ACHIEVING GENDER JUSTICE IN EDUCATION:

A Guidebook



University of Windsor

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Education for Gender Justice Lab

This guidebook was developed building on the findings of the Achieving Gender Justice in Education research project. It is only possible because of the education leaders who generously contributed their time through interviews, and lengthy in-person and virtual consultations and communications over a period of several years.

It contains a collection of guidance notes that provide concrete strategies for how to enact gender justice leadership in educational spaces and navigate the challenges and barriers the research participants faced, punctuated by quotes and reflections from their interviews. These are accompanied by a series of practical resources to help educators get started. Each must be adapted by the educator using them to respond to the specific context of their region, school, or classroom. They are modelled off similar resources created by Glenn Thomas and the Equity Team at the Chignecto Regional Centre for Education in Nova Scotia.

Gratitude goes to all the research participants who shared their stories in the Achieving Gender Justice in Education project. We also gratefully acknowledge the input on these resources from Sheena Brennan and Dayanga Randeniya.

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SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

Educators working in gender justice can face challenges with those in leadership roles, whose support they are often dependant on. Below are guidelines for both educators and leadership to better foster safe and inclusive environments.

Addressing Gender Justice with Administrators

When working with leadership on gender justice, understand that administrators can be caught between doing what they believe in and following board policy. Leaders advised the following:

- Connect your gender justice work to policy and procedure within the school (board), curriculum, and human rights legislation;
- Establish dialogue, but provide scientific and/or academic substantiation and references to enhance your credibility; and
- Find support and leadership in alternate places like the union, other teachers, or in the community.

> "Many friends and colleagues have been able to avoid being disciplined [following a complaint about their gender justice work] because they are pointing to the policies and procedures that they are upholding." (Mia)

Leadership and Community

Many principals must deftly navigate a variety of conflicting interests while trying to maintain the vision for their school. In doing so, they can be accused of avoiding controversy.

Allen, K. A. (2025). School belonging: Evidence, experts, and everyday gaps. *Educational Psychology Review, 37*(84). https://doi-org.10.1007/s10648-025-10055-x

Kutsyuruba, B., Klinger , D., & Hussain, A. (2015). Relationships among school climate, school safety, and student achievement and well-being: A review of the literature. *Review of Education, 3*(1), 103–135. doi:10.1002/rev3.3043

Nowrouzi-Kia, B., Chan, H. Y., Zhu, S., Nandan, S., Bani-Fatemi, A., Howe, A., Gross, D. P., Gohar, B., Yazdani, A., & Chattu, V. K. (2025). Examining the prevalence and effects of gender-based violence in academic settings: A systematic review and meta-analyses. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, *26*(4), 755–768. https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380241289436

UNESCO (2015). Gender-based violence in and around schools prevents millions of children worldwide from fulfilling their academic potential. Education for All Global Monitoring Report. Gender-based violence in and around schools prevents millions of

Vanner, C., Holloway, A., & Almanssori, S. (2022). Teaching and learning with power and privilege: Student and teacher identity in education about gender-based violence. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *116*, Article 103755. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103755

"Wanting to be told what the script is so that they won't get in trouble, the amount of times I've heard 'OK how do we do this work and be inclusive and do all the nice things for the kids and not get into trouble?' And then I laugh because I'm like, 'You can't. You need to know your why and stand your ground and recognize that conflict will come. It doesn't mean you have to be mean to people who don't think like you, but there's no way around it.'" (Evelyn)



Educational leaders had the following recommendations:

- Build gender justice into policy, protocols, and procedures to systematize your stance so that all educators have a clear understanding of expectations;
- Balance community needs with curriculum expectations;
- Take responsibility and advocate for gender justice rather than passing it to superiors who may not see the importance in your school or region; and
- Train all levels of leadership to be aware of key concepts related to consent, equity, and inclusion.

"We decided that consent culture needs to be part of the trustee training this year. If you think about it... they're in the expulsion hearing meetings and if they don't know what sexual assault is, but they're deciding and hearing a case of sexual assault, then they could be making some really negative impactful decisions for students and their families." (Vanessa)

Support Staff as an Administrator

Leadership support is integral to the success of gender justice work. Suggestions to support staff include:

- Show vulnerability as a means of connecting and to promote collaboration;
- Acknowledge when staff needs a break from gender justice work, and identify how it can be sustained without their involvement;
- Follow up with teachers or staff after PD to discuss how to sustainably support the implementation of new ideas or strategies in your school or region;
- Encourage other admin and staff to read up on gender justice;
- Seek the support of other staff when you call out bias or focus on gender justice;
- Find common ground with staff to promote community;
- Go beyond dialogue and create opportunities to implement action; and
- Get used to having open communication about gender and equity.



"If the principles of consent culture are in their school, principals have to document that and show their superintendent the wins. Successes, challenges, impacts... qualitatively most likely through their school improvement in equity plan, which the principal is accountable to show the Superintendent and then beyond as we look for systems data." (Vanessa)

Policies and Procedures

Mentorship, allyship and engagement were widely cited as integral for gender justice work. Leaders advised:

- Racialized leadership conveys shared lived history and experience to racialized staff;
- Address discrimination in the moment so that all students and staff see it is not tolerated. When the opportunity to do so is missed, revisit it and model reflexivity;
- Make workshops mandatory for all staff and administrators to demonstrate their priority;
- Establish re-entry procedures for disciplined students that protect gender justice of targeted students;
- Encourage and host gender justice groups;
- Exemplify allyship;
- Attend the professional development you organize;
- Identify opportunities to address gender justice throughout the curriculum, not just in health education;
- Establish accountability mechanisms for policies and programs; and
- Document gender justice success stories to build an evidence base for superintendents, school boards, and other influential stakeholders.

"I taught grade 10 Religion and I was talking about like, just how to use proper pronouns and how to be respectful. And then the very next day I have to have an in-person meeting with a parent about why I was teaching pronouns. My principal and my superintendent backed me in that conversation." (Nicole)

Email Template: Reaching out to an Administrator to Propose a Gender Justice Activity

Dear_____:

I write to request assistance with an activity I would like to initiate. In accordance with our provincial human rights laws (insert link), and our provincial curriculum that encourages the visibility and discussion of inclusive practices surrounding gender (insert link), I would like to propose a gender justice activity in our school. (If this idea was brought to you by a student or if you have seen it work well in another school or community, explain here.)

Our school policy on inclusion (insert link) highlights a welcoming and safe environment for all, yet some students in our classrooms have said they do not feel safe. Students have reported to me that:

- (Insert complaints, outlining specific stories and concerns but without naming specific students
- Provide locations within the school or community if they are pertinent, like in the library, washrooms, isolated quiet halls, under-supervised or unsupervised areas nearby like a field or corner store so administrators can identify problem areas.
- Identify times that tend to be more problematic)

To begin to address these issues, I would like to (Suggest your proposed activity. Identify members of the community or other staff willing to help. Clarify student involvement and impact. Explain whether there will be a leadership role for students and how you would support them.) This kind of activity would help achieve better connections with our students and the community at large and provide a direct response to the issues I'm observing.

I would appreciate your point of view on how we can improve and support gender equity in our school with this initiative. I am free at your earliest convenience to discuss these proposals.

Sincerely,

Sample Email to Principal:
Whole School Approach to Address Misogyny

Dear _____,

I write to seek your assistance with a pressing issue that I believe deserves a whole-school approach. I was recently approached by a group of students (not currently in my class) seeking guidance. They came to me expressing their fears and anxieties about the treatment of girls in their classes, the hallways, and the lunchrooms: the entire school. They complained that boys, using sexist and violent language, are targeting girls. They describe being jeered at and belittled, and feel physically intimidated. Feeling unsafe and unsure how to handle the situation, they came to me for help. They deserve our assistance, and I will offer my support, but my help alone will not change this much larger problem. I believe these boys are being influenced by radicalizing messages from the manosphere. The manosphere is an online mobilized network of far-right men that believes women systematically subjugate men.[1] It targets lonely young men and boys and attempts to radicalize them by promoting strict gender rules, and inciting them to enact violence against women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.[2] Even before this outreach from my students, I noticed an increase of sexism and misogyny over the past few years.

I would like to work together to develop a school-wide plan, as research shows that attempts to shift school culture are most effective when they are consistently communicated from people across multiple levels of the school. A whole-school approach will demonstrate and enforce that misogynistic behaviour will not be tolerated here at _____. I have been reading helpful research that stresses the need for whole-school approaches to gender justice (insert links or add as attachments).[3] Developing a well thought out strategy will sustain a supportive and safe environment for all students in our school community and bolster teachers and staff as they address these concerns in their respective areas.[4]

First steps could be to assemble a team that represents the different roles and spaces in our school. This could include teachers of various grade levels, resource teachers, nursing staff, library staff, guidance, custodial and support staff, administration, and student representatives. Together, we can identify what guidance and resources are already available and how we can reinforce it. We can then build on that to develop a strategy that clearly defines and assigns roles and responsibilities without overburdening any one part of the school team. I understand that this is a big request and that we are already working at capacity. I strongly feel, however, that this is an urgent issue that should be prioritized to ensure the safety and equity for all students and staff.

