31)

KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE POSTER:

- *Use your senses to explore the picture. What do you see/hear/feel/taste/smell?*
- *Focus on one family at a time. How are they the same or different to yours?*
- *How do you help in your family? Why is your contribution important?*
- *How might the families in the poster take care of each other?*
- *What makes your family unique?*
- *How might the families in the poster be unique?*
- *Describe a special time you spent with your family.*

LESSON IDEAS:

- Make a mobile of all the people in your family.
- Imagine you are a reporter. In pairs/groups children role play an interview with each family. Write and illustrate the news report.
- Fruit salad: Teacher calls out a statement e.g. 'Swap seats if your family likes...!'
- Children describe their family to a partner. The partner listens and draws what they are describing. Children look at the picture together. Repeat activity with a family from the poster.
- Choose a character/family from the poster. Pretend to write from their perspective e.g. my news, a holiday postcard, birthday card, shopping list, email to a friend etc.
- Create an acrostic poem for FAMILY.
- Guess Who? Child comes up and says a statement e.g. 'There are five people in my family', 'I wear glasses', 'I have two daddies' etc. Other children have to guess who the character being described is.
- Write an invitation for the boy's birthday party in the park. What kinds of games or toys might they play with at the party? Are there such things as boys' games or girls' games? Challenge any gender stereotypes displayed by the children.

3RD CLASS AND 4TH CLASS

Strand: Myself and Others

Strand Unit: Myself and My Family

- *explore and discuss different kinds of families recognising that families vary in structure, in the way they communicate and in the way family members spend their time*

(SPHE Curriculum, p. 46)

KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE POSTER:

- *Look at poster and wonder. "I wonder why/who/what..."*
- *What different family structures do you see? How are the families the same?*
- *Focus on one family at a time. What are they doing?*
- *How would you define family?*
- *Why is family important? What does it mean to belong to a family?*
- *Look at the family going to the party. Do you think the dog has a special role in that family? (Some children need assistance dogs for blindness/Autistic Spectrum Disorder.)*
- *Can you see any symbols in the poster? What do you think they signify? (The rainbow represents LGBT acceptance, the wheel is a symbol of Traveller and Roma culture, the globe could suggest a sense of belonging to more than one place or culture.) Why is it important to respect other cultures and identities?*
- *LGBT means people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Can you think of positive contributions LGBT individuals make to society? (If the children struggle, remind them that LGBT people work in all spheres of society - teachers, doctors, actors, musicians, soldiers, artists, mechanics, scientists, human rights activists etc.)*

LESSON IDEAS:

- Create a mind map/spider web of your family.
- Draw a picture of your family inspired by a famous artist e.g. in the style of Picasso's cubist period.
- Discuss how parks and public spaces are used. How can they be designed so that they cater to the needs of all members of the family and community? How would you improve the park in the poster? Design your own park.
- Assign each student one of the families. Give them a writing task e.g. a diary entry for a day, an account of what happened to the family an hour before or an hour after their visit to the park or an email to the local council with a complaint e.g. broken glass in the sandpit.
- Telephone conversations: The children find the people in the poster who have phones. Role play the conversation they might be having.
- How are the household jobs shared amongst the members of your family? How do you think household chores are divided between a family from the poster? Design a 'Household Chores Board' to show this.

- Choose a family and in your group role-play an interesting event in the life of that family e.g. a mysterious visitor. Create still images, use thought-tracking, hot-seating etc.
- Brainstorm problems that a family in the poster may encounter e.g. family dog dies, losing their luggage on holidays, moving house. Pairwork: Interviews about what happened.
- Media education: Discuss the portrayal of family and gender roles in computer games/movies/books/TV etc.
- Sometimes families don't all live in the same house/city/country. How do we connect with our families using technology? Can you see any examples of this in the poster?
- How can we stay safe when using technology? Create Cyber Safety posters to teach children about the importance of staying safe online.
- Write a recipe for a happy family.

