



Belong To LGBTQ+
Youth Ireland



Preventing Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic Bullying

**Evidence-based strategies to
support the implementation of
your *Bí Cineálta* policy.**



Preventing Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic Bullying

Evidence-based strategies to support the implementation of your *Bí Cineálta* policy and create an environment where everyone belongs

In 2024, the Department of Education and Youth published the *Bí Cineálta* procedures to support primary and post-primary schools to prevent and address bullying behaviour. The procedures act as a roadmap to support school communities to work together to prevent and address bullying behaviour, recognising in particular how changes in technology and the diversity of our society are being reflected in schools.

The timing of these procedures could not be more important. We know that 76% of LGBTQ+ young people feel unsafe in school.¹ One of the core principles of *Bí Cineálta* is preventing bullying from occurring, with the understanding that education and empathy generation are the foundations for knowledge, respect and inclusion.² When students feel that they belong within a school community, and that everyone else in the school community belongs there, a culture of kindness is formed. There are many practical ways to foster this sense of ‘belonging’ and Stand Up Awareness Week is a great opportunity to do so, especially as it relates to LGBTQ+ young people.

Strategies for preventing homophobic and transphobic bullying can be aligned with the Department of Education and Youth’s Four Key Areas of Wellbeing Promotion.³ These key areas emphasise that the promotion of wellbeing for young people requires a whole-school approach, which also applies to measures for addressing bullying.

Four Key Areas of Wellbeing Promotion:

- **Culture and Environment**
- **Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)**
- **Policy and Planning**
- **Relationships and Partnerships**

Within each of these key areas there is a number of practical, evidence-based actions that you can implement in your school, centre or service to promote understanding and empathy, foster a sense of belonging and prevent bullying behaviour.

While these actions relate specifically to preventing homophobic and transphobic bullying behaviour, the underlying principles can be adapted and applied to promoting inclusion for the young people you work with, particularly those from minority backgrounds or who may be targeted for identity-based bullying.

Section 1:

Culture and Environment

All members of school communities should feel a sense of connectedness and belonging. When a culture of inclusion and kindness is fostered and articulated, it helps convey the message that negative behaviours like bullying will not be tolerated. This can help create a so-called ‘telling environment’, where young people who experience or witness bullying behaviour are more likely to report it, as they have confidence that it will be dealt with effectively, and that they should not worry about reprisals for making the report. Here are some things to consider in terms of Culture and Environment.

A. Increasing the **visibility and representation** of some of the minority groups that make up the school community can foster a sense of belonging. When it comes to being visible in your support for your LGBTQ+ students, a little can go a long way! Studies show the importance of LGBTQ+ visibility as key to acceptance and comfort with being open about one’s identity.⁴ Small gestures such as posters and flags can contribute to an environment where LGBTQ+ young people feel that they belong. Representation on a larger scale, such as raising the Pride flag on a flagpole, or having a dedicated noticeboard for LGBTQ+ information, can send a powerful message to the entire community that this school is a welcoming place for everyone, including LGBTQ+ people, and that homophobic and transphobic bullying will not be tolerated.

B. **Trusted adults** play an important role in preventing bullying behaviour by increasing the likelihood of young people reporting bullying incidents. You and your colleagues can mark yourselves as trusted adults by being visible about your support for LGBTQ+ people through the use of stickers on your computer device, or other suggestions as above. You could also complete Belong To’s free **eLearning course ‘Educators and youth workers supporting LGBTQ+ young people’** ➔. Upon completion of the course, you will receive a certificate of completion, which you could display on your classroom door or wall, as another indication that you are a safe adult with whom a young person could discuss concerns around homophobic or transphobic bullying.

C. **Safe spaces** are vital in creating a positive environment that prevents bullying behaviour. Toilets and changing rooms can feel unsafe for all young people in school, not just LGBTQ+ young people. There is generally less potential for staff supervision in these areas, and students may congregate together in groups here, which can be intimidating for others. Where possible, accessible, single-occupancy options should be provided for students who need them.

Section 2:

Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

Representation of all types of identities, including LGBTQ+ identities, in the curriculum is a highly effective way of promoting tolerance for difference and the value of diversity in our society. If LGBTQ+ topics are never discussed in the classroom, then the only source of information or beliefs about LGBTQ+ people for students is what they hear in the school yard or read about online. This may not always be accurate or truthful. By including these identities in your teaching, it sends the message that LGBTQ+ people, just like people with disabilities and those from different ethnic backgrounds, are members of our communities and part of our society.

A. Curriculum resources can support you in introducing LGBTQ+ topics to your teaching and demonstrating that LGBTQ+ people belong in our schools and in our society. Stand Up Awareness Week is a great opportunity to bring a focus on LGBTQ+ perspectives in the curriculum. Often during Stand Up Awareness Week, teachers might prepare a lesson featuring LGBTQ+ musicians, LGBTQ+ history or LGBTQ+ authors in relevant subjects. However, as with the visibility elements, smaller-scale and more frequent representation can be just as effective in creating a sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ students. These also help all students learn about diversity and inclusion.

Check out our resource hub for curriculum resources for both junior and senior cycle ➡. These provide suggested topics and themes in which you might include representation of LGBTQ+ identities.

