



# Caring Adults: Supporting 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth

Supportive people and places matter. Building trusting relationships and identity-affirming spaces matters.

This document is intended to provide supports for caring adults to build relationships and spaces that affirm the identities of 2S/LGBTQIA+ students.

2S/LGBTQIA+ students have a right to be heard, to be seen and to feel safe in their schools (Ontario Human Rights Code, 2014). Schools and school 2S/LGBTQIA+ clubs like Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) may be the few or only supportive spaces some 2S/LGBTQIA+ students have. Importantly, when 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth are allowed to thrive and be themselves in affirming environments, they also get opportunities to just be kids (Egale, p. 28).

In 2021 Egale conducted a survey with Canadian youth in grades 8-12. A major finding of the “Still in Every Class, Still in Every School” report was that 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth with supportive adults both inside and outside the home are FOUR TIMES more likely to have feelings of good or excellent mental health. Having the support of affirming adults is not only a protective factor against serious mental health outcomes such as self-harm or suicidal behaviour, but it also creates positive downstream effects for a young person’s future in terms of their educational attainment, employment and economic opportunities, and the sense of self-esteem and self-worth that they carry into adulthood (Egale, p. 28).

The continued need for more supports and services for students who identify as 2S/LGBTQIA+ was highlighted by students in the 2021 #HearNowON survey. This aligns with similar recommendations from students in #HearNowON 2019 that noted the importance of honouring diversity and prioritizing inclusion and belonging in school mental health.

Regardless of your role within the school, there are strategies that you can adopt to foster supportive and affirming spaces and relationships with students.

## Brief strategies for supporting 2S/LGBTQIA+ students

Here are some approaches to consider as you strive to create a more supportive, affirming school culture for all students, and especially 2S/LGBTQIA+ students:

BRIEF STRATEGIES	
<b>Relationship building is the foundation</b>	<p>All students can benefit from having welcoming, inclusive and understanding adults in their school communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Engage with students regularly and offer genuine moments of connection where possible. This will not only aid in your capacity to build individual relationships, but it can also positively impact your school culture and climate.</li></ul>



BRIEF STRATEGIES	
<p><b>Relationship building is the foundation (cont'd)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the power dynamics that come with your role in the school and think about ways to address imbalances as a caring adult. Shift towards working alongside students and promoting reciprocity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reflect on your positionality, personal values, beliefs and biases</b></p>	<p>Caring adults are identified as allies by students who perceive them as supportive. Caring adults may not always be explicitly named as allies by students, but their actions and attitudes demonstrate their commitment to the growth and success of students.</p> <p>Working toward being a caring adult and ally is an ongoing process of learning, practice and reflection.</p> <p>Reflecting deeply on your own personal values, beliefs and biases is an important step toward providing identity-affirming and culturally responsive support to every student. This can help you to recognize the value of the wisdom and expertise of students over their own needs and lived experiences.</p>
<p><b>Start with your own learning</b></p>	<p>It is not the responsibility of students to do this for you; burdening them with this responsibility can unintentionally cause harm. Educating yourself as you work to become a caring adult is fundamental. A great place to start can be engaging with the resources listed below to become familiar with common terminology, definitions, coming in/out process, identity and expression, 2S/LGBTQIA+ history and liberation movements, the importance of supportive spaces and the impacts of our current social climate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn about specific social and systemic barriers and discrimination that 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth may face when accessing healthcare, housing, education, mental health supports, employment, and community spaces (Egale, 2024).</li> <li>• Consider the possible everyday impacts of factors such as bullying and social oppression, everyday microaggressions, loss of family support, and isolation. This may provide insight into potential challenges students may encounter.</li> <li>• Remain open to learning directly from students about their identity lived experiences.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Use inclusive and affirming language</b></p>	<p>Affirming language in both written and oral communication is a great way to show support, and can be inclusive of everyone, not just 2S/LGBTQIA+ folks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be mindful of assumptions and consider <b>gender-neutral</b> ways of communicating, such as: “Hey folks” instead of “Hey guys;” “partner/significant other” instead of “boyfriend/girlfriend;” or “There’s someone here to see you” instead of “There’s a woman here to see you.”</li> <li>• If you do not know someone’s <b>pronouns</b>, you can use the gender-neutral pronoun set (they/them/their) until you can ask.</li> <li>• Language changes quickly. If you make a mistake, apologize swiftly, move on and do better next time. If you do not know what terminology (e.g., pronouns) someone prefers, ask respectfully and remember their preference.</li> </ul>

