Effective Responses to Bullying Behaviour (ERTBB): Supplement

Supporting Schools when Responding to Bullying Incidents Involving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Children and Young People
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This guide to responding to bullying incidents involving lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) children and young people is designed to link into the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum’s resource, “Effective Responses to Bullying Behaviour” (ERTBB).

Staff using this supplement should refer to the linked ERTBB page references included in the text.

This document focuses on the considerations which staff need to bear in mind when addressing incidents of bullying behaviour involving an LGBT child or young person (or one who is perceived to be LGBT) in any capacity. This may include a child that is experiencing bullying behaviour or a child who is displaying bullying behaviour.

Context

Schools have a responsibility to protect children from “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” (Article 19, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).

The Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 requires all grant-aided schools to keep a record of all incidents of bullying or alleged bullying involving a registered pupil. This record must:

a) State what, from all the circumstances, appears to be the motivation of the incident;
b) State the methods of bullying; and
c) Include information about how the incident was addressed.

An LGBT child or young person is anyone under the age of 18 years old who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender. These terms are defined in the Glossary (p16).

Homophobic bullying is bullying behaviour directed at a child or young person because of their perceived or actual sexual orientation. Not all bullying experienced by lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) children and young people is homophobic bullying, and not all homophobic bullying is directed at young LGB people.

Transphobic bullying is bullying behaviour directed at a child or young person because of their perceived or actual gender identity. Not all bullying experienced by transgender children and young people is transphobic bullying, and not all transphobic bullying is directed at young transgender people.

This resource provides information on responding to bullying behaviour experienced by young LGBT people. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates that approximately 2% of the population over the age of 16 years old identifies as LGB. However, this rises to 4.1% when focusing solely on those aged 16-24 years old. Although some young people come out while in primary school, the largest number of LGB young people understand and come out about their sexual orientation around 11 – 13 years old.
The Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES) estimates that approximately 1% of the population are gender non-conforming to some degree, including transgender. Many children understand and come out about their gender identity as young as 4 years old, sometimes before entering formal education.

Research into the experiences of LGBT pupils in post-primary schools, commissioned by the Department of Education and published in September 2017, shows that:

- 48% of respondents had experienced bullying as a result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 39% of these had reported the bullying to school staff. 54% of these had felt ‘unsupported’ or ‘very unsupported’ by the member of staff’s response.
- The main forms of bullying reported in the research study were name calling (90%), lies or false rumours (70%), being isolated by other pupils (56%) and/or being hit/kicked/pushed/shoved around (28%).
- 38% of respondents said they were made to feel uncomfortable by teachers through their use of inconsiderate or derogatory language, taking a heteronormative approach, poor coverage of LGBT issues etc.
- 67% of respondents said they did not feel welcomed or valued within school as a result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

6% of young people surveyed had to move school because of how their school had managed issues relating to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, including bullying.

There was also concern voiced by young people around confidentiality. In particular, they articulated concern about how, without their consent, parents and carers could be informed of their sexual orientation or gender identity by school authorities and how this could pose a risk for some young people.
Also in 2017, Cara-Friend and Youth Action, commissioned by the Education Authority, published a report on research into the lived experiences of LGBT young people. The Still Shouting report (Neill & Meehan, 2017) explored the mental health impact of bullying and exclusion, finding:

- 68% of respondents reported experiencing bullying in school as a result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 36% of respondents said they believed they achieved lower grades because of how they were treated by staff and fellow pupils based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 11% said they had to change school, and 12% said they dropped out of school, as a result of bullying experienced on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 53% of young people surveyed had self-harmed because of difficulties around their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 61% said they experienced suicidal ideation because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 25% had made a physical attempt at suicide at some point because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Though there is some difference in the proportion of young people experiencing bullying (perhaps due to the different age ranges surveyed and the relatively low sample size in each) there is agreement between both reports that LGBT young people are more likely to experience bullying in schools in Northern Ireland, with significant negative impacts on their emotional health and wellbeing.
Safeguarding Policies

The positive behaviour policy forms part of the safeguarding suite of policies which includes the Anti-Bullying and Safeguarding Policies. These policies need to work together to promote an inclusive learning environment where all learners have access to high quality provision and can reach their full potential with support, if necessary, through the implementation of the school’s Special Educational Needs policy.

