

QUEER IN SCHOOL

advice to adults in schools and pupils



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Changefactory Knowledge Centre
Published November 2023
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The photos are of participants in the advice collection

ABOUT THE ADVICE COLLECTION

The advice collection QUEER IN SCHOOL was conducted in January-March 2023. Advice was collected from 54 young people aged 15-21, with an average age of 18.

Changefactory carried out an advice collection on being queer in school with the aim to:

1. Contribute to a good knowledge base for pupils and professionals, with advice from young people about what can be done in school to make it safer for all pupils.
2. Contribute with concrete advice on how it might be wise to meet queer pupils, as safety for other pupils and adults in school.

The participants

In the advice collection, young people were spoken with in three municipalities in Troms and Finnmark, three municipalities in Agder, one municipality in Nordland, one in Trøndelag, one in Vestland, one in Rogaland, one in Innlandet and one in Oslo.

All participants identified as queer. The young people answered how they identify themselves anonymously. For definitions of terms, see the dictionary on p. 55.

Sexual orientation:

31 out of 54 identified as bisexual or pansexual

14 out of 54 identified as gay

7 out of 54 did not wish to be defined

2 out of 54 identified as questioning

Additionally, several participants identified as aromantic, demisexual, asexual or polyamorous

Gender:

22 out of 54 identified as cis

17 out of 54 identified as non-binary, gender fluid, agender

15 out of 54 identified as binary trans

Invitation

The young people were invited through CF's network. These young people then invited other young people to participate. Out of the 54 participants in the advice collection, 34 were not active Pros when they participated, and 20 were active Pros.

Before the sessions, the young people were given information about:

- what the advice collection is about
- why Forandringsfabrikken is conducting the advice collection
- what will happen next with the answers they give
- that participation is completely voluntary
- that they answer only what they want to answer
- that the advice collection is anonymous

In addition, the young people have been given contact information for one or more of the facilitators to be able to ask questions or get more information.

Consent and privacy in the advice collection

The advice collection QUEER IN SCHOOL has not collected personal data as defined in GDPR art. 4. Participation in the sessions has been voluntary. The information (advice) that has been stored cannot be linked to identifiable individuals (participants). Therefore, written consent have not been obtained from the participants. The participants have been informed that no personal data was processed in the advice collection. It was further pointed out that participation is voluntary. The participants were also informed that when the advice cannot be linked to them as individuals, they will not have a basis for example, to request that the advice be deleted. Nevertheless, participants are encouraged to contact the facilitators if they have questions or thoughts about the implementation of the advice collection. The young people in the photos in the advice collection are over 16 years old and have given written consent for the use of the photos.

About the method

The advice collection was conducted using the Changemethod. This is a participatory research method, used to collect in-depth knowledge for use in change work and equal collaboration with children and young people. It has been developed based on the action research method Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). It is based on responses from children and young people about how participating in a qualitative survey can feel safe. The Changemethod consists of a set of core values, working principles and a number of specific tools, to collect knowledge directly from children and young people. The tools are creative and visual, to help make it safe and engaging for many different children and young people.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches

The advice collection has been conducted using both a qualitative and quantitative approach. The qualitative aspect has been most important, in order to bring to light different advice and to ensure an in-depth understanding of what the young people express.

Conducting the sessions

The sessions were conducted in small groups, or one-to-one. The same adults participated as facilitators in as many gatherings as possible. The facilitators tried, as much as possible, to make the places where the sessions were conducted pleasant, and to avoid major disturbances. The sessions started with the facilitators and the young people getting to know each other a little, adapted based on whether they knew each other from before. The young people were again informed by the facilitator about the purpose of the advice collection, that it is voluntary to participate and that the young people themselves choose what they want to answer. The facilitator emphasised that there will be a person writing transcripts who would be writing word for word what the young people said, and that the transcript would be anonymised.

Main themes in the advice collection

How adults in school can

- talk to pupils about them being queer
- show that they support queer people
- talk to classes about being queer

How other pupils can

- talk to pupils about them being queer
- show that they support queer people

Summary of the knowledge

The advice is systematised. The answers that were repeated most often by the young people have been summarised into knowledge from children and young people. The language used is as similar as possible to what the young people have used. The knowledge was not linked to theory.

**THANK YOU TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE
THANK YOU SO MUCH TO ALL OF YOU WHO
HAVE GIVEN ADVICE! THANK YOU FOR GIVING
IMPORTANT ANSWERS TO WHAT ADULTS AND
PUPILS IN SCHOOLS CAN DO TO MAKE IT FEEL
SAFE TO BE OPENLY QUEER. THANK YOU FOR
USING YOUR GOOD AND BAD EXPERIENCES TO
HELP NORWAY UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT
HOW SCHOOLS CAN MEET PUPILS WHO ARE
QUEER.**

CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE
HAVE RIGHTS



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE RIGHTS

Since 2015, Changefactory has conducted more than 10 qualitative surveys on the topic of school. Pupils around the country have shared experiences and advice. An answer that has been repeated is that when something is going to be decided for a pupil, it has to be done in collaboration with the pupil. Then the chance that what is decided will be right for the pupil is much greater. When asked about what is needed for pupils to experience being collaborated with, answers that are repeated often is that they have to be given enough information, talk to someone they trust or bring someone they trust with them in conversations. Many also answer that they need to know what will happen to what they tell.

Although many pupils do not know their rights, there is a great similarity between what they think is important - and the rights they have, when something is going to be decided. Pupils under the age of 18 have rights according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Pupils over the age of 18 have rights according to other Human Rights Conventions and according to Norwegian special laws. Many of the rights under the special laws apply to both pupils under and over 18 years of age.

Most pupils in primary and secondary school are under 18 years old. The UNCRC applies to all children up to the age of 18, in all systems, such as in school, kindergarten and in help systems. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was made Norwegian law in 2003, through Section 2 of the Human Rights Act. Some of the rights are included in Norwegian special laws and some are included in Section 104 of the Constitution. The UNCRC must be used together with the special laws. The Norwegian Education Act is one of the important special laws for children. If the Education Act says something other than the Convention on the Rights of the Child, what is stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child carries the most weight.