Such an approach would benefit our community and would go a long way to enhancing student safety, well-being, and belonging in the school. I look forward to discussing how we can collaborate on this initiative.

Sincerely,

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[2] Morales, E., Hodson, J., Chen, Y., Gosse, C., Mendes, K., & Veletsianos, G. (2024). "You did it to yourself": An exploratory study of myths about gender-based technology-facilitated violence and abuse among men. *Sex Roles*, *90*, 1521–1533.

[3] Joyce, A., Ollis, D., Kearney, S., Leung, L., & Foenander, E. (2019). The influence of contextual factors on implementation fidelity in a whole school approach to prevention of violence against women. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, *30*(2), 238–245. https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.198

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Reimer, K.E. (2020). "Here, it's like you don't have to leave the classroom to solve a problem": How restorative justice in schools contributes to students' individual and collective sense of coherence. *Social Justice Research,* 33, 406–427. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-020-00358-5

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[4] Howard, A., & Keddie. A. (2023). Gender justice within elite all-boys schools? Possibilities of a whole- school approach. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education, 125*(7–8), 308–333.

Kearney, S., Leung, L., Joyce, A., Ollis, D., & Green, C. (2016). Applying systems theory to the evaluation of a whole school approach to violence prevention. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, *27*(3), 230–235. https://doi.org/10.1071/HE16046

Westcott, S., & Roberts, S. (2026). *Schooling misogyny: Exposing and eliminating the influence of the manosphere in education settings.* Routledge.

CALLING IN VS. CALLING OUT

To make connections that will advance gender justice work, educational leaders made distinctions about how and when to encourage connection with staff, students, and community and when to set boundaries. They distinguish between calling out, i.e., singling somebody out based on their behaviour, and calling in, i.e., inviting somebody to consider their choices and options. Both may be appropriate at different times.

Calling In

Lead by Example

Demonstrate appropriate behaviours and practices for students and peers to model. Model consent and lifelong learning:

- Connect current events to structural gender issues;
- Make gender issues personalized. See students as people first;
- Talk about what seeking help looks like;
- Have personal and respectful conversations. Encourage journal writing to explore thoughts and feelings;
- Identify and make connections with allies; and
- Offer alternative choices for lessons to respect differences. Let students lead the direction at times.
- Identify and make connections with allies; and
- Offer alternative choices for lessons to respect differences. Let students lead the direction at times.

"Every group that I've run [with boys], it's always come back to some of these pressures that we face can be mitigated or lessened or dimmed a bit by seeking help and what seeking help looks like can be reaching out to a friend or kids help phone or a counselor or talking to your trusted adult at home." (Ryan)

"Coming from an empathy point of view, saying OK to help, get out of those situations. Because unfortunately, when you're in those situations, you respond to what you're most comfortable with and what you feel has worked. And a lot of times with these subjects, those [impulsive responses] are the wrong ones." (Simon)

"So it could be like identifying ranges in gender identity, it could be masculine traits or that sort of thing [describes activity showing range of gender identities written on separate papers]. So it wasn't just, let's pick them up, put them away and they're done. It's "well, I have a question about this one" or that 'somebody put this one over here, but maybe I'm thinking it to go a little bit further over here.' So even though the lesson was completed, they were continuing the lesson themselves and they were really kind of questioning some of the decisions other people made." (Dawn)

Lead with Empathy

- Offer help and suggestions to staff and students with compassion. Take time to build trust.
- Use case studies to encourage empathy; and
- Change interactions: share food, go for walks to talk, have several meetings to foster closeness.

In building relationships, teach people to be more agile in their thinking. Offer opportunities to compromise and reflect on differing perspectives.

- Amplify diverse voices to combat dominant messaging; and
- Create engaging and thought-provoking exercises that get people questioning their beliefs.

Several leaders use **circle structures** to encourage safe, confidential, comfortable spaces to share and communicate. Guidelines include:

- Having honest vulnerable conversations to explore our biases; and
- Positioning conversations about difference as basic human respect.

"In order for a system to change, for us to have space for new ways of thinking and new ways of being, we have a lot to let go of. I think that that is part of this process too, is like encouraging people to...We don't have to cling so tightly to things. And if we just let go a little bit, and a little bit more, there's just so much more room to really, truly be there for each other. " (Gene)

Systemic Changes

To cement safe environments, leaders suggested system wide changes. Let go of doing things just for the sake of following historical protocol:

- Welcome overlap in separate social justice-oriented student and staff groups: find commonality and connections;
- Work as teams to address gender issues;
- Create protocols to act as guidelines for educators;
- Discourage performative actions by asking about next steps, action items, and accountability mechanisms;
- Encourage meaningful change even if small;
- Highlight the intersections between different forms of equity, privilege, and oppression; and
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities, individual needs, and appropriate supports.

"I'm also part of the correction and renewal facilitator program, which is where we have circles that talk about the inner teacher using Third things, which is not about race, not about gender, just about being human. Coming together and holding each other in a space where we can take care of one another while you're expressing your spirit. What I like about these circles is that we all know that we have the answer within ourselves." (Chicahua)

Recognize the **connection between gender justice and decolonization**. Accept responsibility to learn, ground, and consider how to connect gender justice activism with the current needs of local Indigenous communities. Include a diverse range of people in policy making and decisions throughout the process to demonstrate community and collaboration and to encourage trust and authenticity.

"We spoke about scope of practice: what is a teacher's job, what is a social workers job, what is a child and youth workers job. How to have warm handoffs when something that is being presented to you is beyond your scope? While, at the same time, deep pathologizing gender diverse identities. So, recognizing that just because someone is gender diverse or queer in another part of the umbrella, that doesn't mean that they'll necessarily need mental health support, but where they might be out at school and not at home, having some supports in place is really necessary." (Evelyn)

Calling Out

Address discriminatory comments in the moment. Name and examine harmful language or behaviours. Some strategies suggest to

- Model how to appropriately and calmly address bias;
- Educate how words can build people up rather than tearing them down;
- Share how to look up definitions of certain harmful words;
- Explain why gender policies exist;
- Encourage students not to engage with topics that do not affect them;
- Frame conflict as an opportunity for a productive conversation;
- Quote authorized sources to support your arguments;
- If you offer a safe space, you must police it and enact disciplinary action with consequences;
- Set disciplinary action and follow through; and
- Have conversations about (in)appropriate behaviour and language beginning in elementary school.

"We don't have gender studies or equity studies or anything here, but even at the early early age of six and seven, we have opportunity to use the right language to support positive behaviours, especially with our young boys... how can we use [a challenging incident with a young child] as an opportunity to teach others, versus seeing it as an outburst because he doesn't know his boundaries." (Alexandra)

"You have to. You can't let a kid go around talking about Andrew Tate. I just said, 'He's a criminal, he's in jail, he trafficked women.' They're like, 'What's trafficking?' I said, "Selling women,' and I didn't say for what. And I'm like, 'We know that selling people is not the right thing to do,' and they're like, 'No.' 'So don't watch his videos anymore.'" (Danielle)

Hypothetical Calling In Script: Being Respectful re: 2SLGBTQIA+ Inclusion

Student [entering class after passing a pride table in the hall]: Why do they have to shoot off their mouths and make such a big deal about it?

Teacher: Who's making a big deal about what?

Student: Miss, they had a whole table set up and were bribing people with candy and rainbow stickers.

Teacher: Bribing people?

Student: Yeah, they would give you candy and stickers if you stopped to talk to them.

Teacher: Did you have to stop and talk?

Student: No.

Teacher: What do you think they were there to talk about?

Student: Gay rights or some stuff.... I don't care.

Teacher: Why do you think they would want to talk about that?

Student: I don't know. They want everybody to be gay?

Teacher: I don't think it's about changing other people to be gay. Maybe they just want to feel like they belong. And for cis and straight people to recognize that their behaviour can impact queer people's ability to belong. Even though their rights are protected under our human rights laws just as much as yours are. They still have to fight so people know that.

Student: Why do you care?

Teacher: I care because every student is a person who should feel safe to be themselves. We all have hopes and dreams and school should help us achieve them. But it's harder to learn if you feel scared or like you don't belong.

Student: But they're trying to turn us gay. Nobody in this class is gay.

Teacher: Well, someone might be. Statistically speaking there probably is. Maybe they just haven't shared that with you. But there are people in this room who have allergies and they talk about it with others. I know at least one kid *in this class* who's allergic to dairy. Are they trying to turn you allergic?

Student: No, that's dumb. Being allergic to something isn't a choice.

Teacher: You're right, it's not. You just accept that part of their identity because it doesn't affect you. Do you get mad at them and scream at them for not drinking milk, or are you still friends, or at least acquaintances, regardless?

Student: It's not something they chose. We don't need to fight about that.