Anti-Bullying Policy

All schools are required to:

- Have an anti-bullying policy which forms part of the safeguarding suite of policies
- Have measures in place to prevent all forms of bullying behaviour among pupils
- Consult with registered pupils and their parents/carers on the development and review of anti-bullying policy
- Keep the policy under review

The Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (likely to come into force in 2019) requires grant aided schools to keep a record of “all incidents of bullying or alleged bullying involving a registered pupil” attending the school. The record must state what, from the circumstances, appear to be the method and motivation for the incident. Where a bullying incident is motivated by the pupil’s sexual orientation, or perceived sexual orientation, this must be recorded as homophobic bullying. Where a bullying incident is motivated by the pupil’s gender identity, or perceived gender identity, this must be recorded as transphobic bullying. For further themes see list included in the ‘Bullying Concern Assessment Form’ on Pg. 7 in ERTBB.

Defining Bullying

The Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) defines bullying as the repeated use of power by one or more persons intentionally to hurt, harm or adversely affect the rights and needs of another or others.

The Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 defines bullying as follows:
Bullying is a form of unacceptable behaviour, but not all unacceptable behaviour can be considered to constitute bullying behaviour. Bullying usually involves four key elements:

- It is intentionally hurtful behaviour
- It is repeated behaviour that happens over a period of time, however a one-off incident may be considered bullying in certain circumstances
- It involves an imbalance of power (not included in the legal definition)
- It is targeted – individual/group

All unacceptable behaviour must be challenged, whether it is bullying or not.

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Definition of “bullying”

1.—(1) In this Act “bullying” includes (but is not limited to) the repeated use of—
   
   (a) any verbal, written or electronic communication,
   
   (b) any other act, or
   
   (c) any combination of those,

   by a pupil or a group of pupils against another pupil or group of pupils, with the intention of causing physical or emotional harm to that pupil or group of pupils.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), “act” includes omission.
There are many different ways in which bullying behaviour can be displayed. This could include intentional, repeated, targeted behaviours such as:

- Being called nasty names, teased, made fun of, threatened or put down
- Being hit, kicked, punched, tripped up or knocked over
- Having belongings stolen or damaged
- Having rumours or gossip spread about you or people talking about you behind your back
- Being left out, excluded or isolated
- Being forced to do something you don’t want to do or know that is wrong

It is also important to know that bullying is not:

- A disagreement or a ‘falling-out’
- A one-off fight or argument
- Someone being ‘nasty’ through inconsiderate words or actions
- A ‘relationship’ issue, where pupils need to learn how to get along better
Whole school proactive strategies to help prevent Bullying of LGBT Young People

The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 both provide a legislative framework for anti-bullying work within schools in Northern Ireland.

The first step towards a whole school response to any form of bullying is its written policy and this should reference homophobic and transphobic bullying. Registered pupils and parents should be consulted in relation to the content of the anti-bullying policy.

Schools have a duty of care to children and young people, therefore it is imperative that they adopt a proactive approach to addressing cultural issues, helping to build an inclusive, anti-bullying ethos within the school. Young LGBT people are more likely to suffer from poor mental health, with such problems being attributed to social exclusion, loneliness and experience of bullying.

When schools adopt a neutral stance on LGBT bullying issues (e.g. failing to challenge homophobic or transphobic language) it is likely to worsen the experiences of LGBT children and young people in these environments. This, in turn, can lead to greater disengagement from education by LGBT young people.

The decision of who to tell about their sexual orientation, and when, rests solely with the young person involved. It is unacceptable for a school to require that children and young people be private about their identity at school where the young person has chosen to be open. To require this would be harmful to the young person’s personal development and their mental and emotional health and wellbeing. Furthermore, it could be in violation of Article 8 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which guarantees children and young people the right to an identity, and Article 2, which protects children and young people from discrimination based on that identity.

For transgender (trans) children and young people, inclusion and security at school can involve more than direct work to address bullying and exclusion. Trans pupils are likely to need adjustments to be fully comfortable in education, which may include coming out and/or transitioning at school. This should be done in consultation with these children and young people and their parents/carers on an individual basis to establish the best course of action.

