
Section 4: Positive Space Program Factsheets

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Being An Ally: For LGBT People

Combating Homophobia and Heterosexism for LGBT Identified People

- **Understand Homophobia:** Know how homophobia exists on both a personal and institutional level. Be alert for the subtle forms of homophobia.
- **Know the history of the lesbian and gay rights movement:** Knowledge of history gives us a sense of the past, which in turn helps us create a vision and set a course for the future. It also helps to give LGBTQ individuals a sense of their place in the world.
- **Visualize a non-homophobic society:** Having a vision of a non-homophobic society can help us in bringing it about.
- **Find positive LGBTQ role models:** Free yourself of negative stereotypes and find inspiring LGBTQ individuals to use as role models.
- **Report all incidents of violence towards LGBTQ individuals:** Silence connotes acceptance. Send the message that any form of violence based on hatred is not acceptable.
- **When challenged, defend your sexual orientation or that of others:** In situations you feel comfortable doing so, challenge homophobic and heterosexist remarks.
- **Discuss homophobia with others:** Help increase their awareness about the overt or subtle messages they may be sending.
- **Respond to homophobia in movies and TV:** For many people their only experience of LGBTQ individuals is what's depicted on T.V. Help make sure that LGBTQ characters are depicted realistically by writing in to producers and networks.
- **Know your rights:** Be aware that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is illegal.
- **Attend demonstrations:** Share your voice and your support.
- **Write a letter to the editor:** Express your views on issues by submitting an editorial.
- **Sign petitions and organize petition drives:** Lend your support to others who are working to end homophobia, or take action yourself.
- **Join LGBTQ political organizations:** Becoming involved can be a very empowering experience.
- **Support corporations with progressive attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals:** Let them know that their efforts are appreciated. More companies will likely follow suit.
- **Know the facts, distinguish between myth and reality:** Don't perpetuate the myths, and know how to dispel them for others.
- **Free yourself from LGBTQ stereotypes:** Live your LGBTQ life the way you want to. Stereotypes are boxes and you don't need to fill them.
- **Accept diversity in the LGBTQ community:** There are enough limits out there without us adding our own.
- **Ask librarians to stock LGBTQ books:** Don't be afraid to ask for resources.
- **Participate in Pride week events:** For most LGBTQ individuals it is an exhilarating experience that augments their sense of pride.
- **Be visible, don't be afraid to display the symbols:** Symbols help generate visibility and represent unity.

Adapted from: Una Fahy (1995) (LGBTQ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning)

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered Community Safety Initiative

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For Parents: Supporting LGBT Children

Most parents are not prepared to find out that their child is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT). While some parents are able to accept this new information easily, many parents go through something similar to a grieving process with the stages of shock, denial, anger, guilt and a sense of loss. These are understandable feelings due to our society's attitudes towards LGBT people.

Allow yourself your initial reaction and work towards acceptance, understanding and support for your child. You have not lost your child, only the image and understanding of them that you thought that you had. If your child chooses to tell you that she or he is gay, then your child cares enough about your relationship to want to be honest and authentic. Accept this as an affirmation of the love and trust between you and your child.

If your child comes out to you:

- Keep reminding yourself that your child is the same person that she or he was before you learned about her/his sexuality
- Work on accepting this, your child is not simply going through a phase. Generally your child will have spent a long time thinking about this before ever reaching the stage of telling you.
- Allow yourself to grieve, but do not do this with your LGBT child. They are dealing with their own emotions around the prejudice they face.
- Know that the apprehension that you feel around your LGBT child is due to our culture where prejudice against LGBT individuals is pervasive.
- Do not suggest 'fixing' this problem with therapy. LGBT identification is not a disease to be cured.
- If this revelation is difficult to accept because of your religious beliefs, seek out individuals in your own religion, or in other groups who have positive attitudes towards LGBT issues. An example in Antigonish is the United Church.
- Find support for yourself around this issue, and seek out people with whom you feel safe and comfortable sharing your feelings, and who can be trusted to keep this information confidential.
- Be careful how many people you tell this to. Your child may not be ready for the whole family to know. Discuss this with your child, and respect their boundaries.

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) offers support for parents of LGBT children. Their webpage is www.pflag.ca or call the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered Community Safety Initiative for additional contact information.