Teacher: Right, so why is someone's sexual orientation different? It's just one part of who they are. It doesn't hurt you in any way because they're not trying to change who you are. You don't have to talk about how much you hate it. You don't have to eat the same thing or be attracted to the same type of people. You can just accept it and go about your own life.

Email Template:
Inviting Guest Speaker on Gender Justice Issue

(Use School Letterhead)

Dear (Insert Guest speaker's full name. Avoid using a prefix such as Mr., Ms., Mx., Dr. unless you are sure of their gender identity and professional designation):

(Introduce yourself and explain what your school/class has been working on in connection to the issue you're inviting them to speak about.) We are excited to invite you to participate as a learning partner in our (insert title of program or event. For example, "Celebration of Gender Justice Day" or "our exploration unit on gender justice in Manitoba") at (insert school's name) on (insert date of event). The work you do on (insert specific reference to recipient's role and/or activities) is of great importance to school's efforts. Your valuable expertise and contributions to the community will provide a unique opportunity for students' understanding of gender justice initiatives right here in (Insert community name).

Our school policy highlights the importance of gender equity throughout the curriculum and our everyday lives. We try to foster a safe, welcoming, and tolerant space for all. I will include that policy as an attachment for you to reference should it be pertinent to your focus (attach file). In preparation for your (insert time required of the speaker) presentation,
(You can say, for example:)
· I include an attached agenda for our program for the day;
· I have attached the lesson plan for the previous day to illustrate students' prior knowledge. Contextualize where your students are; or
· Here is a link to the gender justice initiatives at our school (insert link).

It would be an honour to have your perspective shared with staff and students on how gender justice operates in our community and connects to our population here at (Insert name of school).

Identify the time of day their presentation would occur, the size of the audience they would be speaking to, student grades, resources and materials that would be available, and whether you would like it to be interactive or if this is something you would leave up to the guest speaker to decide. Specify whether an honourarium is available and whether costs such as transportation can be covered.[1]

We hope you will consider joining us for this enriching experience. Kindly confirm your participation by (insert deadline for RSVP). Your contributions will be of great value to our students, staff, and broader community.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please reach out with any questions or concerns. We look forward to the possibility of welcoming you to our school.

Best regards,
(Insert signature line with contact information)

[1] It is appropriate to plan a small thank you gift in appreciation of their time and effort. Some schools offer commemorative items, or you can write a card which may include a modest gift card. Speak with the students beforehand about appropriate behaviour to ensure you are welcoming the guest speaker to a safe environment. Check with your administration before inviting them and again to inform them when the guest speaker is confirmed, indicating their date and time of arrival and ensuring someone can meet them when they arrive. Communicate with the guest speaker afterward to inform them of any outcomes in terms of follow up activities or conversations with students that emerged from their visit.

Hypothetical Teacher-Student Conversation about Trad Wives

Student: I'm going to be a trad wife like Hannah from Ballerina Farm.

Teacher: What does being a trad wife mean?

Student: They stay at home with the kids and are taken care of by their husbands. They are in control of the household and the kids. My husband will provide for us and protect us. I'm going to raise my kids and be there for them all the time. I'm going to make healthy food from scratch that I raise in my own garden and on my farm.

Teacher: It's an amazing thing to want to be there for your family. Growing and making your own healthy food also sounds fun and exciting. Complicated though! Farms require a lot of manual labour and technical training. There's often no mentorship to teach you how to do things like cooking, gardening, cleaning, and taking care of livestock... all while raising children.

Student: I'll figure it out. I can take classes or watch YouTube videos. If my husband makes a lot of money, he can even hire someone to do the manual labour, but it can't be that hard. Women have been staying home and raising families since the dawn of time. It's tradition and honestly, we should be making our husbands and kids the priority. We've lost that and our society is horrible now.

Teacher: What do you find scary about our society now?

Student: Our families are falling apart. Nobody is there for each other, and everybody is so alone. I want to be there for my family. I want to make a home for them. I want them to feel safe and loved.

Teacher: That vision sounds beautiful. I want that for my family too. I wonder if it's possible to have those things without being reliant on another person. In previous generations, many women had more time at home, but it came at the expense of their independence. My mother in Canada, for instance, couldn't have her own bank account until 1964. Even if she had a job, the account had to be shared with a male family member.

Student: Yeah, but they didn't need to work or make money because their husbands took care of them.

Teacher: That does seem easier, doesn't it? But working inside the home is very hard work—especially if you don't have any help. A lot of women *did* have to work outside of the home in addition to taking care of their families and running the household. Women from middle- and low-income families couldn't afford *not* to. That's still the case for many families.

Student: My grandmother stayed home. She wasn't rich.

Teacher: Mine neither. And their family had a hard time getting by on my grandfather's income. Having one income was—and still is—a big struggle for lots of families.

Student: Dad says, "Struggle is what helps us succeed."

Teacher: I agree with him. We learn from our struggles and if we can persevere and push through them it often makes us stronger. But sometimes they can pile up and it can be hard to get past them, especially when you're not in control of the situation. That's what happened to my grandmother. When my grandfather died, she couldn't pay the bills and she had 5 kids to take care of. The struggle was often overwhelming for her. In a trad wife household, who controls the money?

Student: Well, in mine, we both will. I will have a say because my boyfriend respects me. I hate being told what to do, especially with my money. I will work at home just as hard as he works at his job. We are a team. It's OUR money.

Teacher: That is a really balanced attitude and approach. I think prioritizing that balance is super important. Because what happens when only one person controls money? Does that affect who gets to make the decisions?

Student: Yeah, I don't want somebody constantly telling me what to do like my parents do. Every time I leave the lights on, my mom yaps about how much money she pays: "My house; my rules." I want to be treated right. As a trad wife I can stay home and do things on my own schedule.

Teacher: It sounds like being in charge of your own space is important to you. What else do you like about the life of trad wives?

Student: It's a simpler life getting back to focusing on the family. But also, I love the dresses and the aprons...and getting time to do things with my kids. It's legit everything I want.

Teacher: I love spending time with my family too. And you should definitely wear dresses and cute aprons if it makes you feel good. Anything you don't like about that lifestyle?

Student: Well, there isn't like one box that trad wives fit into. Like, some say we should be obedient to our husbands and stuff. That part is not for me. I don't want to be under someone's control. I am just as smart as my boyfriend, maybe smarter. I want to stay at home, yeah but I want to be treated like an equal. I don't want to be told how to live my life or what to think.

Teacher: Fair. Like a partnership?

Student: Yeah, like based on what we both want and what we agree is best for our family. But I still want to dress like that!

Teacher: Go for it.

MYTH BUSTING

Staff, parents and students can perpetuate harmful and mistaken messages about gender in their community and schools. Educational leaders offer the following strategies for confronting, examining, and challenging biases.

Confront Bias

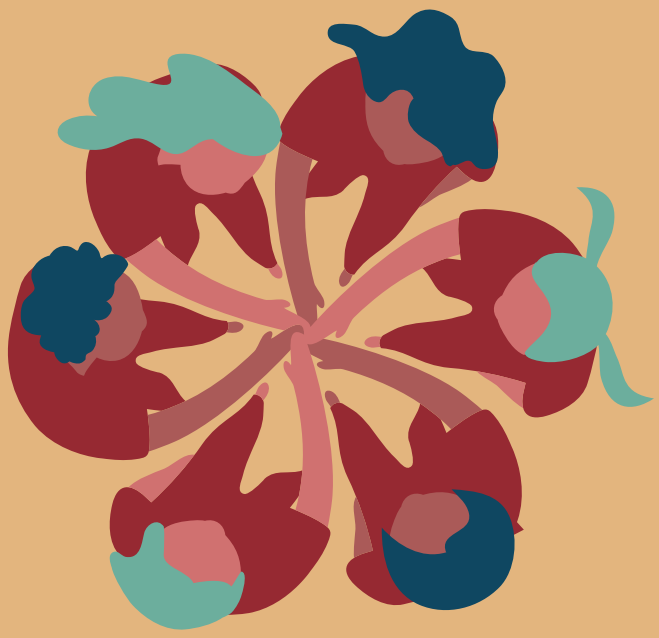
Regardless of the person spreading misinformation or hateful speech, it is necessary to address concerns immediately. Some suggestions:

- Consistently debunk myths;
- Confront harmful and incorrect gossip;
- Discourage those who associate schools with specific cultural identities like the "jock school" or the "arts school"; and
- Normalize inclusion by refraining from unnecessarily highlighting a specific interest group.

Challenge people to intellectually examine their bias. Educate people on their misinformation. Some recommendations are:

- Personalize biased situations, asking people to imagine themselves in that situation;
- Use statistics to support your actions and policies;
- Approach misinformation with inquiries of genuine curiosity; and
- Use facts and cite sources to counter biased or ill-informed opinions.