Children have procedural rights according to the UNCRC

The UNCRC gives children procedural rights. They describe how children should be met, in all actions and decisions that concern them, before assessing what is in the best interests of the child. The procedural rights are the consideration of the best interests of the child, the right to information, the right to speak freely and the right to respect for one's privacy.

The best interests of the child must be a fundamental consideration (art. 3). The child's opinion must be a central factor in the assessment of the child's best interests. In order to assess the best interests of the child, three other rights must first be secured:

- the child has the right to receive **information** (implicitly follows from, art. 12, see UN Children's Committee General comment no. 12 section 25 etc.)
- children have the right to **express themselves freely** in all matters that concern the child (art. 12)
- the child's right to **privacy** must be respected (art. 16)

In all actions and decisions affecting children, the child's best interests must be a fundamental consideration. Actions and decisions that particularly affect queer pupils in school can include, for example, when information is given to legal guardians about the pupil's personal circumstances, when adults in school talk to pupils about being queer and when difficult situations arise in connection with pupils in school who identify as queer.

The child's opinion must be a central factor in the assessment of what is in the best interests of the child. The child must receive enough information, as a prerequisite for the child to be able to express themselves freely and safely. An assessment of the child's best interests cannot be made without the child having first received sufficient and adapted information, and having been able to express their opinions freely and safely.

In addition, the child's right to privacy must be ensured by informing the child about what the child's information can be used for and who may have access to the information, before the conversations. If an adult is considering sharing something the child has said or done, the child must, as a starting point, be given information about this and be allowed to express their views on this, in a way that feels safe for the child. The adult must then assess whether it would be in the child's best interest to share the information.

The state has a duty to ensure that the employees in schools and services who work with children and young people know about children's procedural rights and know how to respect and protect them in practice (UNCRC art. 4).

All pupils have the right to privacy and confidentiality about their personal circumstances

-UNCRC art. 16, Norwegian Constitution Section 102, ECHR art. 8, and the Norwegian Education Act Section 15-1, cf. Section 13

All pupils have rights according to the Education Act. In principle, teachers have a duty of confidentiality regarding pupils' "personal circumstances", cf. Education Act § 15-1, cf. § 13. Pupils' sexual orientation and what pupils share with teachers about their sexual orientation is part of the pupils' "personal relationship". This means that teachers, as a starting point, have a duty of confidentiality and must not share information about pupils' sexual orientation with others unless the pupil themselves agrees to it.

According to the UNCRC, art. 16 and ECHR art. 8 all pupils have the right to respect for their privacy. This right becomes particularly important when it comes to sharing information about pupils, such as how the pupils identify themselves. The sharing of information about pupils must have a basis in law and be necessary. If it concerns pupils under 18, the sharing must be in the best interests of the pupil. When information about a pupil is shared with parents, other adults, or staff without telling the pupil first, the pupil can easily lose trust in the adult. The trust that pupils have in their teachers can be decisive for them feeling safe enough to talk about what is important to them.

Discrimination

-UNCRC art. 2, ECHR art. 14 Education Act. Section 1-1

All pupils in school have the right to freedom from discrimination. The Education Act states that schools must have zero tolerance for discrimination. The UN Children's Committee writes in general comment no. 5, that combating discrimination may require changes in legislation, administration, and resource allocation, as well as educational measures to change attitudes. The government has a duty to ensure that school staff are aware of children's rights, including the right to non-discrimination, and know how to ensure and respect the rights in practice.

Children as a group have the right to express themselves

In the case of actions affecting several children, what is in the best interests of this group must be a fundamental consideration. In order to find this out, children must be able to express themselves as a group, according to UNCRC Art. 3. This must be taken into account in the decision (UN Children's Committee General Comment No. 12 Section 73).

The UN Children's Committee writes in General Comment no. 14 Section 91: *When the interests of a large number of children are at stake, Government institutions must find ways to hear the views of a representative sample of children and give due consideration to their opinions when planning measures or making legislative decisions which directly or indirectly concern the group, in order to ensure that all categories of children are covered.*

Therefore, pupils in a school or in a municipality have the right to express themselves, for example when planning new measures that will affect them. The pupils must be included throughout the process. There must be "an active exchange of views between children and adults" (General Comment no. 12 Paragraphs 12-13 and 122).

ADVICE TO ADULTS IN SCHOOL

KNOWLEDGE FROM CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE



TALK TO MAKE IT SAFE

Here is advice given by young people on how adults in schools can proceed when they know that a pupil is queer, and the adult wants to understand and find out if there is something the adult can do to help create safety for the pupil. The advice can be used, for example, in pupil-teacher conferences, or in other conversations alone with the pupil.

BEFORE THE TALK

Ask if it's okay

- ask the pupil if it's okay to talk about it
- tell them why you want to talk to the pupil about it
- make it safe for the pupil to say no if they don't want to talk about it. For example by saying the pupil doesn't have to answer, and don't ask more if they say no
- ask when you are alone with the pupil and others cannot overhear

Make an agreement with the pupil

- ask the pupil where it's okay for them to talk
- ask the pupil which adult they would prefer to talk to
- ask if the pupil wants to include someone else in the conversation

DURING THE TALK

Good to say

- that it's perfectly normal to be queer
- that you will not share what the pupil tells you, with adults at home or someone in school, if the pupil doesn't want you to
- that you're happy for the pupil and support them
- that the pupil can speak up if the adult says or does something that feels bad or wrong
- thanking the pupil for sharing with you

Not good to say

- asking a lot or in detail about their sexual orientation, sex, or genitals
- that it's probably just a phase
- that the pupil may have been influenced
- that it's not true that the pupil is queer
- "how do you know you're queer?" or "why do you know that you are queer?"