BRIEF STRATEGIES	
<p><b>Be mindful of intersectionality</b></p>	<p>Intersectionality is an important lens to help us understand the various identities and lived experiences an individual can hold. It is important to understand how to support students with diverse intersectional identities that may differ from your own.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitating space for students to share their experiences without assumptions allows us to appreciate these multifaceted realities and helps us better understand both the challenges and strengths they bring.</li> <li>Take the initiative to seek out information that will help you work better alongside diverse student populations.</li> </ul> <p>When considering students who identify as 2S/LGBTQIA+, it is important to understand that students have many intersecting identities that inform who they are, how they see the world, and how the world sees them.</p>
<p><b>Identity and mental health</b></p>	<p>Never assume a direct link exists between a student’s sexual orientation or gender identity and the stressors they are disclosing. Allow the student to be the expert of their lived experiences and make connections. If students express concerns about their own mental health and well-being, know the pathways for mental health and identity-affirming support within your school, board and community to connect a student to support if needed.</p>
<p><b>Navigate student self-disclosure</b></p>	<p>When a student shares their sexual orientation, gender identity, name and/or pronouns, the ways in which you navigate this together can positively contribute to their overall mental health and well-being. The following strategies can assist in this process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Discern</b> if it is necessary to share information about a student.</li> <li><b>Ask</b> permission before sharing information about the student and discuss together in advance how that information could be shared.</li> <li><b>Model</b> how to communicate boundaries and consent through your own actions. An example of this can be asking a student if it’s okay to share their chosen name or pronouns with someone else (especially if it’s with someone they may not have explicitly shared this information with before) (Egale pg. 33 Affirming Adults Handbook).</li> <li><b>Foster</b> an environment where individuals can freely express their boundaries and give or withdraw consent at any time.</li> <li><b>Maintain</b> your relationships with students through regular check-ins that allow opportunities for open communication.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Embed into the curriculum</b></p>	<p>Fostering supportive spaces within schools extends beyond GSAs and affiliate groups.</p> <p>“In an inclusive education system, students must see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, so that they can feel engaged in and empowered by their learning experiences.” (Ministry of Education <a href="#">Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy</a>)</p> <p>Curriculum is a powerful tool to support and affirm student identities. When students see themselves authentically reflected in curriculum resources, they are more likely to be engaged and feel a sense of belonging. It is also a powerful tool for all students to address barriers and create a positive school culture.</p> <p>Educators can be intentional in choosing resources and learning opportunities that both represent the identities of 2S/LGBTQIA+ communities, as well those that break down stereotypes and address homophobia and transphobia.</p>