"And it was always 'straight and queer,' over and over. And my impression was that the guest speaker was trying to create an inclusive dialogue but for students, they [students] actually said that it was too much emphasis on saying 'and queer relationships" when it wasn't something that was specific to queer relationships. So they really thought the emphasis should just be relationships, and the only time that queer relationship should be mentioned was maybe if talking about like the threat of being outed when there's a breakup or something like that." (Amanda)



"Misogyny and sexism are not allowed in this classroom, period. And so, with me saying that there's a space for curiosity, there also needs to be a space for discipline, and there also needs to be a space for being stern and shutting that hate down." (Mia)

Address Myths in the Classroom

Tactics specifically tailored for the classroom also include addressing concerns firmly, immediately, and with an inquiry-based approach. To create a safe community within classrooms, leaders proposed:

- Celebrate and normalize diversity for your students through curriculum and resources;
- Explore identities with your students;
- Foster conversations that allow students to safely explore their assumptions;
- Set up classroom rules that prohibit hateful bias;
- Address bias outside the classroom;
- Normalize talking about difficult issues;
- Accept people for who they say they are;
- There is no opt-out for supporting human rights;
- Bring in guest speakers to humanize topics; and
- Consistently discipline those students who promote hatred and bias;

Examination of biases can start with students. Don't hide from difficult topics: examine and critique them openly. Some options are:

- Have students generate topics of discussion to promote ownership and agency;
- Have students generate personal responses to scenarios;
- Help students critically examine gendered language bias;
- Use games or exercises to challenge biases students see around them; and
- Discuss scenarios and frame them as if the person involved were a loved one.

"So there was a lot of positive that came from going really slowly and creating a space where students could find that sense of community within and share their identity. So from there, like on the slide 'active spaces', there are lots of different things on there around language that we really wanted to highlight with other health and Phys Ed teachers, things like gendered actions of "running like a girl" or "girl push-ups" or things like that." (Amanda)

"With some of the lessons like the pornography lesson, what we do is we frame it like you know, whether or not you want to be a parent in your future, 'think about if you were the father of this person and then this person was a friend, that he brought over and they're spreading these messages.'" (Ryan)

"There was a question within that group, though, about what to do about transgender female students, and they were kind of like, 'Miss, we can't have them because even though they identify as females.' ...I said, 'You know, I'm not gonna be looking in their underpants to find out what it is.' And so if they tell me they're a girl, they're gonna come. And if that doesn't work with you, then I guess you won't be able to join us and that's too bad." (Farzana)

Hypothetical Talking Points for Myth Busting

Children are more likely to engage in sex if they learn about it at school.

- UNESCO reported that youth worldwide are receiving sexual and reproductive health education too late.[1] They lack information on gender rights, healthy sexual behaviour, and equitable social norms. Indeed, UNESCO asserts that the lack of age-appropriate education in the elementary level puts children more at risk for unwanted pregnancies, STIs, HIV, and violence and abuse.
- Action Canada's research shows that children who talk about these things with their parents and teachers are more likely to wait until they are older to have sex. When they do, they are more likely to protect themselves with birth control and condoms. [2]
- In most Canada, sexual and reproductive health education is mostly delivered through age-appropriate, medically accurate, and provincially mandated curriculums. Younger students learn about consent and healthy relationships, autonomy and self-esteem, appreciation of diverse body types, gender and orientation, and personal safety. Nobody is teaching children how to have sex.
- Kids are bombarded with messages about sexuality and reproduction through the media, in the schoolyard, and in other everyday conversations. It's important that the often inaccurate and sexualized material they are exposed to is addressed or counteracted by age-appropriate and accurate information from a trained teacher.

Gender identity and sexual orientation will spread from one child to the next.

- Gender identity and sexual orientation are different. Neither are contagious diseases. Each person determines their own gender identity and sexual orientation at their own pace and for themselves. They are very personal parts of a person's identity that teachers and schools do not try to influence. Every child has a right to be themselves fully.

[1] UNESCO. (2021). The journey towards comprehensive sexuality education: Global status report. *Education 2030*. UNESCO.

[2] Action Canada. (n.d.). Resources. *Resources/Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights*. https://www.actioncanadashr.org/resources

- Other students might come out to your child, but that doesn't mean they're trying to "recruit" or "groom" them. It most likely means they have a strong bond and feel safe with your child. This is a sign of trust that your child will treat them with kindness and respect.
- If your child feels like they are being approached romantically by a child of the same gender and they're not interested, they can kindly say they would prefer to just be friends or respond the same way they would if it was an unreturned crush from a child of the opposite gender.
- Gender identity exists on a natural spectrum. It can shift as a child grows up and experiences different ideas, knowledges, and has time to reflect on what is best for them. Children need our support as they grow and try to understand who they are.[3]
- 2SLGBTQ+ people have always existed. It might feel like there are more because people are more comfortable in expressing their gender and their sexual orientation in public because we have laws now that protect them from discrimination based on their identity. Our society is more welcoming and supportive of differences than it used to be, mostly thanks to human rights activists. Including 2SLGBTQ+ people makes more space for everyone to be their authentic selves.
- It's normal and natural for adolescents to be curious about their sexuality. It's important that youth feel supported as they go through this time of their lives. Studies show that if people, regardless of age, are denied parental support, they are far more likely to have increased rates of depression, to fall prey to substance abuse, or to engage in high-risk sexual behaviours.[4]
- People cannot be coerced or convinced to change their sexual orientation. It is something they are born with.[5]

[3] Thorne, N., Yip, A. K.-T., Bouman, W. P., Marshall, E., & Arcelus, J. (2019). The terminology of identities between, outside and beyond the gender binary – A systematic review. The International Journal of Transgenderism, 20(2–3), 138–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2019.1640654
Veldhuis, C. B., Cascalheira, C. J., Delucio, K., Budge, S. L., Matsuno, E., Huynh, K., Puckett, J. A., Balsam, K. F., Velez, B. L., & Galupo, M. P. (2024). Sexual orientation and gender diversity research manuscript writing guide. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *11*(3), 365–396. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000722

4] Durwood, L., Eisner, L., Fladeboe, K., Ji, C. (Gabriella), Barney, S., McLaughlin, K. A., & Olson, K. R. (2021). Social support and internalizing psychopathology in transgender youth. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 50(5), 841–854. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01391-y
Lefevor, G. T., Hall, S. M., Skidmore, S. J., Graham, K. L., Hatch, D., & Koenig, B. L. (2025). The impact of religious/spiritual struggles, family support, and LGBTQ+ identity on depression among emerging adults in the United States. LGBTQ+ Family (Print), 21(5), 523–538. https://doi.org/10.1080/27703371.2025.2462529
Zhang, Y., Farina, R. E., Lawrence, S. E., Walters, T. L., Clark, A. N., Hanna-Walker, V., & Lefkowitz, E. S. (2022). How social support and parent-child relationship quality relate to LGBTQ+ college students' well-being during COVID-19. Journal of Family Psychology, 36(5), 653–660. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000981

[5] Hamer, D., & Copeland, P. (1994). The science of desire: The search for the gay gene and the biology of behavior. Simon and Schuster.

Students and teachers can choose whether to use a student or teacher's preferred pronouns.

- Using a person's preferred pronouns is about acknowledging and respecting a person's identity, in line with the Canadian Human Rights Act.[6]
- You can't assume someone's gender based on their haircut, their makeup, or their clothing styles.
- Using the wrong pronoun for someone is called *misgendering*.[7] Misgendering can make people feel invalidated, disrespected, or even invisible. The best practice is not to assume but to be open and honest. Introduce yourself first and share your pronouns. They can then introduce themselves and decide if they wish to share their pronouns with you.
- Some people may choose not to share their pronouns; that's ok. Use their name instead.
- According to the Ontario Human Rights Code, every person has the right to define their own gender identity.[8] Trans people should be recognized and treated as the gender they live in, regardless of whether they have undergone surgery or their identity documents are up to date.[9]

[6] Government of Canada (2024, August 19). *Consolidated federal laws of Canada, Canadian human rights act*. Canadian Human Rights Act. https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/h-6/page-1.html
[7] McNamarah, C. T. (2021). Misgendering. *California Law Review*, *109*(6), 2227–2322. https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38CV4BS4M
[8] OHRC. (2014, April 14). Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and Gender Expression. Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression Ontario Human Rights Commission. https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-because-gender-identity-and-gender-expression
[9] OHRC. (2014, April 14). *Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and Gender Expression*. Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression | Ontario Human Rights Commission. https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-because-gender-identity-and-gender-expression

Hypothetical Co-Teaching Strategy Session: Challenging the Manosphere

Teacher 1: I need help! I had a student in my English class ask me what I thought about Andrew Tate. But like challenging me, he wasn't really asking. I knew he was baiting me. He was waiting to see what I would say so he could join in with his buddies. You know, the eye rolling and knowing smiles. They are trying to get me to go on a tirade or something. I don't know how to reach these boys.

Teacher 2: Same thing is happening in my HPE class. I heard one boy complaining to his friends that white men are the most oppressed group. They genuinely believe they are being targeted and discriminated against. When I try to explain, they just shut down. They don't want to hear it. And I don't see the male phys ed teacher experiencing this. They don't challenge him.