5TH CLASS AND 6TH CLASS

Strand: Myself and Others

Strand Unit: Myself and My Family

- *explore and discuss families and homes and how they can vary in many ways*
(SPHE Curriculum, p. 61)

KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE POSTER:

- *What does this poster portray?*
- *What do you think the purpose of the poster is?*
- *Why is it important to talk about and respect different family types?*
- *What makes a family? (Refer to each family in the poster.)*
- *How does family give you a sense of belonging? Why is this important?*
- *Do all families have children? (There is a family of two adults on the right hand side.)*
- *Look at poster and wonder. "I wonder why/who/what..."*
- *Can you think of any gender stereotypes related to appearance/behaviour/jobs/likes/dislikes etc.? What are the benefits of countering these stereotypes? Are people free to look and act contrary to these expectations in your school/community/country?*
- *Do you know what LGBT stands for?*
- *Examine the school's anti-bullying policy. Highlight the words 'homophobic and transphobic bullying'. Ask the children to explain what this means.*
- *How can we ensure that our classroom, school and community are welcoming to all children, teenagers and families?*

LESSON IDEAS:

- What is your definition of family? Write it. Join with a partner and create a pair definition. Join another pair and come up with a group definition. As a class group agree on a definition of family. Design a poster showing the definition and display it in the classroom.
- Write on the board 'Girls can ...' and 'Boys can ...'. Ask the children to discuss. Challenge any gender stereotypes.
- Find the photographer that is taking photos of the families in the park. Discuss catchy captions and interesting photographs. Come up with an exciting newspaper article to accompany each family portrait.
- Make connections to the poster (from poster to own life, poster to other fictional contexts - TV, film, books etc. and poster to the wider world) using the phrase 'That family reminds me of...'
- Ask the children to describe the types of families they see in the media. Discuss why this might be the case.
- Analyse a selection of books to identify the family types represented (see link below for books that include LGBT characters).
- Create their own book for younger children to promote inclusion of all family types.

- Give each group of children a selection of cards with household chores/occupations. Ask them to sort them based on their own criteria. If sorted on the basis of gender, challenge stereotypes.
- Create a Family Rights Charter - a list of things that all families are entitled to.
- Family history project: Ask the children to interview/video members of their family to create a family story - stories of their childhood, places they lived, important events in the past, how gender roles have changed (at home/school/work) since they were younger.
- Create a home page for the school website that illustrates that the school is welcoming to everyone regardless of difference.
- School Council: Selected children meet and implement ideas on how to tackle bullying including homophobic and transphobic bullying.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND CLASS-APPROPRIATE EXPLANATIONS

	JUNIOR INFANTS TO 2ND CLASS	3RD CLASS TO 6TH CLASS
LESBIAN	A woman who loves another woman and they can be a family together.	A woman who has or wants to have a loving relationship with another woman.
GAY	A man who loves another man and they can be a family together.	A man who has or wants to have a loving relationship with another man. Sometimes this term is also used to refer to lesbians.
BISEXUAL	A person who can love a man or a woman and form a family with a person of either gender.	A person who can have or wants to have a loving relationship with either a man or a woman.
TRANSGENDER (OR TRANS* FOR SHORT)	A girl who feels like they are a boy/A woman who feels like they are a man. A boy who feels like they are a girl/A man who feels like they are a woman.	A person who was born with the physical characteristics of a boy/girl but deep inside they feel like they are a different gender and want to live their life as that gender.
HETEROSEXUAL (OR STRAIGHT)	A man who loves a woman or a woman who loves a man and they can be a family together.	A man who has or wants to have a loving relationship with a woman or a woman who has or wants to have a loving relationship with a man.
HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING	When people are hurtful to others because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender or because people think they are.	When people hurt others (verbally, psychologically, physically, cyber bullying etc.) because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender or because people think they are.
TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING	When people are hurtful to others because they are transgender or because people think they are.	When people hurt others (verbally, psychologically, physically, cyber bullying etc.) because they are transgender or because people think they are.
LGBT	A short way to say lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.	An acronym used to refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities.
HOMOSEXUAL	This is another term for gay or lesbian, sometimes used by scientists or doctors. LGB people generally prefer the terms lesbian, gay or bisexual to be used.	This is another term for gay or lesbian, usually used in scientific or medical references. LGB people generally prefer the terms lesbian, gay or bisexual to be used.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Click on the 'Educational Resources' tab of the INTO LGBT Teachers' Group webpage

<http://www.into.ie/lgbt>

- English and Irish language versions of the poster for interactive whiteboards
- Animated presentations of the poster
- List of books to promote inclusion in classrooms
- List of further useful websites

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