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# CELEBRATING BI INCLUSION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

More and more schools are taking steps to ensure that lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) young people feel welcome and included. This resource is designed to provide specific insight into the experiences of bi young people in schools and highlight issues that bi people of all ages continue to face. The resource identifies three key ways in which schools can tackle these issues as part of their wider work on LGBT inclusion, and provides practical tips on everything from **training school staff, to talking about bi issues with students**, and building an **inclusive school environment**.

The terms 'bisexual' or 'bi' refer to a person who has an emotional and/or sexual attraction towards people of more than one gender. Results from an Office of National Statistics survey conducted in 2016 showed that, among 16 to 24-year-olds, 1.8 per cent said they were bisexual, while 1.5 per cent said they were gay or lesbian. And in a YouGov poll in 2015, 43 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds choose something other than '100% heterosexual' or '100% homosexual' when asked about their sexuality.

Research from Stonewall shows that schools continue to make progress on tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and language, and on including LGBT students in school life. However, the specific experiences of bi young people are often overlooked or assumed to be exactly the same as gay and lesbian young people. While bi young people can face the same prejudices as gay and lesbian students, they also face unique challenges. With the equivalent of one young person in every two secondary school classes identifying as bi, it's important that schools ensure they are actively supporting the bi young people in their care.

Every young person should be able to explore their sexual orientation without pressure or judgement. Some young people will go through a process of questioning or exploring their identity; while for others, being attracted to more than one gender will be who they are, now and forever.

## 2. TERMINOLOGY

This list will help you to understand some of the common terms you might come across when tackling biphobic bullying and supporting bi pupils. It also includes useful terms to support your wider LGBT inclusion work and will help staff to understand the difference between L,G,B and T.

There is a wide range of terms that people may use to describe their sexual orientation or gender identity. While this can feel daunting, it needn't be. The best approach is to give people the opportunity to say how they would describe themselves, rather than making assumptions.

### THE BI UMBRELLA

The “Bi umbrella” includes (but is not limited to) the following:

#### BI/BISEXUAL

Refers to a person who has an emotional and/or sexual attraction towards people of more than one gender.

#### PANSEXUAL

A sexual, romantic and/or emotional attraction towards people regardless of gender.

#### BICURIIOUS

A curiosity towards, or awareness of, the possibility of being bi. This is sometimes used by young people who are exploring their sexuality and feel that they may be bi. This term is felt to be unhelpful or negative by some, as it questions the permanence of bi identities.

# OTHER USEFUL TERMINOLOGY

## COMING OUT

When a person tells someone new about their identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans for the first time. LGBT people often come out on a regular basis to anyone new whom they would like to know about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

## GAY

Refers to a man who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards men. Also a generic term for same-sex attraction; some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian.

## GENDER IDENTITY

A person's internal sense of their own gender, whether male, female, or something else.

## LESBIAN

Refers to a woman who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards women.

## NON-BINARY

An umbrella term for a person who does not identify as male or female.

## QUEER

In the past a derogatory term for LGBT individuals. The term has now been reclaimed by LGBT young people in particular who don't identify with traditional categories around gender identity and sexual orientation, but is still viewed to be derogatory by some.

## QUESTIONING

The process of exploring your own sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

## SEX

Either of the two main categories (male and female) assigned to a person on the basis of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions. Sometimes used interchangeably with 'gender' to mean 'male' or 'female'.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A person's emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to another person.

## TRANS

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. May encompass one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, cross dresser, non-binary, gender queer.

## 3. WHAT IS BIPHOBIA?

**The Bisexual Index** defines biphobia as the fear or dislike of someone who identifies as bi; someone who has an emotional and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender. Biphobia is usually based on misconceptions of what bi people are like and how they behave in relationships. The **Stonewall School Report 2017** found that more than a third (36 per cent) of 11 to 19-year-olds 'frequently' or 'often' hear negative comments about bi people (biphobic language), for example that bi people are 'greedy' or 'just going through a phase'.

"I've heard a lot of gossip and horrible stuff people say about bisexuals (they're greedy, it doesn't make sense, pick one and pick the right one, etc.). There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding surrounding bisexuality in general (it's a phase, it's not real, etc)."

Chris, 16, private single-sex secondary school (South East)

"I've been shouted at and talked about on multiple occasions because of my sexuality and I've heard remarks such as 'bisexuals are more likely to cheat, I'd never date a bi woman or man'. A few people who are openly gay have said things like 'as a lesbian, I would never want to do anything with a bisexual woman'."

Sian, 13, secondary school (Wales)

"I've felt as if I knew I was bisexual from the beginning of Year 7 or maybe even earlier. Often I hear people go around gossiping about me and it just brings me down."

Alex, 12, secondary school (South East)

"I always hear my mum and sister taking about how they don't mind gay people but bisexuals are 'liars'."