Teacher 1: It's frustrating and dangerous. I think some girls in my English class don't feel secure enough to express their opinions.

Teacher 2: Maybe we could do a project together about the harms of the manosphere.

Teacher 1: We can start with what they already know. I can have them do a private journal entry, or we can have an informal brainstorm about it. Maybe we come up with case studies, talk about why it's appealing, and have them imagine friends who are attracted to the manosphere while others are feeling the impacts of being targeted by it?

Teacher 2: I can do the same thing and see if I get any different results, especially with the health specifics. We need to unpack this *with* them. If I tell them what to think they will reject it, but if we can get them to critically analyze the material on their own... We could have them do some research. We need some kind of critical thinking activity to have them analyze what they find.

Teacher 1: We can definitely discuss some of the myths they bring up. Maybe we could provide a set of videos—from the manosphere but on the tamer side—and ask students to identify claims and see if we can prove or discredit them. There are also some really good videos that show the effects of misogynistic behaviour.[1] Let's try to find some reliable informative resources and share those with each other.[2] Maybe we have the students create scripts or case studies to really get them to imagine how they would handle a friend they see being radicalized. Or a bystander intervention to step in if they see a boy

harassing a girl. I have so many ideas now!

Teacher 2: OK let's get practical. Do we do the assignments in groups or individually?

Teacher 1: If we do groups, we will have to make them balanced and assign roles so everyone does their equal share. I think group discussion would be valuable, but...

Teacher 2: What if we do both? What if we have them maybe each pick one myth to research. The research is done individually and the group comes together to share what they come up with and synthesize...maybe a jigsaw style?

Teacher 1: Yes! They can create some dramatic scenes or short videos, maybe a poster to highlight their findings: lots of options!

Teacher 2: We could even have a fair where the two classes come together and share their findings or present to the other class. We could even have them go to the younger grades with their presentations to share them. Oooh, or even create small books about some of the myths and take it to the local elementary school to read to them. We'll have to make sure their presentations or books are age appropriate though.

Teacher 1: And might need more input from administration on that. Let's save that idea for now, once we know what we're doing as a total project. Maybe we talk to the students and have them decide? If they want to present to the lower grades, we can add that on. And maybe our classes will want to go in different directions. Alright, let's get some resources together by next week, and meet back here at lunch on Wednesday. Then we can decide if we want to do case studies, or videos or both, or something else altogether.

Teacher 2: I have a few in mind already. I feel so much more confident doing this together.

[1] Big (If True). (2026, May 10). The manosphere. https://youtu.be/peKOcyWq2yw?si=-sTfB4zH9S4WsyqS
Hurst, B. (2026, March 18). *How to talk to men and boys about the Manosphere*. *TedxLondon*. https://youtu.be/ww9840_hb70?si=R8F3NjYRKsbpZOqX.
The Brink. (2026, March 31). The manosphere's appeal: How real pain gets weaponized. The Manosphere's Appeal: How Real Pain Gets Weaponized
White Ribbon. (n.d.). *Discover how online misogyny shapes boys' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours in Canada. Read white ribbon's latest national report.* https://www.whiteribbon.ca/boys-are-at-risk?lng=en
[2] Westcott, S., & Roberts, S. (2026). *Schooling misogyny: Exposing and eliminating the influence of the manosphere in education settings.* Routledge.
Camangian, P. R. (2021). Loving (lumpen) masculinities: Teaching to transform heteropatriarchy, toxic masculinity, and urban misogyny. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 54*(3), 345–358.

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

Developing good relationships with students is the primary building block educational leaders cited to ensure good communication with parents. With good planning and administrative support, interactions with family and loved ones can promote the safety and respect of all involved.

In the Classroom

- Offer support and develop relationships with students to warrant support in their school environment; and
- Use correct terminology when teaching gender, but be age or grade level appropriate.

Sometimes students miscommunicate or parents misunderstand. To mitigate that

- Give correct and accurate information and do not allow students to opt out of an exercise;
- Propose adaptations within assignments about gender topics; and
- Provide choices for students to tailor the subject matter to their needs or interests.



"Call things what they are, say things are harmful. But in a way that won't scare children or make them worried and anxious that people are going to harm them wherever they go."
(Danielle)

Build Relationships

Teachers are often frustrated that they are expected to justify their lessons to parents and respond to phone calls about curricular content. They are grateful for administrative support. Guidelines include:

- Educate students and parents about the rights and responsibilities of all people in their home province. The Charter of Human Rights is a good beginning;
- Maintain professionalism and political correctness with parents to avoid potential problems;
- Start with a discussion about consent culture. Break it down into simple terms such as **"healthy relationships" (Vanessa)**;
- Offer to employ translation tools to send communication in parents' first language if English communication is proving challenging;
- Reach out to families to discuss how to best support individual students. Create a plan together; and
- Prioritize students' safety both at school and at home.

"Within my department I've had the odd questioning of an assignment where someone is exploring sexuality, but in all our assignment tasks we give students options. In both cases where the parent reached out, their child had the opportunity to choose other topics, but specifically chose to focus on that learning for themselves. So that's been good learning for us to continue to provide options and that allows students to explore where they feel their needs are and it also gives us the support that if a parent does ask then we can say we provided many different topics and this is what your child chose." (Amanda)

Planning

Teachers believe they do not have the language to talk about gender issues. Many request a template response to parental backlash to ensure they are not reprimanded, to accredit their stance, and to authorize the school/curricular standing on gender issues.

- Do not go into detail on permission slips about workshops, lessons, or field trips. Simply provide a title rather than a description;
- Do not provide a chance to opt out;
- Communicate with both parents, not just mothers;
- Involve parents in determining consequences for students' inappropriate behaviours; and
- Plan responses in advance of questions or reactive backlash. For example, before delivering a lesson, create a template email to use in case of parental inquiries.

Set boundaries to protect yourself. Some strategies include:

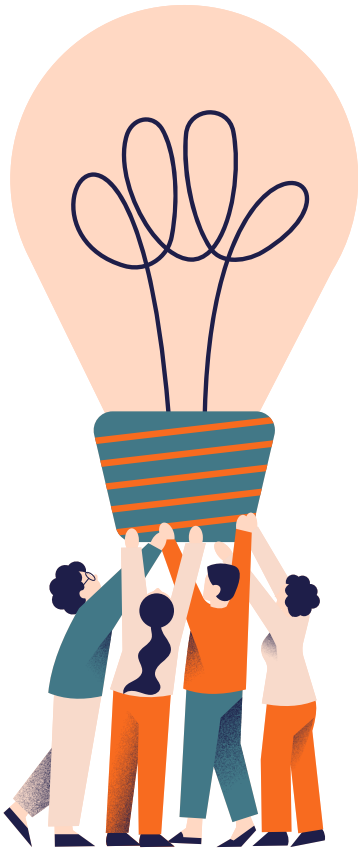
- Pick your battles: decide whether your stress level is worth arguing with a parent;
- Do not engage with parents who are yelling at you. Suggest they call back another time when they can speak calmly;
- Carefully phrase communications with both parents and students to avoid finger pointing or labelling; and
- Document all communications: save emails and take notes including dates, names, and times.

"I've had to call home…and I've had to use a dead name right because the parent is like, who are you talking about? And I'm like, 'Oh my God, this parent doesn't know….' I didn't know that they didn't know, so it was this very touchy thing, but I didn't make it a thing right? I was OK, this parent doesn't know that Aslan is Aslan, but it's really Elizabeth at home still right? Their dead name." (Sara)

Parent-teacher interviews can be emotionally draining, especially with upset parents who are venting or yelling.

- Work in teams so that one person can take a break while the other is chatting with parents;
- Schedule breaks in advance to ensure you have space to step away; and
- Remind yourself that you are tasked with teaching a public curriculum and that it is unreasonable for parents to expect the curriculum to change just for them.

"I think the message that we're being told from our Centre for Education is 'You say it's in the curriculum, you're teaching it.' And if there is push back then the principal says, 'It's in the curriculum and we teach that.' And then if they come back again, it's 'This is public school, we teach the public curriculum, if you don't agree with it, perhaps here are two other options for education. Legally, your child either has to attend public school, private school, or home school. If you don't agree with the curriculum, then perhaps another avenue is right for your family.'"
(Danielle)



Sample Letter Home Regarding Concerns over Children Learning about 2SLGBTQIA+ Inclusion

Dear (Enter parents' or guardians' names here):

Thank you for reaching out regarding (insert child's name) and your concerns about our curriculum. I share your desire for (insert child's name) to excel in school and learn how to become a thoughtful contributing citizen in our beautiful distinct community. I wanted to take some time, therefore, to provide background on the development of the curriculum and its connection to our (enter provincial name here) human rights code [or Charter of Rights and Freedoms] (insert link).