Some children and young people may need to change names informally or formally at school, use different bathrooms, change uniform or make changes to participation in PE, for example.

The effects of bullying experienced by trans, non-binary and questioning children and young people can be worsened when they are unable to comfortably express themselves or use facilities at school, and this can compound the distress felt and problems encountered.
 Schools should:

- Recognise that LGBT children and young people may not be comfortable discussing sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This is a sensitive area which is part of the young person’s identity, as well as one which is personal and private. The child or young person may not even be fully sure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as it is an important part of personal development.

- Be aware that the child/young person may not have disclosed their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to their family, friends or peers, and that they may be actively concealing this information from them.

- Be mindful around language used with an LGBT child or young person (see Glossary p16). Allow them to self-identify, as an assumption around someone’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity may be incorrect or inaccurate.

- Ensure staff are equipped with the information and skills to support LGBT children and young people. This may mean identifying an LGBT Champion, who has responsibility for LGBT issues within the school, and to whom pupils can turn if they have concerns.

- Consider visibility of LGBT identities in the school. Are there openly LGBT teachers or staff members? Does the school mark LGBT events, such as Pride or LGBT History Month? Does it have a safe space LGBT club, such as a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)? Are there posters in the school promoting acceptance of LGBT identities? Visibility is important to make a child or young person feel that their identity is validated and accepted by the school. If not, this can be seen as giving tacit approval for bullying behaviours directed at LGBT young people.

- Be aware that the child or young person may come from a home which is unsupportive or unaccepting of LGBT identities.

- Be aware that there may be intersectional issues affecting the child or young person, such as behavioural difficulties, care status, disability, difficulties at home, etc.
Schools should:

**Have an Effective Anti-Bullying Policy:**
- Which meets current legislative requirements
- Which involves consultation with all stakeholders and active pupil participation in the decision making processes
- Ensures that a record is kept of all bullying incidents, interventions put in place and the outcomes achieved
- Determines, on the basis of evidence, possible method and motivation i.e. identifies the underlying theme which may include sexual orientation and gender identity

For further details about possible themes see list included in the ‘Bullying Concern Assessment Form’ on Pg. 7 in ERTBB

**Empower Bystanders by:**
- Developing their understanding of bullying behaviour and its impact
- Encouraging all pupils to work together to support the target and/or report the behaviour to school staff
- Enhancing playground supervision by staff and “buddies”

**Work collaboratively with Parents/Carers to:**
- Identify particular vulnerabilities
- Pre-empt possible difficulties
- Provide appropriate in-class support
- Ensure the child has access to the curriculum
- Foster pro-social behaviours where possible and where necessary
- Effect a smooth transition when moving from pre-school to primary school, and from primary to post-primary school

See ERTBB Pg. 5 for further guidance

**Have an Inclusive Restorative School Ethos which actively:**
- Promotes self-reflection and participation
- Develops positive relationships
- Focuses on restoration
- Celebrates diversity

See ERTBB pg.21 and pg.22 for restorative practices e.g. The Five Questions, pg.21; Worth a Rethink, pg.22
Responding to Bullying involving LGBT Children and Young People

Bullying involving LGBT children and young people is often targeted towards them because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. We know that between 48% and 68% of LGBT young people have experienced bullying in Northern Ireland on this basis. LGBT children and young people may be targeted in this way due to:

- Their lack of conformity to gender norms (i.e. a male is not ‘masculine enough’ or interested in traditionally male pursuits/hobbies, or a female is not ‘feminine enough’ or is not interested in traditionally female pursuits/hobbies).
- Their physical appearance, including their bodies and how they dress.
- Their behaviour and their interests (e.g. if they do not conform to gender norms).
- Their being perceived as simply different or ‘other’ due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Their being perceived as an ‘easy target’ as they may be socially isolated, perhaps without friends.

Bullying behaviour involving LGBT children and young people can occur:

- In all types of school.
- In the classroom or in the corridors.
- In changing rooms and toilet settings.
- Travelling to and from school.
- On school trips, in shared accommodation settings.
- In youth club settings.
Working in Partnership with Parents/Carers

When staff become aware of a bullying concern, consideration should be given to whether to involve parents/carers. This consideration is particularly important when responding to a bullying concern involving an LGBT child or young person.