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For Service Providers

When Someone Comes Out to you as LGBT Identified

Thank the person for having the courage to tell you.

Please keep in mind that a LGBT person cannot accurately predict your reaction to their coming out to you. You have lived in a society that often teaches intolerance of LGBT people. Therefore, by telling you, this person is putting a large amount of trust in just a few words. At that one point, they have the possibility of losing you as a friend or family member, so often times the decision to first share that piece of their life is not one taken lightly. Do not judge the person, if you have strong religious or other beliefs about LGBT identities keep them to yourself. Ensure that you respect this person's confidentiality and tell them that you still care about them, no matter what.

Understand that the person has not changed.

They are still the same person they have always been. You might be uncomfortable or surprised by the news at first, but make an effort to understand why you are surprised or uncomfortable. Also, this person may share things with you related to this part of their life. Do not assume this person is coming on to you or finds you attractive.

Ask questions.

You can ask questions of the individuals, but understand that they might not have all of the answers. If you want to learn more, then say so. It helps to admit to yourself out loud that you are not an authority on the subject. Also, understand that it is not this person's job as a LGBT person to educate you fully, be prepared to do your own research. You may want to keep the conversations going and provide a way to contact the person in the future. This interaction lets the person answer your questions at a pace that is their own.

Helpful Responses for Discussions around LGBT identity:

- It's okay if you are LGBT identified.
- I can appreciate how difficult it must have been for you to tell me this.
- If you are LGBT, what are the kinds of things that worry you the most?
- What kind of support do you think you need from me?
- I may not have all the information, but I can find more for you.

Potentially Damaging Responses:

- How do you know? Are you sure?
- You're too young to make a decision like that.
- How can you know if you've never had sex with someone of the opposite sex?
- It's just a phase you're going through.
- A lot of people experiment or fantasize, it doesn't mean you're LGBT.
- It's fine that you told me, but you shouldn't tell _____.
- Maybe you just haven't met the right person yet.

Information Adapted from *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Program, Central Toronto Youth Services, 1998.*

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Gender Identity and Transphobia

Cross-dressing - The practice of dressing in clothes that are traditionally assigned to the gender which is not considered to be paired with your biological sex. For example a biological male who wears women's clothes. Other terms include transvestite and drag.

Drag/Drag King/Drag Queen - Assuming both the dress and mannerisms that are most often associated with one sex or the other. This may be for purposes of emotional or sexual pleasure, or simply for fun. Dressing in drag is not an indication of sexual orientation.

Gender - Used to describe those characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed, in contrast to those that are biologically determined. People are born female, male or intersexed, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. These learned attributes are what make up gender identity and determine gender roles.

Gender Identity - How you see yourself socially: woman, man or combination of both.

Intersexed - One who is born biologically with both female and male or ambiguous genitalia.

Transgender - An umbrella term for those who blur the lines of traditional gender expression. This usually includes transsexuals and cross-dressers. One who mentally and emotionally identifies with some or all of the traditional gender characteristics of the opposite sex.

Transphobia - Fear or hatred of those assumed to be transgendered and anything connected to transgendered culture. Transphobia can include a range of behaviours from mild discomfort, to hate speech, to violence.

Transsexual - One who mentally and emotionally identifies as the gender opposite to his/her birth sex. A transsexual may or may not use surgery and/or drug therapy to acquire the physical characteristics of the opposite sex.

Two Spirit - A person possessing qualities of females and males, with honoured roles in some Aboriginal cultures. An identity used by some LGBT First Nations individuals.

A person's gender identity is their internal sense of being male or female. Gender expression is how someone presents their gender to the world. We all have a gender identity, and we all have ways of expressing it. Our society has a narrow view of what it means to be a woman or a man, and we learn that from an early age. Those who are visibly gender-variant face increased risk of harassment in school, unemployment, homelessness, hate violence, lack of access to health care and loss of custody of their children.

A transgendered person is someone whose gender identity or expression differs from conventional expectations for their physical sex. The term transgender is used to describe several distinct but related groups of people who use a variety of other terms to self-identify. Transgendered people can include transsexuals (not all transsexual people need or want sex reassignment surgery), masculine women, feminine men, drag queens/kings, cross-dressers, gender queers, two-spirit, butches, transmen, transwomen, etc. Like other people, transgender people can be straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual.