Our health curriculum (insert link) has been developed by academic experts familiar with normal sexual and reproductive health and in accordance with human rights laws. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or any other queer identity is not learned behaviour like homophobia or transphobia. In our health curriculum, in our hallways, and in our everyday classrooms, queer identities are accepted. They fall on a spectrum of normal human sexual and gender identities that everyone has. These identities are protected under our provincial human rights laws. All people, regardless of their identity, are safeguarded under those laws against discrimination or hateful speech. Educators in (insert province name here) are legally and ethically required to defend the rights and safety of all students under our charge.[1]

In accordance with those mandates, we as teachers are bound by a duty to educate students about the everyday realities of our diverse society. Making students aware of the past and present struggles of 2SLGBTQIA+ people improves their understanding of how difficult it is to face oppression and bias in society.

We do not wish to undermine the values you instill at home. Our curriculum helps students of all identities feel welcome, safe, and supported, to know that their experience is normal and is upheld by our anti-discrimination laws and inclusive school procedures (attach copy of school procedures). We do not accept bullying, teasing, or violence. We promote tolerance, kindness, and mutual respect.

Thank you for your support and understanding. I hope that this brief background has been of assistance in grounding the inclusive education we provide for all our students here at (insert school name here). Should you have further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me, our administration, or our counselling team. Your support as parents helps make this community better.

Best regards,
(enter name and contact information here)

[1] These references are for Ontario only. Please insert the commensurate documents from your province.
Province of Ontario. (2000, June 23). *Safe Schools Act*. e-Laws | Ontario.ca. https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/s00012
Ontario College of Teachers. (2025). *Professional standards*. https://www.oct.ca/en-ca/public-protection/professional-standards

RESPONDING TO BACKLASH

Being prepared for backlash with strategies, guidance, and support are key factors identified by educational leaders in enabling an effective response. Transformative systemic change requires curricular integration, policy change, and action in individual communities, schools, and classrooms. This will inevitably be challenged by people in schools and communities who disagree with these priorities. Below are targeted recommendations.

Start with Open and Respectful Conversations

Changes in attitudes and values take time. Key approaches include:

- Build community to create safe spaces for discussion;
- Genuinely listen to people's concerns, fears, and emotions;
- Avoid immediately introducing complex issues, instead building to them over time as relationships strengthen;
- Recognize that people approach conversations from different backgrounds and belief systems; and
- Speak with compassion and curiosity.

"How do we provide those spaces for teachers where they can talk about what it means to be a teacher and bring them back to the spirit? Then I would like to do a follow up with the circles... we're not gonna focus on [gender or race], we're gonna focus on you as a human being. Who are you, and where you from, what are your values? 'You don't like gay people? Ok fine, and does that mean you don't like me?' 'No, I like you, I just don't want it to be shoved in my face.' 'OK, what does that mean, being shoved in your face?' 'Well, why do we have to do pride?' 'Well, what do you think?'" (Chicahua)

Make Gender Issues Relatable

Regular conversations about respect and inclusion can make these discussions less threatening. Effective strategies incorporate:

- Case studies and real-life stories;
- Connecting gender issues to human rights and to the curriculum;
- Images, videos, or guest speakers; and
- Providing concrete examples and practical solutions.

"When we're looking laterally at the students, the most impactful change they're going to have... is from each other." (Dawn)



"I shared this story [about a hijabi girl] with my Grade 10 hijabi student and I asked, 'should she have had to wait until grade 5 to see herself represented?' And she's like, 'no, that's disgusting.' And I said, 'so then why should a trans girl have to wait until high school to see herself represented?' And that's when the wheels started turning." (Mia)

Use Peer Influence and Student Voice

Peer influence can be especially powerful for adolescents. Strategies may involve:

- Encouraging peer discussion;
- Supporting student advocates and leadership; and
- Including eager student voices when raising concerns with school boards (ensure students will not be exposed to discriminatory comments in this process).

Support Teachers with Practical Guidance

Many teachers hesitate to address gender issues because they worry about saying or doing something wrong. Teachers say they need:

- Targeted and practical professional development;
- Networks that provide continuous support and community;
- Developmentally appropriate pedagogical strategies for discussing gender justice; and
- Time and resources to learn about emerging issues.

Gender justice work, like school safety and equity more broadly, is most effective when it becomes an integrated part of curriculum, school culture, and governing systems with consistent priorities communicated at all levels.

Address Structural Challenges

Gender justice work is often limited by time constraints, lack of resources, and institutional pressures. Administrators may seek quick solutions as better opportunities than long-term responses, particularly when they fear public backlash. Professional development should be locally directed by school boards and regional centers to help schools respond to their communities' specific needs.

Protect the Well-Being of Advocates

Gender justice work should not fall on one person alone. Important practices will:

- Identify advocates and allies;
- Share responsibilities with colleagues;
- Set clear personal boundaries;
- Give supply teachers clear guidelines to maintain safe classrooms when regular teachers are absent; and
- Protect your mental health and well-being and respect boundaries set by collaborators.

Hypothetical Conversation with Peer Educator Not Using Preferred Pronouns

Frank: This pronoun thing has gotten way out of hand. I can't be expected to remember all this new names and pronouns nonsense. Why can't I use the names on their birth certificates?

Jean: Interesting idea. What's the name on your birth certificate?

Frank: Francis Edward Logan Campbell. I'm named after my grandfather.

Jean: Ok, Interesting. Why don't you go by Francis?

Frank: I don't know, Frank just suits me better.

Jean: Is that your preferred name?

Frank: Very funny.

Jean: No, seriously, we do this all the time. I can call you Frank, not Francis Edward Logan Campbell: no problem. I respect how you want to be addressed. We also respect when women change their last name after getting married, even though we sometimes forget, and it can take us a while to always remember to use their new name.

Frank: Yeah, but this is really all sex talk. Kids are too young to be talking about sex and changing who they are before they even know who they are.

Jean: Students' rights matter just as much as yours do. Gender identity isn't about sexuality. It's about who a person feels they are and it's protected by human rights laws. If we forget and correct our mistake that's one thing, but to deliberately misgender someone is a violation of the law. It also puts students in danger, because it sets a bad example for other students to bully them. I know that is the last thing you would want for one of your students.

Frank: No, not at all. I just want to use proper grammar.

Jean: Using they/them is proper grammar! It's even in the Oxford English Dictionary. Did you know that Chaucer, who wrote in the Middle Ages, even used they/them as a singular pronoun?[1] You probably use it all the time without even realizing it. What do you say when there is a water bottle left on the shelf at the end of the day and you don't know who it belongs to?

Frank: Somebody forgot their water bottle….

Jean: Exactly! Somebody—one person—forgot THEIR water bottle. You do this all the time already!

Frank: Yeah, but how do I do that for a person?

Jean: If you're not sure what someone's pronouns are, you can use they/them to signal you're being inclusive or privately ask what their preferred pronouns are. Then you set an example for the students by showing that their identity is respected. You could say, "Ali is out today because they're sick. Can someone please let them know about the assigned homework?"

Frank: That's too much to remember. I'm just going to use their last name…safer that way.

Jean: The safest thing to do is to honour how a student wants to identified and try hard to remember.

Frank: What if I mess up?

Jean: If you make a mistake, that's ok. Take accountability and make the correction. Just say, "I think I got that wrong. Sorry. He has written on the board…" That shows courtesy and respect. It communicates that they control their identity and that you affirm and value that. Then move on. It's important not to make a big deal out of it. The last thing you want is for the student to feel like you see them as a burden.

Frank: Why does this matter?

Jean: Misgendering people can feel really invalidating and dehumanizing, especially for people being vulnerable enough to out themselves by sharing their preferred pronouns.

Frank: Maybe I should ask them in front of the whole class to show I care? And to show other students how to ask?

Jean: Better to ask privately. Not everybody feels safe enough to share their pronouns publicly, and you don't want to draw unwanted attention to the student. We need to honour and protect trans and gender non-conforming students, because they are unfortunately FAR more likely to be bullied or suffer from mental health issues.[2] I know you want to keep your students safe. If you want to model to the class, you could share your own pronouns by writing them beside your name on your desk or in your email so they know it isn't a big deal. After all, everyone has a gender identity, even cis people like you.

Frank: What if their parents don't know? How am I supposed to know the difference?

Jean: If you are not sure if their parents know, ask the student privately how they would like to be referred to before you talk to their parents. If it's a different name, it's probably a good idea (with the student's permission) to talk to the principal to make sure you are clear on the protocol and will be supported if the student's parents find out that you're using a different name than they are and are upset. Also check to see if the school board has a policy on this that can support you.

But it really matters! One research study showed that using a student's preferred pronouns or name in your classroom can decrease the risk of suicide by half. There was a study[3] that showed that just using a student's preferred pronouns can bolster students' mental health and safeguard them against self-harm or suicide.

Frank: Whoa. Thanks for this. I didn't know pronouns could impact kids that way. I'll try harder.