Louise, 15, secondary school (South East)

Harmful myths and stereotypes about bi people include perceptions that: they are untrustworthy, they are unwilling to admit that they are 'really' gay or a lesbian, they are more likely to be promiscuous or 'greedy', or that they will be less discerning in their choice of partner. At their worst, these comments deny the very existence of bi people or that being bi is a valid part of a person's identity. These myths and stereotypes provide the basis for discrimination.

Bi people can face abuse and discrimination not only from straight people, but also from lesbian and gay people. **The Bisexuality Report 2012** highlights the challenge of 'double discrimination' (page 21) and *'... the fact that bisexual people can be discriminated against both by heterosexuals and by lesbian and gay people. Both groups can be suspicious of bisexual partners (fearing that they will be left for someone of the 'other gender') and assume that bisexual people will be a threat to their relationships'.*

Many bi pupils experience bullying because of who they are, with hugely damaging consequences:

- **One in three** bi pupils (35 per cent) are bullied at school for being LGBT.
- Bi pupils are **less likely than lesbian and gay pupils to have an adult at home they can talk to** about being LGBT (37 per cent compared to 46 per cent).
- **Young people who are bi or who identify as another term such as pansexual or queer are more likely to deliberately harm themselves** (67 per cent and 79 per cent respectively) than lesbian or gay young people (59 per cent).



## 4. WHAT IS BI ERASURE?

Bi erasure is a form of biphobia where the legitimacy or existence of being bi as a sexual orientation is questioned or denied, often based on an assumption that there are only two forms of sexual orientation – straight and gay. Bi erasure is not always malicious and is often due to the lack of visibility in everyday life. Even our everyday language erases bi people. For example, you will often hear people talk about 'gay marriage' or 'gay Pride', but this rarely includes bi people.

The *Stonewall School Report 2017* found that **three in four** LGBT pupils (76 per cent) have never learnt about or discussed bisexuality at school, and that LGBT pupils are far more likely to know of openly gay or lesbian members of staff than of staff who are openly bi or trans.

Bi young people often do not see themselves reflected in their school communities. As a result, they may begin to doubt their identity, to feel abnormal or excluded from important conversations about their health and wellbeing.

“I feel like I'm being left out on something that is important, and my school isn't equipping me with the right tools to understand my bisexuality.”

Jessica, 13, single-sex secondary school (South East)

“In the comments of a Facebook post a stranger told me that I was 'not a real Christian' because I am bisexual.”

Sophie, 19, now at university (East of England)

“There aren't many characters in the media who identify as bisexual. Many characters are gay but there needs to be more openly bi characters.”

Ariana, 19, now at university (Yorkshire and the Humber)

“Every time someone famous comes out as bisexual I feel hopeful that my sexuality will continue to be normalised.”

Antonia, 19, now at university (South West)



# 5. HOW CAN WE TACKLE BIPHOBIA AND BI ERASURE?

Schools can tackle biphobia, bi erasure and support the bi young people in their care by:

1. **Educating and training staff**
2. **Tackling biphobia directly with students**
3. **Improving bi visibility within the curriculum and wider school life**

## STAFF

When training staff:

- Review relevant school policies and LGBT inclusion work to ensure that biphobia is explicitly referred to and defined, alongside homophobia and transphobia. Examples of biphobic language will help staff to tackle incidents when they occur. See the Getting Started Toolkit for best practice examples.
- Develop a school script so that all staff feel confident to intervene and challenge biphobic comments made by students.
- Use the ***Stonewall School Report 2017*** in staff training sessions. Pick out statistics and testimonies directly relating to the experiences of bi young people, not just young people who are gay, lesbian and trans. Highlight the need for bi visibility and the consequences for young bi people if left unaddressed.
- Talk about sexual orientation as a 'protected characteristic' as per the ***Equality Act 2010***. Make clear that the legal duty to eliminate discrimination is the responsibility of all school staff.
- Be ready to explain that a person's gender identity can be fluid and/or not fixed, and that not everyone identifies as 'male' or 'female'.

- Facilitate open and frank conversations amongst staff. Tackle any negative perceptions of bi people with considered questions and constructive challenge rather than confrontation.
- Create a supportive environment for staff who may come out as bi. Don't assume staff are straight or gay based on their current relationships, and acknowledge that some colleagues may be bi but won't necessarily feel comfortable identifying as such.
- Refer to bi organisations such as BiUk, Bi Community News, BiMedia and The Bisexual Index, and research that is bi specific such as ***The Bisexuality Report 2012***.
- Celebrate annual Bi Visibility day on 23 September. This is a great opportunity to fly the Bi flag alongside the Pride flag or display bi posters and role models on your LGBT board. Use Bi Visibility Day posters (see resources) or "Some people are bi. Get over it!" posters.
- Ensure bi identities are featured on any LGBT notice or celebration boards and that they are equally represented alongside gay, lesbian and trans identities.
- Stock books with bi characters in the library such as *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell, *Fire* by Kristin Cashore and novels that explore sexuality and attraction such as *Lies We Tell Ourselves* by Robin Talley.