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Homophobia and Heterosexism

HOMOPHOBIA – The irrational fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against homosexuals, homosexuality, or behaviours or beliefs that do not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. Fear enforces sexism as well as homophobia. This word describes anti-lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) attitudes and behaviours.

HETEROSEXISM – The system by which heterosexuality is the assumed norm. This is the institutionalized assumption that everyone is, or should be heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior to and preferable to homosexuality or bisexuality. Heterosexism forces LGB individuals to struggle constantly against their own invisibility and creates challenges for them in creating a positive identity.

HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE – Members of an oppressed group are denied privileges that members of the non-oppressed group often take for granted. These privileges are often so discrete that they can be difficult to identify. Some examples of Heterosexual Privilege are listed below:

- Kissing/hugging/being affectionate in public without threat or punishment
- Expressing pain when a relationship ends, having other people notice and attend to your pain
- Living with your partner and doing so openly to all
- Receiving validation from your religious community

HOW HOMOPHOBIA HURTS US ALL

You do not need to be LGB to be affected by homophobia, you may know and love someone who is LGB, but it also influences your behaviours and your life.

- Heterosexual individuals do not feel that they can form close, intimate relationships with members of their own sex for fear of being perceived as LGB
- It locks people into rigid gender-based roles
- Compromises human integrity by encouraging people to treat others badly
- It inhibits appreciation of other types of diversity which makes it unsafe for everyone as we all exhibit unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant.

We are all diminished when anyone of us is demeaned. Challenging homophobia is not only a fight against the oppression of specific groups. Instead, it is the process of striving for a society that accepts and celebrates the differences of all of us.

“FAMILY VALUES” AS HOMOPHOBIA – In recent politics and media the phrase “family values” has come to be synonymous with anti-LGB movements and institutions. The use of a positive term to describe the oppression of those who do not fall into a very narrow definition of family is a distortion of what many believe true family values to be. Hate is not a family value. Challenge heterosexism and challenge the language used to promote discrimination and exclusion.

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Homosexuality and the Law

A BRIEF HISTORY

- In Canada, prior to 1969, same-sex practices between consenting male adults were considered to be crimes punishable by imprisonment. In 1969 an omnibus bill was passed decriminalizing private sexual acts between two people over the age of 21.
- Quebec, in 1977 became the first jurisdiction in Canada to amend the provinces Charter of Human Rights to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground for discrimination.
- In 1996 the Canadian Human Rights act was amended to explicitly include sexual orientation as one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination.
- In 2002 the Quebec Superior Court and the Ontario Superior Court ruled that denying same-sex couples equal opportunity to marry is unconstitutional and gave the federal government 2 years to correct or enact new legislation.
- In May 2003 the Court of Appeal of British Columbia overturned a ruling of the province's Supreme Court that said marriage should be restricted to heterosexuals.
- In February 2004 Bill C-250 was passed to amend the criminal code which expands the definition "identifiable group" relating to the area of hate propaganda in the Criminal Code to include any section of the public distinguished by sexual orientation.
- On September 24, 2004 the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia ordered that the definition of marriage in Nova Scotia include same-sex couples.

A StatsCan study (2004) found that 46% of lesbian and gay individuals who were the victims of hate crimes were injured as a result. This was almost twice the proportion of injury among hate crime victims in general.

Hatred towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community results in violence and decreased safety for the wider Antigonish community. This type of violence is not only directed towards people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) it also puts at risk anyone who is assumed to be LGBT.

Violence against LGBT individuals begins with seemingly small actions; taunting on the schoolground, homophobic jokes, ridiculing of others for behaviours that are outside of gender stereotypes. These actions exist on a continuum which serves to devalue LGBT individuals in our community, and which perpetuates attitudes which lead to violence and crime against others. Monitor your attitudes and words, realize that what you say and believe influences the criminal activities of others, and take responsibility for the safety of everyone in our community.

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LGBT History and Culture

A VERY BRIEF LGBT HISTORY!