Be open minded

- be curious about what the pupil says
- show that you want to understand how the pupil is feeling and what they're thinking
- show that you respect the pupil for who they are
- put away prejudices, so that you're open and do not judge the pupil
- show that you're listening, by asking follow-up questions and by explaining what you've understood of what the pupil is telling

Find out together with the pupil

- ask if the pupil wants the class to know that the pupil is queer
- ask if the pupil wants to tell the class themselves, or if you should do it
- ask if the pupil can give you advice on how to make it safe for them in school
- ask how the pupil identifies themselves and which pronouns the pupil wants you to use
- ask who knows that the pupil is queer so that you don't talk about it with someone who doesn't know

Have a safe body language and tone of voice

- have an open body language - keep your arms open and relax
- smile and be happy so that they can feel safe
- have a positive tone of voice, so that it becomes less scary to tell



SHOW SUPPORT

Here is advice given by young people on how adults in school can show that they support all pupils who are queer. When adults are supportive, it can be safer for pupils who are queer to be at school. It can also make it feel safe to go to the adult to talk. They can feel less alone and that they don't have to be on their own when bad things happen.

Use queer symbols

Symbols adults can use/display at school:

- display a rainbow flag, for example at the front of the class in the classroom or in the corridors
- wear rainbowbracelets
- wear rainbowpins/buttons
- wear a rainbowkey ring
- use stickers with rainbow flags or supportive words on them, for example around the classroom
- wear colourful clothes
- hang up posters with queer symbols or information about queerness
- hang up art by artists who are queer

How it can feel if adults use/display queer symbols:

- the pupils feel safe and included
- the pupils notice that the adult supports them
- the pupils notice that the adult cares about them
- the pupils feel they can talk to the adult about the topic

Be mindful of choice of words

- use the pronouns and name that the pupil wants
- use inclusive words, that show that you do not assume which gender or sexual orientation pupils identify with
- introduce yourself by name and pronouns
- learn enough about which words feel bad or hurtful to pupils who are queer, so that you don't use them yourself

Talk openly and normally

- talk nicely about being queer
- tell the class that you support queer people
- be open about yourself and your relationship to the topic
- talk about being queer as a normal thing, explain that people are different and that everything is okay and normal
- react in normal ways when pupils talk about the topic, don't talk about it as something big or different
- feel safe when you talk about the topic, so that it can also feel safe for the pupils when you talk about it

Use queer symbols

One of the things that made me smile was when I was in the teacher's room, one of the teachers had a pride flag in a small cup.

It can mean a lot, then I feel that there's a person I can go to if I need to share something. Or if I feel uncomfortable in class, there's someone I can talk to about it.

One thing that I've loved is that I've seen that you see that they're like wearing a rainbow pin on them, can be that simple, that you see that they're just wearing it.

Be mindful of choice of words

Emphasise that when you ask about someone's pronouns, it's important that you respect it and use it.

It's important that teachers don't assume that everyone is straight until proven otherwise.

When you talk about things in class, include things that are different from the norm. For example, when you talk about a family situation with mother, father, child, but rather bring in a kid, two mums and two dads, it doesn't have to be standard systems. Incorporate it into everyday sentences. Make it less scary that it's becoming normal.

If they come to a new class, new teacher, start by introducing themselves by name and pronouns. Be a good example.

They're helping to shape the youth of the future, and they have a lot of power in their hands. If they use that power and adopt practices like introducing themselves with pronouns, it makes it normal to talk about being queer.

Talk openly and normally

It's important that you talk about it in such a way that everyone is different, "you should feel confident in yourself and how you are". It creates safety, say that "everyone has the right to be themselves".

One of the nicest and best ways to normalise it is to be open, and teach young people from an early age that clothes have no gender, you're allowed to try different styles, pronouns, sexuality, test things out. You aren't stuck in anything.

Not like "now we're going to talk about homosexuality", but like "today we're going to talk about love, humanity, society". Be a bit more casual.

Teachers can from the beginning teach that there's nothing wrong with it, be a bit engaged. Talk about how it's not abnormal.

Take the "there are a lot of people who are rude, mean, you can be met in a way because some people have these prejudices, so it's important to be there for each other".



TALK WITH CLASSES

Here is advice given by young people on how adults in school can talk about queer topics in class. The advice is both about when the topic is talked about in the context of a subject, but also about how adults can bring it up to give information about it. The young people have given advice on how adults in school can contribute to normalising the topic, by talking about it often and in good and normal ways. It can create safety for pupils who are queer and help so that other pupils treat queer pupils well.

Use queer examples and themes in subjects

- teach about queer history and queer representation
- use short stories, films, books and assignments about queer people
- highlight news or other relevant things about the topic
- use or have available literature written by authors who are queer

A safe adult can talk to the class

- be open to input from pupils, ask the class if anyone wants to say something, or ask a pupil in advance if they want to help in the talk
- don't use a pupil as an example if they don't want to
- talk about it in an open and normal way, as you would talk about other topics
- familiarise yourself with concepts around gender and sexuality
- invite an adult who is queer to talk about it, if you don't know much about it yourself

Talk about it often

- talk about it regularly
- talk about what's okay to say to people who are queer
- talk about what's not okay to say to people who are queer
- teach pupils about different identities, in relation to both gender and sexual orientations
- give information about organisations and websites about and for queer people
- talk about stereotypes, prejudices and myths and explain what's actually correct

QUOTES

Use queer examples and themes in subjects

If they're not queer themselves, they can try to share a little of the stories other queer people have told, share a bit of the history and the fight for queer freedom and rights and stuff. And just show that it hasn't been an easy fight.

Use a queer couple in a maths problem, or a queer story in a short story, or an ethical dilemma in religion and ethics, include queer people, normalise them in other contexts, that you actually show that they're actually normal people who participate in society in other ways than being hated on.

