



## THE THREE PILLARS TO TRANS\* INCLUSIVE CRITICAL HOURS PROGRAMMING

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In 2014, the Critical Hours task group under the Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative: Growing Up Great presented the “Three Pillars of Critical Hours Programming” as a mandate to help local critical hours programs create the best possible program for all children and youth, regardless of their location within the city. This document highlighted the three components considered most important to follow and measure program success. These components included: (1) skill development; (2) safe and supportive spaces; and (3) positive relationships.

The following section combines ways to implement trans\* inclusive spaces into the three pillars that help create successful critical hours programs. This new trans\* inclusive three pillars combines simple gestures – such as displaying a rainbow flag or trans\* inclusive symbol – as well as more complex ways, both passive and direct, to ensure that all students feel safe and included.

### SKILL DEVELOPMENT

#### **Educate staff.**

Educating staff members is one of the first steps to take in becoming a safe and inclusive space. All staff members should be informed about appropriate/inappropriate language and the importance of safe space for trans\* youth. This ensures that the designated safe space is cohesive across staff, and not changing due to lack of informed members.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Be inclusive.**

Encouraging the use of gender inclusive language creates an atmosphere where students of all gender identities can feel recognized, accepted, and safe being themselves. Defining new and [gender identity] specific terminology allows for everyone to be mindful of, understand, and utilize the correct language when discussing gender and trans\* identities. Model gender-neutral language in your speech, such as saying, “good afternoon everyone,”<sup>2</sup> or using “partner” instead of husband, wife, boyfriend, or girlfriend.<sup>3</sup>

Starting with registration for a program, it can be easy to make youth feel excluded just by having them fill out a form that requires identification of gender. When forms restrict gender identification to checkboxes displaying male and female gender markers (M or F), gender variant youth either refrain from joining the program or are forced to conform to a gender on the form that does not accurately match their identity.

Avoid limiting the choices of gender on forms and adjust them to reflect identity inclusivity. This can be done by adding more checkboxes for identities such as trans\*, two-spirit, non-binary, and gender diverse. Avoid adding a checkbox signifying “Other: \_\_\_\_\_”. This promotes the idea that identities with checkboxes are acknowledged and accepted, while those under the “Other” category are unintentionally classified as “not one of us”. Instead, a checkbox with “: \_\_\_\_\_” beside it allows for individuals to self-identify if their identity is not listed in the choices given.

Unless your program is obligated to collect information on gender identity as part of record keeping or data analysis, the best way to approach gender disclosure on forms and documentation is by leaving a blank space in the ‘Gender’ category. This avoids the constraints and complications of listing some identities and not others.<sup>4</sup> Youth are then free to self-identify and disclose the gender identity they feel comfortable with, or alternatively can choose not to disclose their identity if they are not comfortable doing so.

### **Help educate the students.**

In conjunction with educating staff, make sure that students understand appropriate language and terminology to use in conversations surrounding gender identity and gender variance. Correct any improper use of language in a manner that helps students learn what is respectful, rather than through disciplinary measures. This is key in ensuring that students develop skills like empathy, mindfulness, and acceptance towards those different from themselves.

### **Challenge gender stereotypes.**

Children of all ages have a tendency to monitor themselves and their peers based on expected societal gender ‘norms’ starting as early as preschool.<sup>5</sup> If activities are not labelled with gender ‘restrictions’, students may be more interested in participating rather than avoiding things to conform to gender regulated play. It is important not to make a big deal about children wanting to join groups or activities that are not normative to their gender, and to discourage children from making a big deal out of it as well. Facilitating gender neutral activities is essential for ensuring that young people are not prevented from acquiring healthy social skills and autonomy through participation and are instead encouraged to partake simply for the enjoyment.

## **SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SPACES**

### **Identify as a safe space.**

An easy way to identify your classroom or facility as a safe space is to display a rainbow flag, rainbow sticker, or some other variation. This is a universal symbol that signifies alignment with the LBTTQ+ community. In addition, a gender symbol amalgamation will signify inclusivity of gender variance.<sup>6</sup>

### **Confidentiality.**

If a staff member becomes aware of certain child-centred situations, such as discipline, learning disabilities, and abuse, it is protocol that these are reported to authority figures, such as counsellors, parents, or, in the latter case, police officials and/or the Children’s Aid Society.<sup>7</sup> However, these issues can become magnified for transgender students. Disclosing any information about a child without that particular child’s explicit permission can lead to feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment, discrimination, harassment, and abuse, especially if a parent is not accepting of their gender variance.<sup>8</sup>

Note: If a student discloses that they are being abused, are harming themselves or someone else, and/or having thoughts of suicide, or if you have reasons to suspect these circumstances, you are legally required to report this to the proper authorities.<sup>9</sup> (Review the policies and protocols of child/youth neglect/abuse of your agency/organization/board/institution for proper procedures to follow).

