

# Parents' Guide to SOGI EDUCATION



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## What Is SOGI?

### EVERYONE HAS A SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY. THAT'S SOGI.

Since we all have a sexual orientation and gender identity, this is a conversation that includes all of us. Some students may be seeking to understand their sexual orientation or gender identity. Others already know where they fit, but need reassurance that they are safe and welcome to share their authentic self with the world.

Conversations about SOGI focus on understanding and supporting the diversity that already exists in our schools, our communities, and our world.

### WHAT ABOUT THAT OTHER ACRONYM?

You may be familiar with another acronym: **2SLGBTQ+**. It refers to people who have marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities. The letters stand for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. The plus sign indicates that many more identities also fit under this umbrella.

### WHAT IS SOGI-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

Schools are responsible for proactively creating safe, inclusive learning environments for all students.

Unfortunately, schools are not always safe places for 2SLGBTQ+ students, families, and staff. We're working hard to change that.

SOGI-inclusive education is about making sure that schools have inclusive policies, welcoming learning environments, and teaching resources that showcase the diversity of our world. It is about looking critically at every aspect of the education experience — like policies, practices, facilities, and lesson plans — and identifying where change is needed to make sure that students of all sexual orientations and gender identities feel safe and can truly flourish.

SOGI-inclusive education is delivered in an age-appropriate manner, with content that is tailored to each age group and context.

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## Conversations at School

### **NO ONE IS TOO YOUNG FOR THE TOPIC OF DIVERSITY AND ACCEPTANCE.**

Human diversity already exists in the world around your children, and it is something that your children are observing and wondering about from a very young age. Themes of romance, identity, gender, and belonging are integral to many kids' books, movies, and games. Trying to avoid the subject or hide the existence of 2SLGBTQ+ people leads to confusion.

One of the key ideas of SOGI-inclusive education is that there are appropriate ways to explore these topics at every age. For example, in a first grade classroom, an age-appropriate way to talk about sexual orientation is to read the book *A Family is a Family*. Students learn that every family is different: one family might have kids who live with their grandmother, and another might have step-siblings from past relationships, and yet another might have two gay dads. Reading this book helps kids understand the world around them in an age-appropriate way.

### **EDUCATORS USE EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES THAT ALIGN WITH HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS.**

SOGI inclusion in schools is not a newfangled and untested concept. It is an evidence-based approach that has been researched extensively, debated rigorously, and integrated into our legislation and human rights codes slowly across decades.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY IS IMPORTANT FOR BUILDING A SENSE OF TRUST AND SAFETY.**

In 1989, the United Nations recognized the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). It outlines 42 universal rights of children worldwide, including the right to privacy. We know that when children have safe adults who they can talk to in confidence, their wellbeing improves. That's why the educators at your child's school respect the confidentiality of their conversations, unless there's a safety concern that requires disclosure. We also know that students thrive when schools and families work together. When there is safety and an open dialogue at home, your children will share those same conversations with you.

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## *Conversations at Home*

### **YOU CAN CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR OPEN DIALOGUE ABOUT SOGI TOPICS IN YOUR HOME.**

Conversations about SOGI topics are important for all parents and guardians to be able to have with their children, for two reasons. First, these conversations will help your child better understand the world around them. Second, if your child has an identity that fits within the 2SLGBTQ+ community, it will create a sense of safety and reassurance for them, and they will be more likely to share that information with you sooner rather than later.

The first step is to create a sense of trust, safety, and openness. If you're not sure where to start, try saying something like, "I want you to know that I love you unconditionally. You can always tell me anything, or ask any questions you need help understanding."

If you're not sure how to approach these conversations, check the family resources list at the end of this document, or reach out to your child's school counsellor.

### **FAMILIES ARE OFTEN THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN CHILDREN'S LIVES.**

Having a supportive adult can make a world of difference to a kid who's coming out, and is associated with important mental health outcomes. Supportive and accepting caregivers consistently lead to positive outcomes for their children.

There is a lot of stigma around coming out, and your child may fear being judged, even if you would be completely supportive of them. Because of this, children may feel that first talking to another trusted adult such as an educator is easier than starting off with the most important people in their life - you!

You might experience a myriad of emotions if your child shares this sort of news with you, including grief, loss, frustration, or even guilt. All of this is valid. While you need to process your own emotions, remember that your child likely feels vulnerable. Prioritize compassion over comprehension, and trust that you'll be able to learn more over time.

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## Common Myths

### **MYTH: SOGI-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PUSHES CHILDREN TO BECOME GAY OR TRANSGENDER.**

Sexual orientation and gender identity are innate parts of who your child is. Nobody can change that, and nobody is trying to. The goal of SOGI-inclusive education is to create a school environment where every child can be their authentic self, without fear of harassment, discrimination, or being left out by others. Positive representation of the diversity that already exists all around us improves mental health outcomes for all students.

### **MYTH: 'GENDER IDEOLOGY' IS A FAD, AND WE DON'T KNOW THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER YOUTH.**

Transgender people have always existed. Many know their true gender identity from a very young age. Studies across decades consistently show that supporting students in their identities leads to better emotional, social, health, and academic outcomes.

### **MYTH: THERE IS A SPECIAL 'SOGI CURRICULUM' THAT CONTAINS SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIAL.**

The only curriculum being taught in your child's classroom is the standard provincial one, which is publicly available online.

Every teacher decides how to approach curriculum requirements in their own way, based on thorough professional training – creating lesson plans and identifying teaching resources that they determine to be informative, engaging, accurate, current, and age-appropriate. SOGI 1 2 3 offers resources to help teachers meet curriculum requirements that include SOGI topics. These resources focus on representation and inclusion, and are different than sexual health education.

### **WHAT ABOUT OTHER MYTHS?**

New myths pop up all the time—some easily believable and others clearly absurd. If you ever hear something concerning, reach out to your school's administration for clarification, or check out the additional resources on the next page.

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## Additional Resources

### RELEVANT RESEARCH

#### Still In Every Class In Every School

Published by Egale Canada, 2021

#### National Inventory of School System Interventions for LGBTQ Student Well-being and School Connectedness

Published by SARAVYC, 2016

#### Being Safe, Being Me 2019: Results of the Canadian Trans and Non-binary Youth Health Survey

Published by SARAVYC, 2019

#### GLSEN National School Climate Survey

Published by GLSEN, 2021

*Note that this study is US-based.*

#### LGBTQ+ Youth: Addressing Health Disparities with a School-Based Approach

Published by CDC, updated regularly

*Note that this page is US-based.*

### FAMILY RESOURCES

#### SOGI 1 2 3 Parent Resources

Published by SOGI 1 2 3

#### Helpful Resources

Published by PFLAG Canada

#### Adults Supporting 2SLGBTQI Youth

Published by Egale Canada

#### What to Do When Your Child Comes Out to You

Published by Egale Canada

#### Parents: Quick Tips for Supporting Your LGBTQ Kids—and YOURSELF—During the Coming-Out Process

Published by PFLAG

#### Our Trans Loved Ones

Published by PFLAG, 2019

#### Faith-Based Organizations

Published by Strong Families Alliance

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