## STUDENTS

With students:

- Tackle all incidents of biphobia and biphobic language without exception.
- Deconstruct myths and challenge negative stereotypes about bi people with constructive dialogue, rather than just punishment, to build understanding and help tackle repeated incidences of biphobia.
- Use LGBT History Month and anti-bullying week as opportunities to include and celebrate bi identities; for example, through an assemblies or workshops.

## CURRICULUM

In your curriculum:

- As part of the PSHE education curriculum, issues related to bisexuality might be explored within the contexts of personal identity, relationships, anti-bullying or celebrating diversity. Use bi role models such as Frank Ocean, Freddie Mercury and Stephanie Beatriz. Research role models that could be used across different subjects. For example, Alfred Kinsey, the American biologist who created the Kinsey Scale, or the singer-songwriter Azealia Banks.

- In Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) provide opportunities to talk about different sexual orientations, relationships and forms of attraction, from emotional to romantic and/or sexual.
- Discuss and challenge negative stereotypes about people of all sexual orientations and genders, including bi people. Explain why stereotypes are harmful and invalid.
- Discuss the unique challenges and experiences of bi people; for example, coming out to their partner as bi.
- If you are a Stonewall School Champion, use Stonewall's School Role Models programme to invite a bi role model speaker in an assembly. For information on joining Stonewall's School Champion programme, please go [here](#).



## 6. POSITIVE BI EXPERIENCES

While it is vital that we understand and address the unique challenges many bi young people face, it is equally important to remember that many bi young people feel supported and included by their school community. The following testimonies from **Stonewall School Report 2017** demonstrate the positive impact bi inclusion and bi visibility can have.

“The members of a club I go to had an assembly and I wrote the script and played a character that was bisexual. The assembly was about not using biphobic or homophobic language and at the end we went through sexualities, so that the audience could know that there's more than gay and straight. The entire school saw it and it was really fun to make.”

Lana, 13, secondary school (East Midlands)

“David Bowie inspired me to feel more proud of my identity, as he was so open and proud about his bisexuality.”

Hailey, 13, secondary school (South East)

“I feel very inspired by female LGBT role models in the media, especially bisexual women as they make me feel normal.”

Jameela, 16, sixth form (North East)

“In the future I hope that people will not see bisexuality as a phase or being greedy, and for any sexualities that like more than one gender to not be erased.”

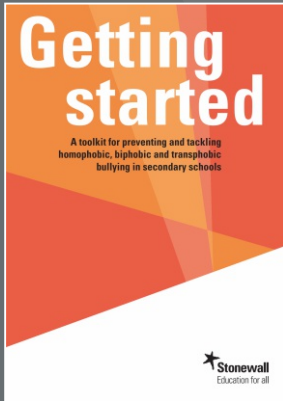
Vikki, 16, sixth form (South West)

# 7. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SUPPORT BI YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR SCHOOL?

- Listen and ask questions – don't assume a young person's sexual orientation, especially based on a current relationship.
- Be led by the young person in terms of how they describe their identity, sexual orientation and relationships. Remember that some young people might reject traditional 'labels' altogether.
- Talk about relationships in a gender-neutral way. This can be done by referring to 'people' or 'partners' in relationships rather than 'men' and 'women'.
- Understand that being bi is a full and valid part of a person's identity. It doesn't mean that someone is half gay and half straight.
- Be supportive and non-judgemental of young people who are exploring or discovering their sexual orientation, acknowledging that it can be scary. Reassure the young person that questioning is normal and that they may feel that their sexuality is set or that it is fluid.
- Find opportunities to talk about and celebrate bi people across school life, signalling to bi students that your school is a safe place for them to talk about their identity.
- Point young people in the direction of appropriate LGBT community groups which have bi-specific content and further links to bi organisations.



# 8. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL STAFF



Getting Started Toolkit for Secondary Schools



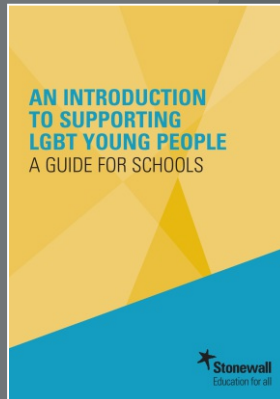
Some people are bi. Get over it poster (A4)



Bi Visibility Day 2017 poster campaign



Stonewall School Report 2017



An introduction to supporting LGBT young people

# OTHER RESOURCES

**LGBT Foundation bi series**

**The Bisexuality Report 2012**

**The Bisexual Index**

**Bi Community News**

**BiMedia**

**Bi.org**

**BiUK**

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