

About Safe Schools Coalition Australia

Information for Parents, Carers and Families

What is Safe Schools Coalition Australia?

Safe Schools Coalition Australia is a national initiative that helps schools to be safe and more inclusive for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, staff and families. It provides a range of free support for school staff, including professional learning, advice and resources.

Safe Schools Coalition Australia is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training and nationally convened by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA). FYA has partnered with organisations across the country to provide expert support for schools.

The Safe Schools Coalition Australia program is not compulsory and schools choose to opt in.

Why do schools participate?

All students have a right to feel safe, be acknowledged and belong as part of their school community. Schools understand that they need to meet this need and provide supportive and respectful environments that enable students to maximise their learning potential.

Research shows that bullying, discrimination and isolation of young people who are same sex attracted, intersex and/or gender diverse occurs in schools and seriously impacts student wellbeing and achievement. Research also shows that school staff are often unsure of how to effectively address these concerns and develop strategies to create more supportive environments.

Through Safe Schools Coalition Australia, schools can access specialised support that contributes to the school's overall approach to student safety and inclusion – for the benefit of the whole school community.

What support can my school access?

Schools can choose to access a range of support through Safe Schools Coalition Australia, including:

- Professional learning for school staff, drawing on national and international research and school feedback, to understand the challenges experienced by same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, and how to adapt supportive strategies to address these.
- Guidance and tools for more inclusive school policies and practices, tailored to the school's needs and context to help ensure all students feel safe and included at school.
- Assistance for staff to support a transgender or gender diverse student who is transitioning or affirming their gender at school.
- A suite of resources for use by school staff that can be found at www.safeschoolshub.edu.au.

Safe Schools Coalition Australia has provided support to hundreds of schools in diverse contexts, including government and non-government schools, faith-based schools and regional schools. Any school can request support and all support on offer is optional. Principals and teachers, who know their students and school community, make professional judgements about how best to make use of available support.

What resources are available?

Safe Schools Coalition Australia's suite of resources for school staff includes guides for more inclusive policies and practices, and a teaching and learning resource.

The guides

The guides include:

- *Safe Schools Do Better* - an introductory guide to supporting gender diversity, intersex and sexual diversity in schools. It includes key research that underpins the need for more inclusive practices and practical information about how to provide a supportive environment.
- *Kick Starting Your Safe School* - a quick reference guide that outlines eight simple ideas for staff to create more inclusive schools.
- *Guide to Supporting a Student to Affirm or Transition Gender Identity at School* - helps school communities to support transgender and gender diverse students who are affirming their gender identity at school.

A full list of the Safe Schools Coalition Australia resources is available on the Safe Schools Hub at www.safeschoolshub.edu.au.

What is taught to students?

The teaching and learning resource

Schools and teachers are best placed to make decisions on the teaching and learning needs of their students, as they do for all curriculum areas. Teachers may draw on age-appropriate books and materials from a range of sources to support an understanding of sexual and gender diversity and intersex, across different years and classroom settings.

Safe Schools Coalition Australia's only classroom resource titled *All of Us* is designed for use by school teachers of Years 7 and 8 students. It focuses on helping students to increase their awareness and understanding of diversity in the community and to foster empathy toward others.

All of Us was developed and aligned to the Australian Curriculum by a team of experts. The materials have been independently reviewed for age appropriate use in schools. Schools and teachers make professional judgements about using *All of Us* in the context of their school and curriculum planning.

Schools must communicate with parents and carers about any plans to use the *All of Us* resource, including participation options.

What does this mean for my child?

School staff who have participated in Safe Schools Coalition Australia training and/or drawn on resources are better equipped to provide supportive and respectful environments that enable every student to maximise their learning potential by:

- Addressing bullying and discrimination in the school
- Supporting students' social and emotional learning
- Being more inclusive of diversity in their language and teaching practices
- Running inclusive and supportive school events, and
- Acknowledging and responding in a supportive way to the needs of all students, including those who may have an intersex variation or have questions about their gender or sexuality.

What does being a 'member school' mean?

Being a member of Safe Schools Coalition Australia is a school's commitment to take steps to become safer and more inclusive for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, staff and families. Joining up is one way for schools to demonstrate that same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, staff and families are valued, respected and included.

Schools must seek agreement from the representative parent body (or equivalent) prior to signing up as a member of Safe Schools Coalition Australia.

Schools do not need to become a member of Safe Schools Coalition Australia to develop more inclusive strategies to recognise and support diversity in their school community.

What can parents do to contribute to an inclusive school?

Parents, carers and families have an important role to play in the education of children and contributing to a school culture that is welcoming and supportive of students, staff and their families.

This could include:

- Supporting positive action by the school
- Engaging with opportunities to contribute to the development of inclusive school policies and planning.
- Supporting school events or activities that recognise and celebrate diversity
- Talking to their children about diversity in the community and that it is not okay to bully or discriminate against others.

Glossary

Gender diverse: A broad term that can refer to all forms of gender identity and gender expression and includes people who may identify as, for example, trans, transgender, genderqueer or gender questioning. It refers to people whose gender expression or identity differs from the gender identity associated with the sex assigned to them at birth or society's common ideas and beliefs about being masculine or feminine.

Intersex: is a broad term used to describe people born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical ideas about male or female bodies. Sex characteristics means a person's physical characteristics relating to sex, which may include anatomy, chromosomes or hormones.

Same sex attracted: People who experience feelings of sexual and/or emotional attraction to others of the same sex. This includes people who may identify as, for example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual or those who are questioning their sexuality, or who are not wanting to label themselves.

Transphobia: Used to describe a whole range of negative feelings or behaviours towards anyone who is transgender or gender diverse that often lead to prejudice or discriminatory actions or abuse. Transphobia, and fixed ideas about gender, can affect a lot of people, including those who have transgender friends or family members. Transphobia also includes institutional and cultural bias and structural inequality.

Homophobia: Used to describe a whole range of negative feelings or behaviours towards anyone who is same sex attracted. Homophobia can also affect people who others think are same sex attracted, as well as those who have family members or friends who are same sex attracted. Homophobic behaviour can also include abusive threats or actual physical violence, sexual harassment and deliberately excluding someone because of their sexuality. Homophobia also includes institutional and cultural bias and structural inequality.

Want to know more?

Visit the Safe Schools Coalition Australia website for more information, including contact details for partner organisations in your region and links to free resources for schools.

www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au