I think that the queer fight can be integrated in many subjects, like social science. It's very natural to talk about it there, you have different commemorative days, like pride.

I believe that talking specifically about history, and talking about both queer history and kind of where we've come from, where we are, where the struggle is, make it visible.

I also think that we have classes where it's about discrimination and racism - I definitely think discrimination against queer people has to be included.

I just thought of one thing that could be nice to bring up, statistics on how many queer people there are out there, how many there are, and feel free to say "you might know someone who's queer" or "someone you know might be queer". To normalise it, then they'll realise that anyone around them could be queer.

A safe adult can talk to the class

It would also be nice if they do something like this, like me, I'm open about everything, that they'd taken some of us who are open about it, ask us what makes it comfortable.

They shouldn't point and say, "they and they and they are queer, so I think you have to talk nicely about it". Or "they and they thinks it's awkward when you whisper about it, so don't do it". They can say "there might be some queer people in the class".

Like anything else. Don't talk about it like it's supposed to be something special. Because it's not as special as people make it out to be. It's completely natural and a normal thing.

They should know the basics of gender and sexuality. At least the basic labels, like pan, bi, gay, lesbian - they are, after all, completely basic. And the basic genders, trans-man, trans-woman, non-binary, demi is probably one of the bigger labels as well.

Avoid saying "that's the way it is", "that's it", but based on what you know now and stuff.

Talk about it often

Normalises it a bit. That they actually bring it up in class and talk about it. If something with pride has happened, that it's normal, can just mention it.

It makes you feel safe, it can be easier to come out and be yourself, you may gain more trust in that teacher, maybe when it comes to other problems you have.

So if it becomes normalised you won't get such an overwhelming reaction. Then you can say I like girls and then "oh cool". As natural as liking boys.

They should tell about good websites. Tell them about websites where you can ask anonymously, because it probably isn't always easy to ask your parents about anything.

I think it's important to maybe address specific myths and prejudices that people often have. For example, specifically that this isn't a new thing, a brainwashing thing, that gay men aren't pedophiles.

If you hear about it, it can be like "so cool", then it becomes normal, realise that this is normal.

Talk about identity. Doesn't need to be just queer identity, but about other identities as well. Like Sami, some are Afghan, some like brown cheese better than white cheese, and where you come from.

We have those posters in the classroom, "it doesn't matter who you like, what skin colour" etc. It's a nice poster.

Just getting those words in front of you. Some are gay, some are lesbian, some are trans. Explain what it is.

If you as a teacher don't know how to do it, there's always a queer nearby who knows something. There are so many organisations. Skeiv ungdom, or FRI, who have Pink Competency, who talk about all things queer. So if you want to include it in your teaching, you can use a lot of other resources.

Bring up the fact that the class should be a safe environment for queer people.



ADVICE TO OTHER PUPILS

KNOWLEDGE FROM
CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE



TALK TO UNDERSTAND

Here is advice given by young people on how other pupils can proceed when they know that a pupil is queer, and they want to talk to the pupil to understand more. The advice is about how a talk like this can be done in safe ways for the pupil who is queer, and what is important for it to be safe enough for the pupil.

Ask if it's okay

- ask the pupil if it's okay to talk about it
- tell them why you want to talk to the pupil about it
- make it safe for the pupil to answer no. If they don't want to talk about it, then don't ask any more questions, talk about something else instead
- ask when others cannot hear you

Make it safe

- say nice things to the pupil both during and after the talk
- talk openly and normally about it, this can make it safer for the pupil to answer your questions
- talk about it when you're alone, so the pupil doesn't have to be afraid that others may hear
- do not share what the pupil says with anyone else, for example to others in school, without the pupil's consent

Ask about what you're wondering about

- put away prejudices and bad attitudes, so that the pupil can feel that you think completely openly about them
- ask concrete and direct questions, rather than making assumptions
- don't be afraid to ask, but make sure that it feels completely fine for the pupil to not answer, for example by saying that it's perfectly fine if the pupil doesn't want to talk about it

Show that you want to understand

- show that you want to know, for example by asking questions to understand more
- ask questions about what's being said, so the pupil knows you're listening
- smile and have a warm body language, so that the pupil knows you care
- don't do other things while you are talking, like being on your phone
- show that you have good intentions and that you will not use what the pupil says for something bad

QUOTES

Ask if it's okay and what you're wondering about

You could ask "I have some questions about so and so, is it okay if I ask those questions? It's okay if you don't want to answer".

Ask, "is it okay if I ask questions? Because I want to understand or know".

"Hi, I have some questions. I don't know much about this topic, so I might say something wrong, but if I do, please change what I said and correct me." Get the basics and then it's just a matter of talking a little.

Don't push even if you're curious, even if you want to know with good intentions, if the person doesn't feel comfortable, they shouldn't feel like they have to tell. Be a bit more open. And you can ask questions, but you should ask first if it's okay before asking the question.

If you feel the need to say "not to be rude" beforehand, stop. Then it's meant to be rude.

If you think, I don't know if this is OK to say, then you don't say it, and you look it up later.

Show that you want to understand

In general, to be respectful, show that you're curious and that it comes out of curiosity, not meanness.

Start with "I don't judge you, I support you".

The person asking can say "this will be between us and I won't share it with anyone". It should go both ways. The person sharing should say "I don't want anyone else to know this as well".

What I think is very important is to make sure that the person who tells you this knows that you still care about them. You should specify that "this doesn't change my opinion of you, you're still my best friend no matter what, I'm here for you no matter what". Too often people change their attitude towards the person in question. Important to specify that you're still you.

Instead of being prejudiced, they can ask like this "what does it mean for you to be of that orientation and be our friend at the same time? Are those overnight stays okay for you?". That there will be an understanding there, between everyone. That you just don't have those prejudices.

Try to show that you have good intentions and that you're not going to use it for anything bad.