- 7th C. BCE Lesbos, a Greek island was a cultural centre where Sappho, a lyricist known for the homoerotic content of her poetry, spent much of her time.
- 853 CE Pope Joan (Pope John VIII) is said to have spent two years as Pope, before it being discovered that John was actually a woman.
- 1431 CE Joan of Arc burned at the stake for her refusal to recant heresy, including her refusal to stop wearing men's clothing.
- 1600-1800 CE Colonists to North America bring prejudices about sexuality with them from Europe. They are scandalized by Native American beliefs about sexuality and nudity.
- 1868/69 CE Hungarian doctor, Karoly Benkert, coins "homosexuality" to describe same-sex acts.
- 1933-1944 CE Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany in 1933 and all homosexual organizations are banned. Attacks on homosexuals escalate including imprisonment in concentration camps. Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexology is raided, shut down, and all records destroyed by the Nazis.
- 1973 CE American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.
- 1975 CE American Psychological Association removes homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

LGBT SYMBOLS OF PRIDE

PINK TRIANGLE – The pink triangle was used in the Nazi concentration camps during World War II to identify homosexual males. Today, for many the pink triangle represents pride, solidarity and a promise to never allow another Holocaust to happen.

BLACK TRIANGLE – As the pink triangle was used in Nazi concentration camps to identify homosexual males, the Black Triangle was used to identify lesbians, along with other women who did not conform to the Nazi's ideas of 'female behaviour'.

RAINBOW FLAG – The Rainbow Flag was designed in 1978 in San Francisco by Gilbert Baker. This flag is a symbol of LGBT pride and offers a positive colourful and optimistic alternative to the Pink Triangle.

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LGBT Resources

Local Pages

Antigonish Positive Space Campaign

www.stfx.ca/campus/stu-serv/equity/LGBT.htm

LGBT Pages

Bisexuality Resource Centre

www.biresource.org

Gay Canada: Resources, Information, Chat

www.gaycanada.com

Maritime Lesbians: Your Source of Information

www.maritimelesbians.com

Two-Spirited People of the First Nations

www.2spirits.com

365Gay.com: Canadian Daily Online Paper

www.365gay.com

Families and Friends

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

www.pflag.ca

Health

AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia

www.acns.ns.ca

Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition

www.rainbowhealth.ca

Transgender Health Program

www.vch.ca/transhealth./index.html

Healthy Relationships/Violence

Abuse in Gay Male Relationships

www.gaypartnerabuseproject.org

Woman Abuse Prevention

www.womanabuseprevention.com

Human Rights

EGALE Canada

www.egale.ca

International

ARC International

www.arc-international.net

Behind the Mask: Gay and Lesbian Affairs in Africa

www.mask.org.za

Religion

Religious Tolerance

www.religioustolerance.org

Safe Harbour Metropolitan Community Church, Halifax

<http://safeharbourmcc.com>

Teachers and Facilitators

Gay and Lesbians Educators of BC

www.galebc.org

T.E.A.C.H. Toronto

www.ppt.on.ca/teach.html

Transgender/Transsexual/Crossdressing/Intersex

Canadian and International Links

www-hsl.mcmaster.ca/tomflem/transgender.html

Youth

LGB Youth Project Halifax

www.youthproject.ns.ca

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LGBT Terms and Definitions

Ally - An ally is an individual who is not a member of a specific group, but who works to end discrimination and oppression of that group. An example would be a lesbian woman who actively works to end discrimination against transgender individuals or a straight man who combats homophobia.

Biphobia - Fear or hatred of those assumed to be bisexual.

Bi-sexual – An individual who is emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted to both women and men.

Gay – A man who is emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted to other men.

Gender – Used to describe those characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed, in contrast to those that are biologically determined. People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. These learned attributes are what make up gender identity and determine gender roles.

Gender Identity – How you see yourself socially: woman, man or combination of both

Homophobia – Fear or hatred of those assumed to be Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) and anything connected to LGB culture. Homophobia is when a person fears homosexuality, either in other people or within themselves, homophobia can include a range of behaviours from mild discomfort, to hate speech, to violence.

Lesbian – A woman who is emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted to other women

Sex – Characteristics of women and men which are biologically determined.

Sexual Orientation – An individual's sexual identification which depends on a person's sexual relationships or affinity.

Straight- Another word for *Heterosexual*. May be used as an “umbrella” term to describe non-LGBT individuals.

