



## What You Need to Know About...

# Creating Safe and Gender-Affirming Places for All



*“In a truly equitable system, factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status do not prevent students from achieving ambitious outcomes. Our experience shows that barriers can be removed when all education partners create the conditions needed for success.”*  
- Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009

At KPR, we aspire to create school environments that are not only safe, but help our students and staff grow both socially and academically. Gender identity is a large part of how people relate to the world around them, and we wish for all gender identities to be recognized and celebrated in KPR spaces.

### **If students or staff talk to you about their gender identity, listen in a respectful and non-judgmental way.**

Support them in developing their own understanding of their gender and direct them to resources for gender diverse, questioning and trans\* individuals. Do not “out” an individual or disclose their gender identity to another without permission. Understand that this is not a “phase”, and speaking with you may be the beginning of a very important journey for them.

**Avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes.** Many of us enforce gender norms without even realizing it. Think carefully about the messages in everything you say, do, teach or communicate about gender. Are you complimenting girls more often on their appearance but boys more often on their athleticism? Do you ever imply there is something wrong with men who behave in stereotypically feminine ways or women who behave in stereotypically masculine ways? Gender neutral language is not always perceived as neutral by a gender diverse or trans\* individual (e.g., calling a group of students “guys” regardless of their gender).

### **Intervene and take action when students use gender-specific terminology to make fun of each other.**

When students use terms like “sissy,” “fag,” “dyke,” “homo,” “it,” “he-she,” or “gay” and staff fail to intervene, these words are perceived as acceptable. The use of such language further alienates gender diverse and trans\* students in schools and perpetuates discriminatory stereotypes about gender, gender identity and sexual orientation.

### **Create gender-neutral and / or mixed gender spaces.**

Be mindful about the ways in which single-gender groups or clubs can alienate gender diverse and trans\* students and ensure everyone is made to feel welcome.



### **How to handle harassment in the hallway in 3 minutes (EGALE): Stop the Harassment**

- Interrupt the comment or halt the physical harassment.

### **Identify the Harassment**

- Label the form of harassment: “You just made a harassing comment based upon race (ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, size, age, etc.).”

### **Broaden the Response**

- Do not personalize your response at this stage: “Our community does not appreciate hateful/thoughtless behaviour.”

### **Ask for Change in Future Behaviour**

- Personalize the response: “You must think about how your words affect others.”

Q: How do you create a culture where people feel comfortable using a gender neutral washroom?

- When introducing or announcing the gender-neutral washroom, be clear that it is for everyone. "There is a new washroom in x location that is now designated for student use. This washroom is single stall and can be used by any student who requires a washroom." Avoid saying that this washroom is specifically for students who are transgender and gender non-conforming. Also avoid policing the bathroom or commenting on individuals who use it. This may create a negative space and can lead to staff or students feeling judged by others. Again, this washroom is for everyone.

**Listen to concerns from gender diverse, questioning and trans\* individuals.** Take concerns seriously without becoming defensive; such feedback is an important opportunity to learn and grow.

## Reasons to Create Gender Inclusive Schools

Adapted from the *Gender Spectrum: What educators need to know* ([www.pridenet.ca](http://www.pridenet.ca))

It is important to create gender inclusive schools. Here are a few reasons why:

1. Messages that expand understanding of gender empower students and staff rather than limit them. Encouraging all members of our community to develop the interests and skills that matter to them is self-affirming and motivating.
2. It is important to dispel harmful stereotypes and prejudices. This helps all members of our community understand the impacts of stereotyping and discrimination, enables them to celebrate differences, and encourages them to work toward creating a peaceful, pluralistic society, which is the essence of good citizenship.
3. All students and staff of all gender identities, including trans\*, two-spirit and gender expansive, need to see themselves and their lived realities reflected in policy and practice, to affirm their identities and to enable them to realize their personal success.
4. To create safe and positive spaces, KPR sites should be places where all individuals feel safe and secure. When someone is bullied, excluded or assaulted because they do not conform to others' beliefs about gender, they do not have an equal opportunity to succeed personally, emotionally, socially, academically and professionally.
5. Schools are required by the Ontario Ministry of Education to be inclusive. The Ministry Policy, *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, p. 8, states: "every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or other factors."

Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board's Strategic Plan: *Living, Learning and Leading in a Challenging World (2015-2018)* speaks to the importance of creating safer spaces for trans\* youth by encouraging staff and students to "provide interventions, programs and supports responsive to the needs of students and staff." Every KPR school has gender diversity within it. That is why creating gender affirming schools for all is such a necessary process in helping our students and staff succeed every day.

Ontario Ministry of Education (2009, April). *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf>



Gender is reinforced in the language we use to talk about jobs, roles, relationships, what interests people should have, and how they should relate to the world. You can make changes within your everyday interactions that help people feel more comfortable and affirmed in their identities!

Seek opportunities to incorporate the contributions of LGBTQ+ people in science, history, athletics and arts into your curriculum.

Be an Ally: Constant self-education, creating space for trans\* and LGBTQ voices, taking direction from those communities instead of deciding what they need, and advocating for them are all part of being an ally.



\* There are many terms that individuals use to identify their gender. In this document, trans\* is an umbrella term that aims to include all gender identities that are not included in the mainstream gender binary (two-part definition) of male or female. "Trans" includes individuals who are Transgender, Gender Non-conforming, Gender Expansive, Gender Independent, Gender Queer, Gender Diverse, and more.