BRIEF STRATEGIES	
<p><b>Embed into the curriculum</b> (cont'd)</p>	<p><b>What can this look like?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed and reflect 2S/LGBTQIA+ resources and topics throughout the curriculum. Think about how these may be relevant in Language, History, Social Sciences, etc.</li> <li>• Seek inclusive resources and represent a variety of people, orientations, family structures, etc.</li> <li>• Highlight and discuss with students significant days related to the 2S/LGBTQIA community.</li> <li>• Analyze how narratives, concepts, language etc., may be rooted in homophobia or transphobia, when using resources that may not represent (or misrepresent) 2S/LGBTQIA+ communities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Interrupt and address</b></p>	<p>We each have a responsibility to cultivate a positive school culture in which everyone can thrive. Incidents of discrimination, prejudice, homophobia, transphobia or bullying are not a student's responsibility to manage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lean into discomfort to interrupt and address situations that may negatively impact school climate/culture can help to maintain a supportive environment.</li> <li>• Learn how to navigate difficult conversations, diffuse conflict, and to notice and manage microaggressions in the moment.</li> <li>• Know your school board's policies on discrimination and harassment and be ready to support students.</li> </ul> <p>A major asset in this practice is to have strong relationships with students and staff to guide your responses in ways that support both the students impacted as well as students perpetuating harm.</p>
<p><b>Building 2S/LGBTQIA+ student advocacy</b></p>	<p>Being knowledgeable of 2S/LGBTQIA+ rights will better equip all parties to respond to instances of discrimination, harassment, bullying, and other forms of hate, as well as positively influence their environments to be more safe, affirming and supportive. Familiarize yourself with current board procedures, policies, processes and legislation supporting student rights.</p>
<p><b>Foster community connection</b></p>	<p>Community connections can be an incredibly important resource in providing support to 2S/LGBTQIA+ students and assisting adults in developing the skills needed to be an affirming adult. This can be done by engaging with online resources, creating peer support, building connections with community supports and welcoming others to walk alongside us in these efforts.</p>



## Resources for caring adults on supporting 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth

RESOURCES	
<b>SMH-ON resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Identity-affirming School Mental Health Frame</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Cultural Humility Tool</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Student Engagement Toolkit</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">2S/LGBTQIA+ Student MH Social Media Bundles</a></li> </ul>
<b>Community resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Black Youth Helpline: How to Access Services</a>: a resource for Black youth which supports individuals, families, schools and systems</li> <li>• <a href="#">2-Spirited People of the First Nations</a>: a resource for 2-spirit peoples that celebrates strength and provides physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual advocacy</li> <li>• <a href="#">Egale Canada</a>: a resource for affirming adults in the school community who would like to learn to be supportive and affirming to 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth</li> <li>• <a href="#">LGBT YouthLine</a>: a resource list from YouthLine, a 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth-led organization that affirms and supports the experiences of youth across Ontario</li> <li>• <a href="#">LGBT Youthline: Peer Support</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">PFLAG Canada</a>: national organization focused on supporting parents and caregivers of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth</li> </ul>
<b>Educator resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Egale Canada: Resources for Educators</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Egale: Inclusive and Affirming Language Tips</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">ETFO Curriculum Voice: Niizh Manidoowag Two-Spirit</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">ETFO 2S/LGBTQIA+ Resources</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">OSSTF Gender Identity and Expression – Policies/Procedures, Ontario School Boards</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Get Real Movement: Resources</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">GLSEN Educator Resources</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Welcoming Schools: Resources, Books and Lesson Plans</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Safer Projects Tipsheet</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Advocacy in Schools</a></li> </ul>
<b>Gender-affirming care resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Rainbow Health Ontario</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Point of Pride: Affirmative Care for Trans Folks</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Trans Care Plus</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Native Youth Sexual Health Network</a></li> </ul>
<b>Listen, learn and reflect from the words of 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">GLSEN: Article: “I’m a Black Queer Student, and My School Needs to Recognize My Entire Self”</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">GLSEN Article: “I’m a Trans, Disabled Young Person, Not One or the Other”</a></li> </ul>



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## Crisis supports for youth

### CRISIS SUPPORTS

- [9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline](#): call, text, 24/7, EN/FR
- Black Youth Helpline : call, email 9 a.m. – 10 p.m.
- [Hope for Wellness Helpline for First Nations, Métis and Inuit](#): call, chat, 24/7 EN/FR (online & phone), Cree/Ojibway/Inuktitut (phone)
- [Kids Help Phone](#): call, chat, text, 24/7, EN/FR (other interpretation services available)
- [Kids Help Phone: First Nations, Inuit & Metis](#): Text FIRSTNATIONS, INUIT or METIS, 24/7
- [LGBT Youthline](#): chat, text, email, Sunday-Friday 4:00-9:30 p.m.
- [Naseeha Youth Helpline](#): call, text 24/7 Helpline for Muslims (national)
- [RiseUp \(Kids Help Phone\) \(Bilingual\)](#): call, chat, text, 24/7, EN/FR