In conversations like that, you say "thank you very much for sharing this with me. I really appreciate you opening up in this way". That you emphasise "I see this is difficult for you to talk about. I know it isn't always easy to talk about. It's entirely up to you to share, if you want to talk at all". It's such a small thing, but it does so much. It makes them feel more cared for.

Maybe say something like "thank you, you helped me, because I don't know much about it, so thank you very much for being so open and for conveying this so I can learn more about it". Because if you show me that you want to learn about this, and are interested in knowing about it, then you and the pupil leave feeling relieved.

Do it a bit in private. When people took me aside and said "I'm wondering about something, do you think you can answer it?" it was a lot more comfortable for me to answer, and easier to be open. Because there wasn't too much attention on me.



SHOW SUPPORT

Here is advice given by young people on how other pupils can show that they support queer people. How other pupils meet pupils who are queer, and how queerness is talked about, can mean a lot for queer pupils to feel safe in school. When pupils show that they support queer people, pupils who are queer themselves can feel safe around those pupils, and they can feel less left out.

Normalise it

- don't make a big deal out of it, for example by reacting big and dramatically, if the topic comes up, then the pupil may feel that it's abnormal or very different
- talk about it normally, don't say, for example, "my gay best friend" or "my friend, who is trans, has..."
- treat the pupil like before, for example do not start saying "slay" or drift away when a pupil has come out
- talk openly about it, so pupils who are queer notice that you think openly about it and that it's okay to talk to you about it

When something bad happens

- try to speak up, in a respectful way, to pupils who make bad or hurtful comments, by saying that it's not cool
- if it's serious and you don't dare to do anything there and then - talk about it with the pupil who is queer afterwards, and say that you know it wasn't a nice thing to say

Make it safe

- talk to pupils who are queer in nice ways
- tell pupils that you support queer people
- use the pronouns and name that the pupil who is queer wants you to use
- feel free to wear pride symbols, like pins or other items with rainbow flags on them
- celebrate pride even if you're not queer yourself
- learn something about queer history, organisations and terms - it can make it safer to talk to you
- include pupils who are queer in talks and activities
- talk about the love lives of pupils who are queer in the same way you talk about the love lives of pupils who are straight
- react kindly if a pupil who is queer says they like you, even if you don't like them

Be respectful

- don't use queer words as slurs, like "fucking faggot/lesbo/tranny" or "haha you're so gay because..."
- don't make fun of pupils who are queer
- don't ask personal questions, like "how do you have sex" or "what was your name before?"
- don't react badly, like getting angry or saying something bad about people who are queer, if someone asks you if you're queer

QUOTES

Normalise it

Just be yourself, don't make a big deal out of it. It's normal for a boy to like a boy, or a girl to like a girl. It's the same shit.

Feeling very small, not very important. Or that people change their behaviour towards you when you're queer. Or that you're shut out from your group of friends.

Kind of, just be the same old person, do the same things as before. Don't make a big deal out of it, it can get uncomfortable.

If you continue to treat me normally, it will be easier for me to talk to them properly. It becomes easier to build a relationship. But if you notice that they think very differently of you, it becomes very difficult to have a relationship with them.

I have an aunt who speaks normally to others, and then to me she says like "boys oh slayyy". She changes her personality to match mine and it gets tiring. It gets tiring, it's a lot.

Girls are very keen on having a gay friend, a gay buddy. They have to stop that.

When something bad happens

If you're afraid to say anything or step in yourself, give them an ugly look. Dare to look at them, give them a bitch face.

For me, it means the most to know what they think. Good if they stop it, but I would have cared more about what that person thought of me. As long as I know that's not what it's about, that they don't agree.

It sets a good example for others. And if I dare to say something, maybe she'll dare the second time and the next time, and then more. It becomes a bit easier to speak your mind without being shut out or criticised for it. If everyone just follows along and goes along with it, it becomes very difficult to speak up against the one who's leading the pack. It's cool to speak up.

It would be much easier to stand up for yourself, if others stand up for you too. Because then you don't feel alone, feel that if something goes wrong you have other people there who are with you.

It's about standing up when people say discriminatory things, say "that's not okay, what are you doing?" even if it doesn't affect you.

If you're in a group of friends, for example, and someone uses abusive language, say "no, don't do that". It shows that you're a bit of an ally. Standing up against injustice.

It's important that the pupils don't just start yelling and screaming, but ask questions "why are you saying this? where do these opinions come from?".

Dare to speak up if someone makes a comment. Say "I don't think that was a nice thing to say". You should be allowed to speak up against your friends without it becoming an argument.

I would be so happy and feel so safe with them and it would be really good, especially when someone has your back. It means so much.

It's bad enough to laugh along. I feel unsafe if someone just stands there. Come over and explain afterwards "I didn't mean to just stand there, I just freaked out" if it wasn't on purpose.

It creates a great sense of safety and reminds them that you have people around you who care, then you automatically start caring less about the uncomfortable comments.

Then that person sees that people care and that then they can somehow be convinced that it wasn't true.

Make it safe

When I've heard people who've talked about it in a completely normal way, it gives me a sense of safety and I know that they accept me.

The nicest thing is that they don't look at you differently after you come out, that they hang out with you like they did before, that they look at you exactly the same. It becomes important because then you feel taken care of, "okay I can be who I am, without making mistakes or making you uncomfortable".

Treat them the way you did before. And if you feel like I'm behaving differently or you don't know which words to use, talk to your friend about it.

Be very welcoming, and if you yourself feel like it, you can of course put up a pride flag or wear it as a piece of clothing or a bracelet.

Maybe they have a friend who doesn't have other friends to go to Pride with. And so even if you're straight, it's nice to be able to help that friend do what they want to do.

One thing is to just say it, if you know someone is queer, go up and say "hey, I think it's cool that you're queer, that you're open about it, I just want to say that I support you". It would've made me very happy.

Actually just say “you know what? we support you for who you are, you choose who you want to be, and we don’t judge you for who you are regardless of who you want to be”.