### **Establish non-discriminatory policies and codes of conduct.**

Enforce policies that encourage equality, individuality, and inclusiveness, and prohibit harassment and discrimination against students for actual or perceived gender identity and/or expression.<sup>10</sup>

### **Discourage discriminatory behaviour.**

When dealing with new situations, it is common to feel uncertain about how to handle things. This also happens as a figure of authority in situations where harassment and bullying may be present. It is important that all offensive remarks are addressed and clearly de-escalated. Challenge inappropriate comments, words, and jokes through private conversations with the students that participated in the inappropriate behaviour.<sup>11</sup>

Being silent and not addressing demeaning jokes and comments signifies to the students that you are consenting. If transphobic remarks are ignored and not challenged, students either do not learn that it is inappropriate or they assume that it is acceptable behaviour.<sup>12</sup>

### **Avoid gender segregation.**

In play and classroom activities, children are often influenced by their peers and even teachers/supervisors to conform to gender-segregated activities.<sup>13</sup> Reproducing gender-segregated activities can leave transgender and non-binary students feeling uncomfortable, excluded, and limited. This means they will have to decide between three options: (1) conforming to the group of their biological sex and feeling uncomfortable with the pressures of being forced into a gender category they do not identify with; (2) joining the gender category that they identify with, potentially opening themselves up to harassment and bullying; or (3) not participating at all. Instead, if group activities need to be separated into 'teams', choose another method such as grouping alphabetically by name, or by numbering students off.

## **POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Acceptance**

Being accepted is important for children, however for individuals in a minority group, such as being transgender, acceptance is key to experiencing a sense of belonging.<sup>14</sup> Creating a safe and inclusive space for transgender youth can help other students work towards becoming more accepting of their peers, creating positive peer-to-peer relationships and child/youth-adult relationships.

### **Be a role model.**

Not only does challenging inappropriate comments help to promote a safe space for all students, but authority figure who refuses to allow such behaviour into the classroom, you can be trusted as a safe person to talk to.<sup>15</sup>

### **Signal support.**

Identify individuals who can act as a safe contact, resource, and ally for LGBTTQ+ students, whether transgender, non-binary, a sexual minority, or questioning their

identity.<sup>16</sup> Staff of the critical hours program should identify themselves as a safe contact early on and remind students of their confidential support. As well, staff can identify other individuals within the school that provide safe support for LBTTQ+ students, such as guidance counsellors, principals, and even some teachers.

### **Provide resources.<sup>17</sup>**

Not all students are “out”. Some students may be out to their friends, a trusted adult, but not their parents or other family. Everyone’s situation differs. And for some students, trying to find local and reliable resources to support them through the process can be dangerous if they are lacking a supportive social sphere.

Having a list of resources on hand to provide to gender variant youth (whether they identify as, or are questioning) can give them the support that they need to lead a successful life.

## **TRANS\* INCLUSIVE RESOURCES**

### **Support and Counselling**

- LGBTQ Youth Services: Centretown Community Health Centre - Counselling for LGBTQ youth and young adults ages 12 to 25, and their families in a city wide program. Free bilingual services are provided by an openly gay Mental Health Counsellor for LGBTQ Youth that specializes in sexual orientation and gender identity. 613-233-4443 ext. 2171, [www.centretownchc.org](http://www.centretownchc.org)
- Youth Services Bureau: LGBTQ positive bilingual individual and family counselling available in a city wide program. Crisis intervention. Services are free and confidential. For youth ages 12 and up and their families. 613-241-7788 ext 213, [www.ysb.on.ca](http://www.ysb.on.ca)
- PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays): Support group for parents, families, friends and spouses of LGBTQ people. 1-888-530-6777 [www.pflagcanada.ca](http://www.pflagcanada.ca).
- Queerios LGBTQ+ youth drop-in (ages 12-18): Twice monthly social group for LGBTQ+ youth in Western Ottawa area. Safe(r) Space Hang out focusing on inclusion, belonging and respect. 613-591-3686 [www.wocrc.ca/](http://www.wocrc.ca/)
- Queer Trans Youth (up to age 25): Youth-led peer discussion and support group for Queer & Trans youth Wednesdays 7-9 pm, 613-563-4818 <http://kindspace.ca/>
- Projet Jeunesse Idem (ages 14-25): Francophone peer support and discussion group for GLB youth ages 14 to 25 years. Contact for meeting times and/or more information 819-776-1445 [www.jeunesseidem.com](http://www.jeunesseidem.com)