B. Full implementation of the **SPHE** curriculum gives students a strong awareness and understanding of the different groups that make up our society. It promotes empathy and appreciation of people who are different to ourselves, and this is foundational in preventing bullying behaviour from occurring.⁵

Section 3:

Policy and Planning

Inclusive policies are foundational in creating a positive school climate and culture where all young people feel welcomed, supported and encouraged. A significant policy development impacting schools in 2025 is the introduction of the *Bí Cineálta* policy, and there are many actions that can be taken in conjunction with this to prevent and address bullying behaviour:

A. A student-friendly version of your school's *Bí Cineálta* policy must be developed and the Department of Education and Youth has provided a template as the basis for this, which can be amended as deemed appropriate. Schools can consider including information on homophobic and transphobic bullying, as appropriate, along with other types of bullying behaviour, as well as clear information on how to report a concern or bullying incident. This helps contribute to the 'telling environment', where students are given easy access to information on how to make a report.

B. Consider **other policies and procedures** that support the implementation of *Bí Cineálta*. These might include your school's Code of Conduct, and particularly how it relates to the use of homophobic or transphobic language. The use of 'casual' homophobic or transphobic language such as "that's so gay" and similar phrases can have a destructive effect on school environments and seriously damage feelings of belonging and safety for LGBTQ+ students. Agreeing a consistent approach that will be implemented by all staff can effectively tackle this issue.

Check out our online hub for resources on tackling homophobic or transphobic language using our suggested 'Educate, Recognise, Intervene, Explain, Record' (ERIER) approach ➔.

C. Staff training can help you and your colleagues support your LGBTQ+ young people and promote inclusive schools and services. Often, staff feel unequipped to talk about LGBTQ+ topics because they feel they do not have the knowledge or skills to do so. Belong To's 'Educators and youth workers supporting LGBTQ+ young people' is a free eLearning module that covers the basics of LGBTQ+ terminology, some of the challenges that LGBTQ+ young people face in school and how to support a young person coming out.

To register for a free account and take the e-learning course, visit <https://training.belongto.org/learn> ➔.

Section 4:

Relationships and Partnerships

Building and nurturing positive relationships is at the heart of measures to improve feelings of understanding and empathy, foster a sense of belonging and prevent bullying behaviour. Important relationships include peer-to-peer relationships, staff-student relationships and relationships between the school, families and outside support services.

A. LGBTQ+ and Allies Clubs are a very effective way of fostering positive peer support relationships, as well as building positive relationships between students and supportive staff.⁶ There is no 'one size fits all' approach to setting up and running an LGBTQ+ and Allies Club, but there is strong evidence that young people having a safe space to be themselves in school, even if for only one lunchtime a week, can be a significant protective factor in terms of their mental health and wellbeing, and feeling that they belong in school. As well as offering opportunities to build relationships with other LGBTQ+ students, it also allows connections with allies to form, which enhances feelings of safety and belonging and can reduce homophobic and transphobic bullying.

B. Awareness initiatives are suggested as a strategy for increasing feelings of belonging and preventing bullying behaviour. There are many themed weeks and initiatives for different groups within school communities and Stand Up Awareness Week is a great opportunity to increase awareness and visibility of LGBTQ+ identities. The greater the participation of the entire school community, the more impactful the awareness initiative will be, so think about ways to include all staff, students and families in events where possible.

C. Consider your **local youth services** and other support services in your community. The young people in your setting may or may not be aware of the services that are available, or how they would make contact with them. You could invite a youth worker or other person from the service to come to the school and give a talk to students during Stand Up Awareness Week and continue to develop the relationship from there.

Bullying, when not addressed effectively, can have lifelong impacts on those who experience it, and bullying associated with a minority characteristic can be particularly harmful⁷. The introduction of the *Bí Cineálta* procedures offers educators an important and useful framework to align prevention strategies with wellbeing, and to take a whole-school approach to preventing bullying behaviour.

At the heart of these strategies is the idea that fostering understanding, empathy and solidarity among all young people, whether they are similar or very different to each other, is of fundamental importance. By implementing these simple, evidence-based actions, we have the potential to create diverse, inclusive communities inside and outside of school, where everyone feels that they belong.

“

It is not just the people in the LGBTQ+ community that help us, it is also our allies who help us not be alone in everything we do. We see it every year at Pride — allies showing up and showing us how supported we are, which makes me feel so proud and safe.”

— **Lea** (they/them), member of Belong To's Youth Advisory Panel



References

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Belong To LGBTQ+
Youth Ireland

**Belong To is a national organisation
supporting LGBTQ+ youth.**

Since 2003, we have worked with LGBTQ+ young people across Ireland offering safety and support through our services. Let your students and youth groups know about Belong To and what supports are available for them including LGBTQ+ youth groups, crisis counselling with Pieta and digital support services.

For educators, we offer online training, support and initiatives such as the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark. For youth workers, we support a National Network of LGBTQ+ youth groups and run the Rainbow Award – an action-focused accreditation programme that supports a whole-organisation approach to safe and supportive services for LGBTQ+ youth.

Learn more at www.belongto.org