If it’s a boy you’re talking to, even if you know the person isn’t queer, don’t say “have you found a girlfriend?” just say “have you found a partner?”.

You feel warm in your heart, because you might have been uncertain for a long time, don’t know how friends take it, don’t know how anyone will take it. You’ve felt so alone, then they come and just say “you’re not alone, we like you for who you are”, then you’ll feel much better afterwards.

The most important thing for me is that they show commitment, like being part of the conversation, when something comes up about queer people. Talk to those who are queer in your class, and just try to show acceptance as best as possible.

Be a little more welcoming and open to different conversations, if you suddenly end up in a conversation about queer people or the girl who has a girlfriend, don’t back down.

They can also, if there’s a topic they’re unsure about, then they can ask people themselves, they can do some research themselves too.

Be respectful

You can’t tell if someone is queer, so you have no idea if the people you’re around are queer or not.

Instead of, for example, saying “you punch like a girl”, say “damn you’re so bad at punching”. There are many gender-neutral things you can say.

Avoid using discriminatory swear words. Many people don’t understand that calling people who aren’t gay gay isn’t okay. After all, it’s based on stereotypes, and it’s something to try to avoid.

As a queer person, if I hear pupils using language like that, I can never know if it reflects their attitude or if it’s just part of their vocabulary, but it signals more of a bad attitude.

There are a lot of people who throw comments and call each other names and all that, so they could at least stop doing that.

It isn’t fun and you can get hurt by it. You can become very uncomfortable and you don’t feel that you’re very welcome.

If someone has changed their name, respect that and pronouns. Don’t make it a big deal. The person is still the same.

BACKGROUND & DICTIONARY



BACKGROUND FOR THE ADVICE COLLECTION

Below are excerpt from two national action plans, a report from Save the Children and an article from the Norwegian Institute for Human Rights. The excerpts have been chosen because Changefactory thinks they are extra relevant based on what the young people in the advice collection have shared.

The Norwegian Government's Action Plan on Gender and Sexual Diversity (2023–2026)

<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/the-norwegian-governments-action-plan-on-gender-and-sexual-diversity-20232026/id2963172/>

“Norway ranks high among countries with a high level of equality. In 2022, Norway was ranked fourth on the rainbow map published by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Europe. Studies show that many queer people in Norway live good lives, and several advances have been made for queer people in Norway and in several other European countries. However, we still face major challenges.”

“Many queer people experience prejudice, discrimination and hate crime. ‘Homo’ is used as an insult in Norway, and transgender people, in particular, face a great deal of hate speech. We have some way to go before gender and sexual diversity is fully accepted in Norway, and before queer people can enjoy the same quality of life as the general population.”

[Some of the actions in the action plan are:]

- “Action 7 - Assess the need for schools to increase their expertise in gender and sexual diversity: The Government will consider the need for teachers to increase their expertise in LGBT+ issues and, if relevant, implement competence-raising measures in this area.”

- “Action 23 - Improve sex education that includes LGBT+: The Government will continue the ongoing work to support sex education in schools. In 2023, the Government provides basic funding for FRI (the Norwegian Organisation for Sexual and Gender Diversity), Pink Competency courses in schools and kindergartens, Queer Youth, Sex og Politikk, and the magazine Blikk.”

“A country is not truly free and democratic unless it guarantees the fundamental human rights of its citizens to be who they are and to live free, independent lives. We have yet to win the battle for a free, inclusive and safe society for all. In Norway, as well as elsewhere. Too many queer people do not enjoy a good quality of life and good living conditions. Many queer people have a connection to religious and belief-based communities, and some find their community’s view of their gender or sexuality challenging. Queer people from ethnic minority backgrounds can experience discrimination and marginalisation both because of their minority background and because they transgress gender and sexual norms. Transgender people frequently experience challenges in their lives, particularly in relation to mental health and discrimination. Homophobia and transphobia are also prevalent in sports. Children’s sports should be a safe arena for everyone, but unfortunately, this is not always the case. Across the world, we are seeing progress, but also serious setbacks to the rights of women, ethnic minorities and queer people. The efforts to promote gender and sexual diversity have an international perspective. Together with the other Nordic countries, Norway will take the lead in ensuring that human rights, freedom and diversity benefit all people equally.”

“Safety, diversity and openness” - The government’s action plan against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and gender characteristics (2021–2024)

https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/023227879f06471793113a7f116e71b9/210624-handlingsplan-lhbtqi_-.pdf

“The government’s vision is to reach the UN’s sustainability goals and achieve full equality through the inclusion of queer people and equal opportunities for everyone in Norway. The goal is to ensure that all queer people are granted their rights as they follow from international human rights and the Constitution, on an equal basis with everyone else. Norway will promote human rights and equality for sexual minorities and gender minorities internationally and include LGBTQ people in efforts to fight poverty and achieve the UN’s sustainability goals.”

“The overall aim of the education sector’s efforts for gender and sexuality diversity is that the provision in kindergartens and schools should be genuinely inclusive for all queer people, both children, staff and guardians. A kindergarten and school provision that is not inclusive can lead to queer children and young people having a reduced belief in their own possibilities, skills and self-worth, and is an obstacle to a good upbringing.”

“The school must take into account the diversity of pupils and make arrangements for everyone to experience belonging in school and society. We can all feel that we stand out and feel different. Therefore, we depend on differences being recognised and valued.”

“In the new curriculum for primary school the competence targets from social studies in the 7th grade can be used as an example of how the curriculum for the Knowledge Promotion from 2020 can contribute to promoting equality of lgbtiq people and people with variations in gender development. For example, students in social studies after the 7th grade should be able to: “reflect on variations in identities, sexual orientation and gender expression, and link their own and others’ boundaries to feelings, body, gender and sexuality and discuss what can be done if boundaries are broken”.”