Transgender – An umbrella term for those who blur the lines of traditional gender expression. This usually includes transsexuals and sometimes also includes cross dressers. One who mentally and emotionally identifies with some or all of the traditional gender characteristics of the opposite sex.

Transphobia – Fear or hatred of those assumed to be transgendered and anything connected to transgendered culture. Transphobia can include a range of behaviours from mild discomfort, to hate speech, to violence.

Two Spirited - A person possessing qualities of females and males, with honoured roles in some Aboriginal cultures. An identity used by some LGBT First Nations individuals.

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Positive Space Program

- Almost 20% of teenagers surveyed in Antigonish indicated that they have had questions about their sexual orientation. (The Adolescent Health Project, 1992)
- LGBT individuals say they do not feel safe or welcome in Antigonish, *“People in my community often don’t feel safe to go to any nighttime activities for fear of harassment or physical attacks. My friends and I get homophobic slurs yelled at us out of car windows, cans are sometimes thrown from the same cars.”* (St.F.X. Student Focus Group, 2003)
- 46% of gay and lesbian victims of hate crime were injured as a result of the incident. This was almost twice the proportion of injury among hate crime victims in general. (StatsCan, 2004)
- Canada has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the world, and 1/3 of these are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) youth. (Kroll & Warneke, 1995)

What is the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered (LGBT) Community Safety Initiative?

This is a project funded by the Ministry of Community Safety and Emergency Preparedness that aims to reduce violence, harassment and hostility towards the LGBT communities in Antigonish. This project works to raise awareness through education directed at Antigonish service providers as well as community groups. It will provide an opportunity for non-LGBT identified individuals to be supportive of their LGBT community members and to aid in the promotion of safety for our community as a whole.

What does Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered (LGBT) oppression look like in Antigonish?

In Antigonish it is often only members of the LGBT community and those who are close to them who are aware of the risks faced by this community. Some examples of negative attitudes that people may notice in their own lives are the use of words such as ‘gay’ to describe things that are undesirable. For example “That T.V. show was so gay.” Negative attitudes may in some cases translate into actions of harassment, threats or direct violence for people who are identified as LGBT. Members of the LGBT community report violent physical attacks, constant harassment, taunting and name-calling, a lack of a sense of belonging and decreased tendency to report crimes in which they are the victims. (St.F.X. Student Focus Group, 2003)

What can you do?

A first step is to begin talking about these issues, be aware of people that you love who are affected by this issue, and challenge yourself to think of ways to be supportive of them. LGBT. When you hear homophobic comments, challenge them and avoid telling homophobic jokes or stories.

Antigonish is a community where every resident should feel safe. If you are interested in learning more about this issue and the LGBT Community Safety Initiative, or to discuss how this project can work with your organization to tackle these issues, please feel free to contact us.

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Questions and Answers about Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

What is sexual orientation? A person's sexual orientation is defined by their enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to other people. Heterosexual (or straight) refers to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are primarily for people of the opposite sex. Homosexual (or gay and lesbian) refers to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are primarily for those of the same sex. The term lesbian refers to women who are homosexual. Bisexual (or bi) refers to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are for people of both sexes.

What is gender identity and expression? A person's gender identity is their internal sense of being male or female. Gender expression is how someone presents their gender to the world. We all have a gender identity, and we all have ways of expressing it. Our society has a narrow view of what it means to be a woman or a man, and we learn that from an early age. Those who are visibly gender-variant face increased risk of harassment in school, unemployment, homelessness, hate violence, lack of access to health care and loss of custody of their children.

What does Transgender mean? A transgendered person is someone whose gender identity or expression differs from conventional expectations for their physical sex. The term transgender is used to describe several distinct but related groups of people who use a variety of other terms to self-identify. Transgendered people can include transsexuals (not all transsexual people need or want sex reassignment surgery), masculine women, feminine men, drag queens/kings, cross-dressers, gender queers, two-spirit, butches, transmen, transwomen, etc. Like other people, transgender people can be straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual.

How are sexual orientation and gender identity determined? No one knows exactly how sexual orientation and gender identity are determined. However, experts agree that it is a complicated matter of genetics, biology, psychological and social factors. For most people, sexual orientation and gender identity are shaped at any early age. While research has not determined a cause, homosexuality and gender variance are not the result of any one factor like parenting or past experiences.