Staff should be aware that:

- The young person may be out and open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to everyone, including their parents/carers.
- The young person may be out and open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to friends, but not to their parents/carers.
- The young person may not be out and open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to anyone.
- The young person may be fully supported by their parents/carers regarding their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- The young person may not be supported by their parents/carers regarding their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- The young person’s parents/carers may be hostile regarding their child’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Choosing an Appropriate Intervention

Interventions are grouped according to the severity level of the bullying behaviour. See ERTBB Pgs.16-19 for intervention details.

The main aim of an intervention is to RESPOND to the bullying behaviour that is taking place, RESOLVE the concern and RESTORE the well-being of all those involved. When considering an appropriate intervention schools should take account of:

- A range of matters pertaining to the incident
- The profile of the children involved
- The need to ensure the active involvement of the child in all aspects of the process including post-incident learning through self-reflection and self-assessment
When responding to an incident of bullying behaviour involving an LGBT child or young person, staff should take note of the following:

- If the bullying behaviour is directed at an LGBT child or young person and if, on the basis of evidence, it is motivated by their sexual orientation or gender identity, record it as such. This allows trends to be monitored and findings used to inform and guide practice.

- If contact with parents/carers is required this should be managed by the appropriate member of staff. Remember, while the pupil may be out and open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity at school, they may be concealing this from their parents. Schools should be careful to respect the privacy of pupils in such situations.

- Ensure that the young person who has experienced bullying behaviour is adequately looked after, remembering that while bullying can have a detrimental effect on any young person’s mental health, this is particularly the case where there are already issues regarding social isolation for an LGBT child or young person.

- Take time to listen to and hear the child or young person who is LGBT. An attitude of treating them as ‘just the same’ may make them feel invisible, which may compound issues around distress, loneliness or social isolation based on their identity.

- Ensure that support given includes support which can be accessed when not at school. This can include third party support providers specifically for LGBT young people.

- In promoting a restorative approach in response to bullying behaviour, the pupil experiencing bullying behaviour should be a key factor in selecting an approach that responds to their individual needs. This should be done by offering a number of solutions from which the most suitable can be chosen.

- Enable the young person demonstrating bullying behaviour to explore their actions to identify any factors that may have caused it. For a range of strategies, see ERTBB Pgs. 16-19.

Remember that in some cases, a multi-agency approach, involving community-based services, is appropriate.

Where records show an increase in bullying motivated by sexual orientation or gender identity, consideration should be given to the need for more targeted preventative strategies to address any underlying concerns relating to LGBT issues.
External Support Organisations

It is important to remember that there are many organisations across Northern Ireland which offer help and support in this area. A full list of these organisations, including contact information, can be found on the relevant pages of the NIABF website:

Homophobic Bullying - www.endbullying.org.uk/homophobic-bullying
Transphobic Bullying - www.endbullying.org.uk/transphobic-bullying
LGBT Children and Young People: A Glossary of Terms

There are a number of key terms which may arise when speaking to (or about) LGBT children and young people, particularly around the way a child or young person self-identifies. The table below lists some of the key terms along with additional information which schools should find useful with regard to understanding the sensitivities required when responding to incidents of bullying behaviour involving an LGBT child or young person.

Those children and young people who are unsure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity are often referred to as ‘questioning’ and are included in the acronym ‘LGBTQ’, which is often used interchangeably with ‘LGBT’.