### **Sexual Health Services**

- Anonymous HIV testing and counselling: Free Anonymous HIV testing (no record kept), and HIV/AIDS prevention counselling available at sites across the City of Ottawa. Free condoms available. Call the AIDS Info line at 613-563-2437
- Sexual Health Centre and Satellite clinics: Free and confidential sexual health services: counselling, testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, and Hepatitis B vaccine. Satellite centres in some area schools. Free condoms available. 613-234-4641, [www.ottawa.ca/en/health\\_safety/sexual/centre/index.html](http://www.ottawa.ca/en/health_safety/sexual/centre/index.html)

- Gay Zone Gaie: A Sexual Health Centre and more for Guys into Guys; Sexual health testing and health promotion activities.  
Thursday evenings from 5 to 8 pm, [www.gayzonegaie.ca](http://www.gayzonegaie.ca), [info@gayzonegaie.ca](mailto:info@gayzonegaie.ca)
- Sexual Assault & Partner Abuse Care Program: Free services for people age 16 and over who have been sexually assaulted.  
Please call the Ottawa Hospital, Civic Campus at 613-739-3762
- Ottawa Police Services-Hate Crimes Unit: To report crimes motivated by hate such as a threat, harassment or acts of violence. Call 613-236-1222 ext. 2466. For emergencies call 911. The Hate Crime unit works closely with Ottawa LGBT Police Liaison Committee [www.glbtt.ottawapolice.ca/](http://www.glbtt.ottawapolice.ca/)
- Kind (formerly PTS): Information and referral, discussion and peer support groups in an inclusive space for broad range of Queer & Trans people.  
Contact Kind 613-563-4818.
- Ten Oaks Project – Camp Ten Oaks and Project Acorn: Serving children and youth in LGBTQ families and LGBTQ youth. Inspired by camp and grounded in social justice as we strive to create safer spaces and grow positive peer networks for all children and youth. Camp Ten Oaks sleep away summer camp and Project Acorn youth leadership.  
[www.tenoaksproject.org](http://www.tenoaksproject.org)
- Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity: Promotes diversity and intersectionality in gender identity and sexuality.  
[www.ccgds-ccdgs.org](http://www.ccgds-ccdgs.org), 613-400-1875
- OCASI Positive Spaces Initiative for LGBT Newcomers-LGBT Settlement Support: Provincial LGBTQ initiative by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)  
[www.positivespaces.ca](http://www.positivespaces.ca), 613-233-4443 x 2125 [mnerses@centretownchc.org](mailto:mnerses@centretownchc.org)

### **Websites and Networks**

- ALTERHEROS: Bilingual Canadian website  
[www.alterheros.com](http://www.alterheros.com)
- Rainbow Health Ontario: Ontario Provincial LGBT Health program. Great LGBT Health Fact Sheets.  
[www.rainbowhealthontario.ca](http://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca)
- Pride Education Network: formerly known as GALE BC Gay and Lesbian Educators of BC, English Canadian website  
[www.pridenet.ca](http://www.pridenet.ca)
- Day Against Homophobia – May 17: Annual May 17th event, Bilingual Canadian website  
[www.homophobiaday.org](http://www.homophobiaday.org)
- GLSEN Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network: American website, tools and resources for GSA's, Gay Straight Alliance School Clubs  
[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)
- Gender Creative Kids Website: Canadian Website focused on gender creative kids and their families, schools and communities.  
[www.gendercreativekids.ca/](http://www.gendercreativekids.ca/)
- EGALÉ [www.mygsa.ca](http://www.mygsa.ca): National Canadian organization advancing equality and social justice for LGBTQ people.  
[www.egale.ca](http://www.egale.ca)

- Put this on the map: Reteaching Gender & Sexuality Video and education program from Seattle, Washington USA  
[www.putthisonthemap.org/](http://www.putthisonthemap.org/)
- Transgender Basics Video-Gender Identity Project: Educational video by trans people created by the LGBT Centre in New York City.  
[www.gaycenter.org/gip](http://www.gaycenter.org/gip)
- Trans lifeline: Canada Support hotline by trans people for trans people.  
(877) 330-6366 , [www.translifeline.org/](http://www.translifeline.org/)
- Gender Mosaic Ottawa: Peer support for adult trans and cross gender people.  
[www.gendermosaic.com/](http://www.gendermosaic.com/) [info@gendermosaic.com](mailto:info@gendermosaic.com)
- Rainbow Service Providers Network: Network of service providers working with children and youth from LGBTQ communities.  
Contact Lisa [lisa.elminowski@ucdsb.on.ca](mailto:lisa.elminowski@ucdsb.on.ca)
- THIO-Trans Health Information Ottawa  
[www.facebook.com/THIOttawa/](https://www.facebook.com/THIOttawa/)