Can LGBT people change their sexual orientation or gender identity? There are religious and secular organizations which sponsor campaigns and studies touting that LGBT people can change their sexual orientation or gender identity. Their assertions assume that there is something wrong with being LGBT - the largest problem is, in fact, society's intolerance of difference. Anti-LGBT attitudes, laws and policies need to change, not LGBT individuals.

Why should I support lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights? LGBT rights are not special rights. We must struggle to achieve *equal civil rights* for *all* people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) individuals; Because our LGBT children, friends and family members deserve the same rights as our straight ones. Because discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is still legal. Because a LGBT person can be fired from their job simply because of who they love or how they express their gender. Because LGBT youth face constant harassment and abuse in schools across the country. Because the road to full equality and acceptance is a long one.

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Rural and Urban LGBT Lives

There is often a perception of the LGBT community as urban based. The reality is that LGBT people live in all contexts, including small towns and rural areas. LGBT people in rural contexts experience some different challenges and experiences to those who live in cities. Rural communities often enjoy a more close-knit and interdependent community structure. A drawback of this for rural LGBT people may be a sense of vulnerability around revealing their LGBT identity to others. Residents of rural areas often describe that 'everyone knows everyone's business.' This can present a challenge for those who feel that they have a large part of their identity which they do not want to share with their whole community. Rural LGBT persons may feel a sense of isolation, not only within the broader community, but also from the larger LGBT community.

Rural LGBT communities typically have less access to LGBT specific resources, information and services. They may also have fewer opportunities to meet other LGBT individuals and to spend time in inclusive public social spaces. Despite these challenges, many LGBT individuals choose to live outside of the urban context. It is important to focus on the positive elements and aspects of rural and small town life, while working to challenge the social oppression that leads to targeting of LGBT individuals in these contexts.

At 'Reworking the Periphery: LGBT Lives in Rural Nova Scotia', participants discussed the challenges and benefits of living in rural Nova Scotia:

The group present was overall optimistic and positive about their experiences of living rural and LGBT. Challenges identified by this group were a need for role models, improved access to resources, increased visibility for the LGBT community, the challenges of LGBT parenting in small communities, and issues of safety around coming out.

Research needs identified:

- Rural based training models and resources
- Research focused on rural communities around Youth Issues, Health and LGBT people's motivations for staying in / leaving / or coming to rural areas.

Community needs for change identified:

- Improved rural accessibility to existing resources and programs
- Increased visibility of allies and role models and public LGBT Events
- Institutional Commitments to Training from local service providers
- Pressure national and regional LGBTQ organizations to increase awareness of rural issues

Rural based LGBT organizations and individuals need to lead rural initiatives

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Supporting an LGBT Friend

Guidelines for responding to a friend coming out to you:

- Thank your friend for having the courage to tell you.
- Don't judge your friend. If you have strong religious or other beliefs about homosexuality, keep them to yourself.
- Respect your friend's confidentiality. Do not share this information with others.
- Tell your friend that you still care about them, no matter what. Be the friend you have always been. The main fear for people coming out is that their friends and family will reject them.
- Ask any questions you may have, but understand that your friend may not have all the answers. You can save some questions for later or, better yet, you can find some of the answers together.
- Include your friend's partner in plans as much as you would with any other friend.
- Be prepared to include your friend in more of your plans. They may have lost the support of other friends and family, and your time and friendship will be even more precious to them. This may include "family" times like holidays or special celebrations.
- Offer and be available to support your friend as they "come out" to others.
- Call as you normally would during the time right after your friend has come out to you. This will let them know you are still friends.
- Be prepared for your friend to have mood swings. Coming out can be very traumatic. Anger and depression are common, especially if friends or family have trouble accepting your friend's orientation.
- Do what you have always done together. Your friend probably feels that coming out will change everything in their life, and this is frightening.
- Learn about the LGBTQ community. This will allow you to better support your friend, and knowing about their world will help prevent you from drifting apart.
- If your friend seems afraid about people knowing, there may be a good reason. People are sometimes attacked violently because they are perceived as LGBTQ. Sometimes people are discriminated against in such things as housing and employment.
- Don't worry that your friend may have attractions or feelings for you that you may not share. If they have more or different feelings than you have, these can be worked through. It's the same as if someone of the opposite sex had feelings for you that you don't share. Either way, it's probably not worth losing a friend over.
- It's never too late. If someone has come out to you before and you feel badly about how you handled it, you can always go back and try again