Report from Save the Children: The rights of LGBTI children in Norway - Assessments and advice in light of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

<https://www.reddbarna.no/content/uploads/2021/01/Redd-Barna-rapport-om-LHBTI-barn-og-deres-rettigheter-i-lys-av-barnekonv....pdf>

“The Education Act requires schools to carry out continuous and systematic work to promote the health, environment and safety of the pupils, here under measures to promote the psychosocial school environment. Here, the school must work to prevent bullying and discrimination. According to the Discrimination Act on sexual orientation, schools are also required to work actively to prevent harassment.”

“Several surveys show that children who break norms for gender and sexuality are a vulnerable group when it comes to bullying and harassment. Bullying and harassment can come from both fellow students and adults, here teachers. “Faggot” is one of the most common slurs in Norwegian schoolyards, which speaks of a generally negative view of homosexuality. Research also shows that the use of the slur is linked to being “sissy”, and the slur is thus at least as much about gender expression as sexual orientation. Transgender people say that as pupils they experienced having the choice between either hiding their gender identity, or a school day characterised by bullying, harassment and violence. During the gathering organised by Save the Children, it emerged that several of the participants had negative experiences with bullying and harassment linked to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Several of the participants experienced a lot of sexual harassment, and that it was seen as a “fetish” to break the norms for gender and sexuality. In particular, they experienced many uncomfortable questions from peers related to sex and sexual preferences.”

Article NIM: Queer rights - Queer people as a human rights subjects

<https://www.nhri.no/2022/skeiv-rett-skeive-som-menneskerettslege-subjekt/>

“Human rights are universal. We all have rights, regardless of who we are. Queer people, like everyone else, have basic human rights according to, among other things, the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). These conventions are also based on the general human rights principle of equality and non-discrimination. Individual groups in the population have gradually also received their own international human rights conventions that contain special rights that supplement those that follow from the more general conventions. This has been done to strengthen vulnerable groups' protection against discrimination. An example is the UN Convention on Women, which gives special rights to women. Furthermore, the UN Convention on Racial Discrimination gives special rights to ethnic minorities, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities gives special rights to people with disabilities. In addition, children also have special rights according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Lesbians, homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender people, and others who break with society's expectations of gender and sexuality, do not have their own convention in the same way as many other vulnerable groups.”

“Also the more specialised human rights conventions have had an impact on the development of the queer human rights protection. Although it is not explicitly mentioned that queer people have any protection according to the wording of the Women's Convention, the Convention on Racial Discrimination, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, these conventions have also had an impact on the development of human rights protection for queer people.”

“Both the UN Women's Committee, the UN Committee on Racial Discrimination, the UN Children's Committee and the UN Committee for Persons with Disabilities have, in different ways in practice, taken up challenges that queer women, queer children, queer people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and queer people with disabilities face. They have done this both in general comments on how the conventions should be interpreted, in decisions in individual cases, and in recommendations to individual states.”

DICTIONARY

The definitions in this dictionary are collected from Kids Helpline dictionary (<https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/lgbtiq-ultimate-dictionary>)

Ally: a person who is part of a privileged group (e.g. heterosexual, cisgender, endosex) that is a friend, advocate or supporter for LGBTIQ+ people and their rights. An ally usually helps challenge heterosexism, cissexism and stigma towards intersex people by educating people in their lives. We can all be allies for each other.

Asexual/Aromantic: the sexuality of someone who doesn't feel sexual or romantic attraction, or may only feel it rarely (e.g. gray-asexual) or in some situations - like after developing a strong emotional bond (e.g. demisexual).

Bisexual: a person of any gender who has romantic and/or sexual relationships with and/or is attracted to people from more than one gender. Some people who fit this description prefer the terms 'queer' or 'pansexual', in recognition of more than two genders. Although 'bi-'technically refers to two, it is often used by people who have relationships with and/or attractions for people of more genders than just women or men.

Cisgender: people whose gender identity is similar to the sex assigned to them at birth.

Coming out: a term used by a lot of people to describe when they tell others about their sexuality and/or gender. This phrase is a shortened version of 'coming out of the closet' and has been around for over 30 years! Coming out means different things to different people. For some it's about coming out to the world. To others it's about coming out to people like friends or family. Lots of people talk about coming out more than once, because as you meet new people, they might not know how you identify.

Gay: people whose emotional, romantic, physical, and sexual attraction is to people of the same gender.

Gender binary: a term that describes the common assumption that there are only two genders people identify with: either male or female. The gender binary is one of the most difficult-to-change ideas in society, even though it excludes many people's life experiences and histories.

Gender expectation: the expectations others have about our assigned sex at birth that affects how we are told to behave. For those whose gender identity or expression is different to their assigned sex at birth, it can be more difficult to explore their identity because of these expectations, and the misunderstanding and discrimination of others.

Gender/Gender identity: our own understanding and experience of gender, despite what society expects. Our gender can be understood, experienced and shown through our identity (e.g. labels, pronouns), body (e.g. appearance) and expression (e.g. how you act, how you dress).

Heteronormativity: the way that people generally assume that others are heterosexual and think about the world from a heterosexual viewpoint or perspective. This means there is an expectation that being straight is "normal". Heteronormative attitudes and beliefs include believing that people should always be straight and only date the opposite gender to them.

Heterosexual: a formal label used to describe people whose emotional, romantic, physical and sexual attraction is to people of the opposite sex and gender. Heterosexual people may also be described as 'straight'.

Homophobia: any intentional forms of violence, threats and/or hurtful comments, thoughts or beliefs about people who identify as gay, lesbian or homoromantic asexual.

Intersex person or person with an intersex variation: a person is born with chromosomes, reproductive organs or genitals that don't fit the narrow medical or social expectations for what it means to have a male or female body. There are many different intersex variations. For example, a person may appear to have a male body but have mixed or mostly female reproductive organs inside or genitals that seem to be in between what is expected for a male or female body. Intersex people are assigned a sex like everyone else. In some cases, an intersex variation may be visible at birth. At other times, it may be discovered at puberty or later. Other terms that intersex people, their families and doctors use include having innate "variations of sex characteristics", "differences of sex development", or specific medical terms associated with a particular intersex trait or variation.