Words, Identities and Terms

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<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Androgynous</td>
<td>A term used to describe an individual whose gender expression and/or identity may be neither distinctly ‘female’ nor ‘male’, usually based on appearance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asexual</td>
<td>A sexuality characterised by lack of sexual attraction or lack of a desire for partnered sexuality.</td>
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<td>Biphobia</td>
<td>The fear, hatred or intolerance of people who are bisexual.</td>
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<td>Bisexual (Bi)</td>
<td>A person who is physically, romantically and emotionally attracted to both males and females.</td>
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<td>Cisgender</td>
<td>A term used to describe people who, for the most part, identify as the gender they were assigned at birth.</td>
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<td>Closeted</td>
<td>Describes a person who has yet to ‘come out of the closet’, i.e. they are not open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.</td>
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<td>Coming Out</td>
<td>The process of telling someone about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It is not a one-time event as an individual must come out countless times over the course of their lifetime.</td>
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<td>Gay</td>
<td>A word used to describe someone of either gender who is physically, romantically and emotionally attracted to someone of the same gender. More often used for males attracted to males.</td>
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<td>Gender Expression</td>
<td>Refers to how someone expresses their gender. This may refer to how an individual dresses, their general appearance, the way they speak, and/or the way they carry themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>Gender Identity</td>
<td>An individual may have a gender identity which is different to, or the same as, their biological sex. Gender identity is a personal, deeply felt sense of one’s own gender. It is important to note that an individual’s gender identity is completely separate from their sexual orientation. Everyone has a gender identity, regardless of whether someone is transgender or otherwise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender Neutral</td>
<td>A term used to describe facilities that any individual can use regardless of their gender (e.g. gender neutral bathrooms). This term can also be used to describe an individual who does not subscribe to any gender (sometimes referred to as ‘Gender Queer’).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender Non-Conforming</td>
<td>A person who is, or is perceived to have gender characteristics that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations.</td>
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<td>Gender Role</td>
<td>A societal expectation of how an individual should act, think and/or feel based upon their biological sex.</td>
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<td>Heteronormative</td>
<td>The assumption that heterosexuality is the normal or default sexual orientation, with minimal or no consideration for bisexual and homosexual orientations.</td>
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<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>People whose physical, romantic and emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex (also known as ‘straight’).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>People whose physical, romantic and emotional attraction is to people of the same sex (see also ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homophobia</td>
<td>The fear, hatred or intolerance of people who are gay or lesbian.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intersex</td>
<td>People who naturally (without medical intervention) develop primary and/or secondary sex characteristics that do not fit neatly into society’s definitions of male or female.</td>
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<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>A woman or girl whose physical, romantic and emotional attraction is to other women or girls. Some lesbians identify as gay women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>A gender identity which does not fall into the traditional gender binary of ‘male’ and ‘female’. Non-binary is an umbrella term and can describe a wide range of identities and experiences.</td>
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<td>Outing</td>
<td>The act of publicly declaring (sometimes based on rumour and/or speculation, but often based on disclosures made) or revealing another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity without that person’s consent. This is considered inappropriate.</td>
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Supplement for Effective Responses to Bullying Behaviour (NIABF 2018)
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<td>Out</td>
<td>When someone is ‘out’ their sexual orientation and/or gender identity is not secret, and is disclosed comfortably by an individual.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>Not limited in sexual orientation with regard to biological sex, gender or gender identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pronouns</td>
<td>Pronouns are how we refer to someone in the third person, e.g. ‘he’, ‘she’ or ‘they’. If someone is transgender then their gender identity is different to the sex assigned at birth, so an individual may choose to be referred to using different pronouns to that of their legal biological sex.</td>
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<td>Queer</td>
<td>Traditionally a pejorative term, queer has been appropriated by some LGBT people to describe themselves. It is not universally accepted within the LGBT community and should be avoided unless someone self-identifies that way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>The process of considering or exploring one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>The term used to describe an individual’s physical, romantic and emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual (straight) orientations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trans or Transgender</td>
<td>An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Someone who was assigned male at birth may identify as female and therefore would be considered transgender. Note it does not have anything to do with alterations made to bodies, it relates to gender identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Transitioning is a process of changing one’s birth sex to more accurately align with one’s gender identity. It is a complex process which occurs over a long period of time. Transition can include some or all of the following personal, legal and medical changes: telling one’s family; changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents; changing pronouns; hormone treatment; surgery etc.</td>
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References


Gender Identity Research & Education Service
http://www.gires.org.uk/what-we-do/individual-help/

Post-primary school experience of 16-21 year old people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGB&T), Department of Education, 2017

Still Shouting: The needs and experiences of young people in Northern Ireland who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (LGBT), Cara-Friend & Youth Action, Gail Neill & Declan Meehan, 2017

Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

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