How to show that you're friendly to LGBT issues:

- **Use the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered in conversations**
- **Keep your language free of heterosexual bias**
- **Wear a button such as a rainbow, pink triangle, "Straight but not narrow" or "Hate is not a family value", be prepared to talk about these when asked about them**
- **Display LGBT positive materials in your workplace**

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered Community Safety Initiative

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Supporting LGBT Individuals

As an Ally to the LGBT community you may find yourself in situations which require you to support an individual who is experiencing difficulties because of their LGBT identity, or who may be in a state of crisis. If you are approached by someone, it is important to remember that this person is placing their trust in you, but does not expect you to have all the answers or to be able to fix all of their problems. Instead, you should ensure that you have a good knowledge of your local LGBT resources. The internet is a great place to start. If someone comes to you with questions around their identity, offer to help them to do some research, guide them to other resources in your community or give them the time to really listen to them.

Be Yourself

Be aware of and respect your limits. We are each unique and have different strengths. We also each have limits which need to be respected. Collectively, if we use our individual gifts in our work as allies, we will have a powerful network of multi-talented, multi-faceted committed people. Know yourself and what you want and are willing to do as an ally. There is enough to be done that we can all share a part in this exciting project!

Be Relaxed

Don't be hard on yourself! While we are not responsible for the existence of transphobia, homophobia or heterosexism, we are responsible for its existence within ourselves and our environments. It takes courage to examine the source of prejudice within ourselves and to work to eradicate it. Be patient with yourself. We are all human, born and raised in homophobic, transphobic and heterosexist cultures. We all have growth and learning that will take place as part of this self-evaluation process. This is extremely important to our work as allies and for those we want to support.

Demonstrate LGBT Positive Behaviour:

- Remember that the LGBT individual may be experiencing grief reactions because of negative stereotypes. The person may have lost connection, or fear losing connection with family or friends.
- Use the vocabulary that the other person uses. If they say 'homosexual', follow their lead. Likewise, if the person uses other words to describe themselves, use those. Remember that to some, terms such as 'queer' are acceptable and are part of a reclaiming of language. Ensure that the other person uses such terms before you do. If you're unsure what word to use, ask the person what they would like you to use when referring to them.
- Be aware of your comfort level and limitations. Do not add pain because of your judgements about LGBT identities.
- Be aware of cultural differences that may affect the person.
- Provide pamphlets and materials to the person if they are seeking resources
- Respect confidentiality. Any information that is shared with you around LGBT identity should be kept confidential

Use Active listening

One very important skill for supporting LGBT people or challenging LGBT-oppression. Active listening goes beyond just hearing. It is about understanding what the other person has said.

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Talking to your Child

Nobody knows whether they're going to have gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or straight children. Because of this, it's healthy to establish a home environment that is affirming to all young people and will give them a sense of belonging, an increased awareness, open-mindedness and sensitivity to others regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This can relieve some of the anxiety, stress and fear experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) youth when they begin the process of first coming out to themselves and then to others around them. For LGBT children and youth, knowing that who they are is ok with their parents affirms her or his self-esteem.

Suggestions on how to discuss lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered issues with your children:

Your Own Thoughts

The first important thing to do when dealing with this topic in relationship to your children is to reflect on your own attitudes towards LGBT people. We all carry around our own prejudices which children notice and internalize. This can be particularly damaging if they are LGBT themselves. When words such as 'gay' or 'fag' are used as common insults, a negative environment is created for anyone who is gay, or for anyone who is questioning their sexual orientation.

- Watch your own language, ensure that you do not mock people who are LGBT, or make homophobic jokes in front of your child. Do not use the word 'gay' to insult something.
- Do not ask your child whether they have a girlfriend/boyfriend (depending on the child's sex), and ensure that when you discuss your child's future you leave space for them to make their own choices about who they will have relationships with.

Other People

Children are exposed to hatred against LGBT individuals from a very early age. An example of this can be seen in the language used to describe something as stupid, by using 'gay' as an adjective, or through common insults such as calling other children 'fags'. Your child, although they are hearing these words, may not have an understanding of what they really mean.