Lesbian: people who identify as female and are attracted to other females in a romantic, emotional, physical and/or sexual way.

LGBTIQA+ (communities or populations aka Queer Community):

stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans/transgender, Intersex, Queer/questioning, and Asexual – and is one of many acronyms that represent common sexual and gender identities and bodies in the community. The + symbol is used to show that there are many more ways to be gender, sexually or body diverse. There are many variations of this acronym. The term 'queer' community is common these days and used to describe sexual and gender identities because it is often seen as the most inclusive term of the many ways people can identify and express their identity (see queer definition). Remember that intersex is about bodies and not identities, and intersex people can be any age. Also bear in mind that not everyone who is LGBTQ or I is connected to a community.

Non-binary: someone's understanding and experience of their gender as being outside of the common belief that there are only two genders, either male or female. Some people also have a legal non-binary sex.

Pansexual: attracted to (or having the potential to be attracted to) people of any or all genders. Simply put, it means that someone's sex or gender doesn't factor into whether you find someone attractive or not – it might be whether they're intelligent, from a particular culture, or are good at sports.

Queer: originally meant 'strange' or 'peculiar' and became an insult against non-heterosexual people in the late 19th century. More recently, the word has been reclaimed by some people in the LGBTIQA+ community and may be used as an umbrella term for people who identify as sexually or gender diverse (see LGBTIQA+). Because 'queer' is an ambiguous word and can mean different things for different people, it is important to explore its meaning with someone before using it.

Questioning: the way we naturally question our sexual or gender identity at some point throughout our lives. It can be confusing stuff, but it's also pretty normal.

Sex (aka Assigned Sex/Gender at Birth): can mean many different things. It can refer to biological sex or sex characteristics. It can refer to assigned sex, and it can refer to a legal status on identification documents. For many people, the distinctions between these different ideas about sex don't matter. For intersex people, biological sex characteristics are more variable than typical for sex assigned at birth. For transgender people there is a difference between sex assigned at birth and gender identity.

Sexual identity/Sexuality: how you experience and express yourself sexually – including who you're attracted to and want to have emotional, romantic, physical and/or sexual relationships with. Sexuality is another word for sexual behaviour or someone's capacity to have sexual feelings.

Straight: a more casual label used to describe people whose emotional, romantic, physical and sexual attraction is to people of the opposite sex and gender (also see Heterosexual).

Trans/Transgender: people whose gender identity is different to their assigned sex/gender at birth. A transgender person may use different words to describe their identity, like trans/transman/transwoman, or may prefer to use male, female or other non-binary labels. There are also culture-specific words that some people may use because they are more appropriate or make more sense to them (e.g. Brotherboy and Sistergirl). 'Transsexual' is a medical label that was used in the past but is now less commonly used by people in this community.

Transphobia: any intentional forms of violence, threats, hurtful comments, thoughts and/or beliefs about people who identify as transgender, genderqueer or don't follow traditional gender norms.

CHANGEFACTORY KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Why knowledge directly from children and young people?

Children and young people have to feel that school, kindergarten, support services, police and the legal system are safe and useful for them. Children and young people all across Norway have experiences from meeting these systems and advice on how they can be the best possible. Authorities, professionals and students often lack this knowledge from children and young people, when frameworks and what constitutes good practice are to be determined, nationally and locally. Therefore, it must be brought in to a much greater extent and, together with other knowledge, be part of the knowledge base, in order to develop and ensure the quality of good systems for children and young people.

More than 10 years of collecting knowledge

For more than 10 years, Changefactory (CF) has systematically collected experiences and advice from children and young people about how they experience school, kindergarten, support services, the police and the legal system. In 2017, the Prime Minister opened Changefactory Knowledge Centre, to collect knowledge from children and young people about the public systems. As far as we know, there are few knowledge centres in Europe whose main purpose is to gather and disseminate knowledge directly from children and young people about the systems they are in. CF seeks collaboration with similar organisations.

Participatory and practice-oriented method

In order to collect, systematise and disseminate summarised experiences and advice from children and young people, a participatory and practice-oriented method is used. CF has called it the Changemethod. The Changemethod has been developed in close collaboration with children and young people. It greatly considers that children have the right to express their opinion, in ways that feel safe for them. The method consists of process descriptions and tools that help many different children and young people participate. It builds closely on a participatory method used in action research, called Participatory Learning and Action (PLA).

Safety is most important

The experiences and advice are collected directly from children and young people in sessions or interviews. The sessions are organised with an emphasis on ensuring that they are experienced as safe as possible for the children and young people who participate. The adults who facilitate are, among other things, trained by children to meet children and young people with openness and human warmth. This is based on the main findings from children and young people about what adults have to be like, in order for children to be able to tell honestly.

Experiences and advice are summarised

Experiences and advice from the sessions are documented in transcripts and other written and visual documentation. The data is summarised and systematised. No links are made to theory. Experiences and advice that are repeated by many children and young people in many places across the country, become the main answers. We call this knowledge directly from children and young people.

Children and young people present

The knowledge from children is presented in reports, films, podcasts, books and online. Participants in the qualitative surveys can also be invited, as pros, in communication and professional development. The pros present knowledge directly from children to politicians, national authorities, professionals and students.

Selected publications



Talking safely in school

Advice from 1962 children on what has to be done for children to be able to tell what's most important



Meet absence safely

Advice from 120 young people on how adults in school can meet children who are away a little or a lot from school



Life skills

Tools for the class LIFE SKILLS, a talking-class where children and young people get to practice putting feelings into words



Safe in class

Tools for a safe and good learning environment in grade 1-10.



Talking kindly

Advice from 900 children on how public health nurses can make it safe for children to talk to them



Angry on the outside hurting on the inside

Advice from 101 children on how to meet children and young people who are angry and use violence