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Email Template to Admin re: Parental or Student Concern

Dear (insert administrator name):

I am writing to request additional support in addressing the concerns (insert parent or student name) shared about our inclusive school's policies (name specific relevant policies for your school or board). They continue to seek guidance about (insert description of parental concern. If any disciplinary actions have been taken, add notes about incidents in this space). I have written to them thanking them for their concerns. In that email, which I copy for you here (insert link to original email or add as an attachment), I cited how our lessons match provincial curriculum and uphold provincial human rights legislation. I have also appealed to their understanding of our inclusive school policies for ensuring the rights and safety of all students. (Mention here which particular policy or procedure the family or student is having issue with).

Despite these efforts, however, (insert parents' or student's names) are insistent that they require further action or explanation. While I do not wish to undermine their values or beliefs, I reminded them that we as educators have a duty to protect all students and to deliver our curriculum to teach students the importance of tolerance, respect, and dignity. It is important for me to set a boundary on this communication and escalate it to you so that I do not feel overburdened or harassed.

Could you kindly reach out to this family or meet with me to discuss the situation? I would greatly benefit from your support.

With thanks,
(Insert signature line here)

PROTECTING YOURSELF

Gender justice can feel overwhelming and isolating for many of those who do this crucial work. It can also put people's professional and physical safety at risk. Participants in our study advised that it is imperative to prioritize oneself through setting boundaries, ensuring personal safety, finding community, reaching out for help, being proactive, and standing up for oneself.

Set and Protect your Boundaries

Knowing the large workload and absence of funding and supports, educational leaders stressed the importance of self-care in doing gender justice advocacy, urging people to create and maintain boundaries to preserve their mental health, energy, and physical safety:

- Listen to your body: take time away with friends and family to get perspective when you start feeling overwhelmed (from 15 minute walks, a day off, and/or extended vacation);
- Be vulnerable and open about your needs and boundaries without alienating others;
- Give yourself permission to pause or limit your involvement in gender justice advocacy;
- Change the space in which you are advocating: turn to a community leadership role if the education system feels too burdensome; and
- Choose to stay private and silent about some issues to conserve your energy.

"It's like I want to call you out, but I don't wanna burn bridges. I know you're well-meaning, but because you're well-meaning you probably would benefit from knowing that this was kind of a weird interaction that you're reaching out for me for." (Farzana)

Pick your battles to safeguard your well-being. You can't support every project or initiative and show up for everything:

- Plan slow, steady, small, measurable steps;
- Teach students and other staff the skills to do the work themselves;
- Reflect on progress made over a long period of time; and
- Turn down opportunities that make you uncomfortable.



"...when I'm asked my pronouns. I'll say he/him.... I've debated about saying him/they, but then I have no interest to go through the conversations." (Simon)

"I denied the job, which was, I mean, a professionally risky thing to do. But I said I have some stuff to sort out that I think, working in education I think a lot of educators and teaching staff, I'm learning, go through when you're in those places where you grew up. Mine is a very specific context and I said the grant is the work that I wanna do. And that's where my focus kind of needs to be, so. So it was an interesting moment of severing a bit from the system in order to have some perspective on it." (Gene)

Ensuring Your Safety

Some spaces and places can feel unsafe to people who commonly experience hatred and bias about their gender identities:

- Hold controversial meetings virtually to protect people from violence;
- Don't make meeting locations public; and
- Reschedule unproductive communications with parents or guardians.

Some adults will try to engage or even harass you online. Take a break from social media. Keep personal details off the internet.

> "...my principal...told me what she says to parents who are dis-regulated on the phone – or family, it's not always parents, or even sometimes it's just random people from the community that found out something's going on at the school so they wanna call and find out the truth. She says when someone starts yelling at her, 'I'm going to let you go now, you seem a little disregulated. When you're ready to talk calmly, please call me back.'" (Danielle)

The Importance of Community

People who do gender justice work can experience a lot of pushback from others, making them feel like outsiders. Participants underlined the necessity of community and social supports:

- You may request to move to a different board or school to find like-minded staff;
- Partake in workshops or gatherings that build community with other educators;
- Locate and share support resources in your community;
- Find grants from outside sources to fund the work you find important;
- Know your limitations: sometimes to ensure your safety, ask a person with more privilege to introduce difficult topics; and
- Lean on your allies.

Seek Assistance

Knowing that your job or personal safety may be at risk, participants made the following recommendations:

- Document issues and set boundaries;
- If you feel shut out, take your ideas to the union or school board for support;
- Be aware of resources in your community;
- Take advantage of union help to file grievances to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), or the appropriate body;
- Build strong relationships with administrators, superintendents, and directors; and
- Familiarize yourself with policies and procedures.



"I was asked to speak at this meeting, to share my thoughts and opinions. Yet, now I am under investigation for doing so. Luckily, I already have a group of educators who are employed by the same school board that I am in, who were at that meeting where this situation took place, who are ready to write a letter and to vouch for me, and to say that nothing that I said was even remotely harmful." (Mia)

Make Proactive Choices

Having a proactive mindset was a crucial element of protecting oneself. Participants gave a variety of approaches to fostering this type of mindset:

- Educate yourself on gender issues to benefit your understanding and articulation; and
- When feeling imposter syndrome, remind yourself of how your identity and advocacy uniquely benefits students.

Prepare for triggering conversations. Recommendations include:

- Have conversations from a curious stance; and
- Reframe contentious conversations about gender or sex to focus on safety and healthy relationships.

"So a lot of that was just letting members know that in terms of violence against women, like if you have a woman that you're working with or if you are a woman who's experienced domestic violence, where can you go in [urban location], we have shelter movers here, we have people who will help you, we have a women's advocate committee that will help you put in a safety plan at your school. Just educating our members about what the committee does, but also what resources are available in the community if they need that help." (Lisa)

Stand up for Yourself

Lastly, participants encouraged those doing gender justice work to hold to their convictions:

- When in a position of authority, say what others are afraid to say;
- Remember that silence perpetuates the problem; and
- Prepare to experience attacks when your beliefs conflict with your system.

"Stand your ground and recognize that conflict will come. It doesn't mean you have to be mean to people who don't think like you, but there's no way around it." (Evelyn)



Hypothetical Script:
Shutting Down Misogynistic Comments

[Student mutters under their breath]: Go back to the kitchen where you belong.

Teacher: Did you mean to say that out loud? I'm surprised you feel comfortable saying that. I find that pretty offensive. But ok, explain this to me. Who belongs in the kitchen and why do they belong there?

Student: Women.

Teacher: Explain to me why that's funny.

Student: What? It's not funny if I have to explain it.

Teacher: Maybe it's not funny then. I don't understand why women belong in the kitchen. Educate me.

Silence.

Teacher: Saying that all women belong in the kitchen is a derogatory remark that devalues women. I remind you and everyone else here about our behaviour guidelines. We must treat everyone with common courtesy and respect. Everyone has the same rights as you do. I have the right to be here and be treated with respect, just like you do.

Student: I was just making a joke.

Teacher: How would you feel if somebody made a joke about where you belonged because of who you are?

Student: I would think it was funny!

Teacher: Hmmm. I don't. Sexist comments are hurtful, discriminatory, and unwelcome. If another student feels like they are not being treated with kindness or respect, that affects their ability to learn. It affects my ability to teach. It's my job to make sure this is a safe learning environment. I am obligated to ensure the safety and well-being of all students in this classroom. Your words are not making this space safe. If you speak to me or anybody else in this class like that again, you will be asked to leave the class and I will repeat your comments to the principal and your parents. We build other people up in this classroom. We help others be their best selves.

Student: I didn't mean to hurt anyone. It's not that big a deal.

Teacher: I can see that you didn't understand the impact of what you were saying. But it's a form of harassment. If you were an adult and said something like that at work, you could be fired. You could be sued. That's how serious it is. It's wrong and illegal to talk to people that way. I know you didn't know that. Now that you do, I hope you won't treat people that way again. If it does happen again, I will follow our school's policy, which is to report the problem to the principal because it goes against our code of conduct. I will also let your parents know what happened so they can discuss the issue with you at home.

Student: People say this stuff on TikTok all the time.

Teacher: I believe you. There are a lot of sexist videos and influencers on TikTok and Instagram. Did you know boys are marketed to through them, even if you don't go looking for that type of stuff? The algorithm finds you. It's my job to help you think about those messages critically and ask questions about them. Like, why are they saying these things?

Student: They want the likes and follows.

Teacher: Right. Influencers get attention through shock value. They deliberately make controversial comments. They act out sensational things to get your attention. Why do you think they do that?

Student: Because it's funny. And so I'll watch more.

Teacher: Right, so you will watch more. They want to keep you watching for longer to see what is going to happen next. Because the longer you watch, the more they can promote their brands and get money from advertisers or from viewers who invest in their private brands. Their real goal is to sell you something: betting apps, creatine, protein powder, or workout supplements. Do you ever see ads like that?

Student: Oh yeah…. OK, I see what you're saying… sorry.

Teacher: I am glad to hear that. All right. Let's move on.