- Explain to your child what it means to be gay, and why fag is a word that hurts people when used as an insult.
- Use language that children can understand, and adapt your explanations to suit your own child's level of understanding around romantic relationships and gender identity.
- Discuss that some women love other women and some men love other men. Explain that these are the same as romantic relationships between people that are familiar to your child. Specific examples of people they know who are in romantic relationships can be helpful.
- Discuss different family structures with your child. You could look at pictures of different families with your child (foster, nuclear, adoptive, divorced, single-parent, same-sex, extended). Discuss how these are different from your family, and how they are the same.
- Read a variety of books with your children, some suggested titles are below.

Who's In a Family? Robert Skutch
One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads, Johnny Valentine
Asha's Mums, Rosamund Elwin & Michele Paulse
King and King and Family, Linda DeHaan and Stern Nijland
How Would You Feel if You Dad Was Gay?, A. Heron and M. Moron

Heather Has Two Mommies, Leslea Newman
Daddy's Roommate, Michael Willhoite
King and King, Linda DeHaan and Stern Nijland
My Two Uncles, Judith Vigna

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What is an Ally?

An ally is an individual who works to end oppression within their personal and professional life. An ally works to end a form of oppression from which they receive privilege. For example, a white person who works to end racism, a lesbian woman who works to end discrimination against transgender individuals, or a straight man who combats homophobia.

Why be an Ally?

- By embracing difference in others, you embrace it within yourself.
- It gives you an opportunity to interact with and learn from a population that you may not be a member of.
- You will make a difference in the community environment and in the lives of LGBT community members.
- If you have friends or family members who are LGBT identified, this will allow you an opportunity to actively indicate your support of them.
- You will make the community a better place, oppression is a negative force that impacts everyone.

What does an Ally do?

- Works towards developing a greater understanding of oppression, privilege and the needs of the LGBT communities.
- Promotes a community that appreciates, embraces and celebrates difference.
- Challenges anti-LGBT comments, statements or jokes.
- Interacts respectfully and maintains the confidentiality of others.
- Commits to making positive changes.

What does it take to be an Ally?

Empathy	Commitment to Social Justice
Respectful	Risk taker
Willing to learn	Recognizes that Oppression hurts all people
Open-Minded	Good Active-Listener
Willing to challenge yourself and others	Recognizes that oppression is an ongoing issue

An Ally is committed to personal growth and is willing to examine how privilege operates within her/his life

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What is LGBT Oppression?

Oppression

“Oppression” describes what happens when a group of people or individuals are denied an equal right to live freely, in security and with dignity. People may experience oppression because of their:

- Skin Colour or Ethnic Background RACISM
- Gender SEXISM
- Age AGEISM
- Economic Level or Income CLASSISM
- Gender Identity TRANSPHOBIA
- Sexual Orientation HETEROSEXISM

Heterosexual Privilege

Members of an oppressed group are denied privileges that members of the non-oppressed group often take for granted. These privileges are often so discrete that they can be difficult to identify. Some examples of heterosexual privilege are listed below.

- Marrying--which includes the following privileges
- Not questioning your normalcy, sexually and culturally
- Validation from the culture in which you live

<i>How LGBT Oppression Affects LGBT People</i>	<i>How LGBT Oppression Affects Non-LGBT People</i>
Forces people to conceal their true identity from friends, family and to hide themselves when in public.	Forces us to act “macho” if we are a man or “feminine” if we are a woman. This limits individuality and self-expression.
Forces you to question whether you are a “normal”.	Makes it hard to appreciate true diversity and the unique traits that are not mainstream or “normal”.
You risk losing friends and family when you are honest with them about yourself.	Causes youth to become sexually active before they are ready in order to prove they are “normal”.
Dealing with lifelong put-downs, slurs, jokes, and being talked about or stared at by others.	Strains community and family relationships.
Encountering verbal or physical abuse/violence from strangers.	Prevents vital information on sex, gender and sexuality from being taught in schools.
Encountering emotional abuse in the form of graffiti, jokes and defaced posters.	Can be used to hurt a straight person if they “appear to be LGBT”.
Being forced to constantly educate those around you about LGBT oppression.	

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