



Talking with Children

About Homophobia and Transphobia

Witnessing or hearing about homophobia/transphobia can be upsetting and confusing for children.

Upsetting because hate is upsetting in general, if they don't understand the words they might feel vulnerable to attack, if they or family/friends are LGBTQ+ they are likely to feel unsafe, and if they belong to a different marginalized group they might worry that they will be the next target.

Confusing because many children don't know the meanings of words that are used hatefully and develop vague understandings of badness that feel worrying in undefined ways.

Talking about LGBTQ+ identities – and about homophobia and transphobia – helps children develop a foundational understanding that helps them withstand hate speech/acts. Here are some suggestions for talking with children proactively and responding to hate incidents.

Talking With Children Proactively

- Explain what gender identity and sexual orientation are, and words used to describe various identities. See LexPride's *What is LGBTQ+?* to clarify your own understanding.
- Expose children to LGBTQ+ identities through age-appropriate affirming books, media, and toys. See LexPride's Resources web page and inclusive practices sheets for lists.
- Model use of inclusive language and celebration of diversity. Remember that omitting LGBTQ+ people from conversation creates the impression that we are abnormal.
- Explain that some people fear or hate what they don't understand. If they don't know or understand LGBTQ+ identities, these people sometimes lash out. Brainstorm better ways to respond when you don't understand something.
- Explain that some people believe that being LGBTQ+ is wrong or sinful because of their religious or cultural upbringing. Remind children that people should *always* treat others with respect, regardless of personal beliefs; it is wrong to hurt people just because we disagree with them.
- Explain that some people use hate speech because they don't know how else to express their feelings, they feel peer pressure to do so, they feel stronger or more powerful when they act aggressively, or they think it's a way to exact revenge for a perceived slight. Note that some people still need to learn how to manage their feelings constructively. Brainstorm better ways to manage your feelings in these kinds of situations.
- Talk about the concept of being an "active bystander" or "upstander." If the child feels safe, they can tell the harm-doer to stop, distract the harm-doer to interrupt the aggression, or help the target(s) get out of the situation. If the child does not feel safe intervening, they should respect that feeling; they can leave the situation and report it to a trusted adult. After the incident, they can support the target(s) so they don't feel alone. Brainstorm safe ways of intervening during or after a hate incident.

Responding to Hate Incidents

- If your child has not mentioned a hate incident, ask them if they witnessed or heard about it.
- If they did witness or hear about it, ask them what they think the content (words, symbols, behaviors) means. Validate however they respond, then clarify the meaning as needed. If they did not witness or hear about it, state the facts of the incident and then ask them about the content.
- Ask your child why they think the incident happened—what motivated the act of hate. Talk about reasons why people behave this way (see front side of this sheet).
- If your child expresses sadness about the incident, validate these feelings—and reassure them that many people in the community are working to educate those who don't understand LGBTQ+ identities to help prevent future incidents.
- If your child expresses fear for themselves, friends, or family members who are or might be LGBTQ+, validate these feelings. Acknowledge that these incidents can be scary. Reassure them as above.
- If your child expresses fear for themselves, friends, or family members because they belong to other marginalized groups and could be targeted next, validate these feelings and reassure them as above.
- Brainstorm positive actions that your child (or family) can take to lift up targets of hate and unify people.
- Ask your child if they have more questions. Let them know they can talk with you any time.

What Else?

LexPride offers a variety of social, support, and educational events. Please see our online calendar (<https://www.lexpridema.org/calendar>) for events that are open to the public.

Please contact us at LexPrideMA@gmail.com to ask about other opportunities, plan an event, or schedule a training on understanding LGBTQ+, overcoming unconscious bias, recruiting for diversity, or being an active bystander.

Please see LexPride's website (<https://www.lexpridema.org/resources>) for additional resources.