### **College and University**

- Pride Centre of University of Ottawa: Support, education and advocacy for students and youth. Peer support groups. 613-562-5800 ext. 3161.  
[www.sfu.ca/services/pride/](http://www.sfu.ca/services/pride/)
- Carleton University Gender and Sexuality Resource Centre: Support, education and advocacy for students and youth. Peer support groups.  
613-520-3723 [www.cusaonline.com/glbtc/](http://www.cusaonline.com/glbtc/)
- Algonquin QSA: Algonquin College's Queer Straight Alliance. For more information join the Algonquin QSA Facebook group. Campus Positives Spaces Campaign  
[positivespace@algonquincollege.com](mailto:positivespace@algonquincollege.com)

### **Helplines**

- Kids Help Phone: a free 24/7 counselling and information service for young people.  
1-800-268-6868, [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)
- Gai-Écoute Quebec's provincial peer support line  
1-800-505-1010 or [www.gaiecoutte.org](http://www.gaiecoutte.org)
- Gender Diversity Clinic at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario  
[www.cheo.on.ca/genderidentity](http://www.cheo.on.ca/genderidentity)
- Around the Rainbow: Support group for parents and caregivers of gender creative, trans, transgender children, youth, or young adults run by Family Services Ottawa and the Children's Hospital of eastern Ontario, 3rd Tuesday of each month, 6:30pm-8:30pm, No registration required.  
[www.familyservicesottawa.org/children-youth-and-families/around-the-rainbow](http://www.familyservicesottawa.org/children-youth-and-families/around-the-rainbow)
- Gender Creative Kids Canada  
[www.gendercreativekids.ca](http://www.gendercreativekids.ca)
- LGBT Youth line: a free peer support phone line for LBTTQ+ youth. Sunday to Friday, 4:00pm-9:30pm.  
1-800-268-9688, [www.youthline.ca](http://www.youthline.ca)

### **Housing**

- Non Profit Housing – Youth Services Bureau: Safe, affordable housing for youth ages 16-21, including GLBTTQ youth.  
613-729-0577 ext. 1247 [www.ysb.on.ca](http://www.ysb.on.ca)

- Young Women’s and Young Men’s Emergency Shelters – YSB: Youth Services Bureau provides GLBTTQ inclusive short-term emergency housing for youth ages 12-20. Locations are confidential.  
Young Women’s Shelter 613-789-8220, Young Men’s Shelter 613-907-8975, [www.ysb.on.ca](http://www.ysb.on.ca),

## **OCDSB**

- School multi-disciplinary team: each school has a team in place comprised of a social worker, psychologist, learning support teacher(s), and a principal
- Inclusive, Safe and Caring Program department staff
- LGBTQ Book Kit for K-8 Schools

## **Publications and Policy**

- Supporting Transgender and Transsexual Students in K-12 Schools (Canadian Teachers Federation)  
[www.gendercreativekids.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Supporting-Transgender-and-Transsexual-Students-web.pdf](http://www.gendercreativekids.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Supporting-Transgender-and-Transsexual-Students-web.pdf)
- Public Health agency of Canada: Q/A Gender Identity in Schools  
[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/std-mts/rp/gi-is/index-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/std-mts/rp/gi-is/index-eng.php)
- EGALE Canada: Every class in Every School – final report on the First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia  
[www.egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/EgaleFinalReport-web.pdf](http://www.egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/EgaleFinalReport-web.pdf)
- OCDSB Equity and Inclusive Education

## Endnotes

- 1 Wells, Roberts, and Allan, *supra* note 24 at 41.
- 2 Baum, et al., *supra* note 29 at 19.
- 3 Wells, Roberts, and Allan, *supra* note 24 at 42.
- 4 Agard, et al., *supra* note 18.
- 5 Mulvey, Kelly Lynn and Melanie Killen. “Challenging Gender Stereotypes: Resistance and Exclusion.” *Child Development* 86.3, (2015): 681–694. Wiley Online Library. Web. 6 Mar, 2017.
- 6 Wells, Roberts, and Allan, *supra* note 24 at 39.
- 7 *Ibid* at 42.
- 8 *Ibid* at 42.
- 9 *Ibid* at 43.
- 10 *Ibid* at 41.
- 11 *Ibid* at 41.
- 12 *Ibid* at 41.
- 13 Mulvey, and Killen, *supra* note 34.
- 14 Baum, et al., *supra* note 29 at 12.
- 15 Wells, Roberts, and Allan, *supra* note 24 at 39.
- 16 *Ibid* at 39.
- 17 *Ibid* at 42.