Hypothetical Email to Principal Requesting Support for Student-Perpetrated Harassment

Dear _____:

I write to make you aware of recent difficulties, and to request your support. I have been experiencing repeated and prolonged sexual harassment by one of my Geography students, Trevor. Despite setting clear boundaries that I have tried to enforce through reprimands and calls home (see attached notes), Trevor continues to direct inappropriate comments and sexual gestures toward me (Attach any notes from past emails, exchanges with administration and/or family, and documentation of attempts to communicate with Trevor directly). The situation is untenable. The classroom is not safe. His behaviour sets a bad precedent for other boys witnessing this behaviour, and implies that treating women and girls in this manner is acceptable. It is not. As a result, I need help to safeguard my wellbeing so I can be a productive and effective teacher.

This situation is making it difficult for me to do my job and it is affecting my mental health. I need your help and support because I am being harassed. I don't feel safe, and I fear for the safety and well-being of the girls in my class. I worry that, if my they see me being treated like this, they will believe it is acceptable for them to be treated this way as well. I also worry for my physical safety, as I am concerned that his behaviour could escalate into physical violence. While Trevor has the right to an education, I also have a right to do my job without being harassed.

I have been in contact with my union representative and have reached out to mental health services, but I would appreciate your support in confronting this issue head on. Could we please set up a meeting to strategize next steps in ameliorating the situation and improving my safety in the class, as well as that of the girl students. Trevor needs support in confronting and changing his behaviour. I have consistently tried to offer this myself but it goes unheeded. Until he can conduct himself in a respectful manner, I do not want to be in the classroom with him. I want to be there for my students and see them through to the end of the year, but this feels untenable. Could we please meet to discuss options.

Kind regards,

Email Template to Union Rep Seeking Support

Dear (insert local union rep's name):

I write to make you aware of recent difficulties, and to request your support in addressing them (Insert description of incident or ongoing dispute). *For example:* After having received repeated emails from parents about a lesson on consent and healthy sexual relationships that include and normalize 2SLGBTQIA+ relationships. These lessons are in accordance with our provincial curriculum (insert link to exact part of curriculum for your province).

As per our provincial agreement, I need to safeguard my well-being so I can be a productive and effective teacher (insert provincial agreement section). (Describe here the steps you have taken to address the issue(s) and provide links to or copies of documentation). *For example:* Although I have responded professionally to these parents linking the relevant documents and provincial human rights laws (insert link to provincial human rights code section), they persist in emailing me (copy emails).

I have escalated the issue with my school administration, but have seen no satisfactory outcome or solution (copy email exchange). I also contacted my department head to make her aware of the situation and request her support (copy email exchange). Unfortunately, these measures have been insufficient in resolving the situation. (Give examples of how the situation is unsustainable, and explain its effect on you). *For example:* The parents continue to email me and are berating me. I feel harassed and unsafe.

Though I have followed the guidance from my administration, it hasn't ameliorated the problem. You can say:

- I need to step away from this issue;
- This situation is making it difficult for me to do my job effectively;
- These events are negatively affecting my mental health;
- I need your help and support because I am feeling bullied; or
- I don't feel safe.

I would greatly appreciate your guidance in identifying the legal and policy requirements to ensure my health and safety. My place is with my students, but without resolving this harassment, my work and my students' learning is suffering.

Sincerely,

KNOWING YOUR 'WHY'

Finding and knowing one's purpose helps sustain educational leaders in doing gender justice work. Their guidance centres student support but also values community, mentorship, and the diverse unique perspectives of educators and students.

Supporting Students

Some students do not feel supported or accepted in their schools. They are **"hungry for representation" (Gene)**. Many leaders found their purpose through understanding and protecting the needs of students.

- Placing student supports above all;
- Protecting the human rights of all students;
- Making your allyship public so people can find you when they need support;
- Letting students lead direction with their needs;
- Being a person students can trust;
- Helping students become better;
- Having an impact;
- Taking over clubs that support students;
- Empowering students;
- Ensuring student identities are represented;
- Focusing on specific students' needs; and
- Giving students a voice and help them locate supports and resources

"Your why is to try to be a person in their lives that they can trust. Like, think about being an LGBTQ student and having no one advocating for you. Like I don't know. I think I would tell my past self just like, it's gonna be tough and there's gonna be politics. And I didn't realize how much politics there were in teaching and what not. But in the end, you wanna go home, driving home, feeling good about yourself as a person, not just a career climber." (Nicole)

"I know that this might be the first time they're having a teacher that looks like me in front of them and maybe they don't really appreciate or recognize the importance of that right now, but to make sure that you do remember or try to remember later on because you know it's part of how our societal makeup is, right?" (Farzana)

Unique Perspectives

Operating within the educational system, educational leaders find their voice to affect change.

- It is important to prevent damage to students early in elementary settings before they reach high school with a lot of problems;
- Filling voids in the education system;
- Being an advocate from within the system;
- Ensuring there is a voice for gender justice in the Catholic system; and
- Being able to respond well as a consultant outside the classroom

Many leaders had similar backgrounds to their students. **Being a voice and a resource** for those students was very important.

- Fighting for children who are like you growing up;
- Feeling like you have to represent women's voices; and
- Being someone who looks like their students and understands their culture

Mentorship is crucial for both educators and students. Many educators commented on having been inspired by their mentors.

"At the end of the day, it's remembering how I work with these young men, the impact that they have and knowing that I can help them become better. Oftentimes the question is, are you making a difference?" (Ian)

The Importance of Community

Fostering and maintaining community was a common theme for educational leaders when discussing why they do gender justice work.

- Working for the people in the community;
- Try to help people stay in their communities;
- Creating spaces for understanding and communication between students, teachers and other support staff;
- Building support and respect for and with students in their community;
- Learning from their students; and
- Growing through experiencing that community

"From my experience with this particular group of students and their advocacy, I know that there are challenges that our students are facing.... I'm really curious to see how I can continue to learn from those outcomes to continue to work with students and better support them." (Amanda)



Reflective Journal: Rediscovering Purpose

Use free writing (quickly without thinking or editing) to respond to the prompts below.

Why did I want to become a teacher (or a principal or another type of educator)?

What do I love most about teaching?

What do I want to accomplish as a teacher (or as a principal or another type of educator)?

What, if anything, is taking me away from this purpose?

What actions could I take (from small to radical ones!) that might guide me closer to my purpose?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Websites

2025 Gender Report | Global Education Monitoring Report
Action Canada
Adolescence, Teenagers, Masculinity & Wiseguyz: Changing the Conversation
Benchmarks for Comprehensive Sexual Health Education in Canada
Toolkits — Bold Voices
Boys are at Risk - White Ribbon
Coaching Boys into Men
Connect with Respect
Consent Toolkit – amaze
Creating Circles: A Handbook on Art-making with Young People to Address Gender-based Violence
Curriculum Guide | Moose Hide Campaign Education
Digitally Informed Youth
Drawing the Line on Sexual Violence: A Guide for Elementary Teachers
Driver's Ed for the Sexual Superhighway: Navigating Consent | Scarleteen
Effective Consent Education for Boys and Young Men
Gender and Sexuality in Education Resources: By Teacher Candidates, For Teacher Candidates
Gender Justice in Education Pathway
Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Prevention within School-Based Comprehensive Sexual Health Education
Halifax Sexual Health Centre
High School Too: Growing our futures with consent
How to talk to men and boys about the Manosphere
Inclusive Schools - Egale Canada
Investigating the Histories of Women - Canada's History
It's Not Okay: A Toolkit for Preventing Sexism and Sexual Harassment in Schools
Lesson_Advertising_Male_Violence
LGBTQ+ Classroom Resources v08.2026
LGBTQ Toolkit – amaze
Love in a Dangerous Time
Manosphere Toolkit – amaze
Planned Parenthood Ottawa | Planned Parenthood Ottawa provides unbiased information, support, and services to make healthy choices about relationships, health, and pregnancy.

Ready, Set, Respect!
Relationship Sex Education Toolkit for the post-16 sector
Responding to Sexual Harassment in Experiential Learning: A Toolkit for Staff and Faculty at Post-Secondary Institutions
Sex Education Tools for Educators | Sex Education Resources
Sexual Harassment in Experiential Learning: A Price Students Shouldn't Have to Pay
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: SOGI 123
Sexual Violence Toolkit – amaze
Sexuality & Tech Toolkit – amaze
Shout Out Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia and Heterosexism
Still Not Laughing
Still we Rise
Supporting LGBTQ+ and Students of Colour
Teaching-about-GBV-Toolkit_2023_UWindsor-1.pdf UofWindsor-Trousse-prevention-VFG-2025-1.pdf
The Care in Action Guide — High School Too
The manosphere
The manosphere's appeal; How real pain gets weaponized
Together for Sex-Ed: Digital Resources | Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights
Traçons-les-limites à l'égard de la violence à caractère sexuel: Un guide à l'intention des enseignantes et enseignants de l'Ontario, 1ère-8e année
Violence Against Indigenous Women
wrprevent.ca — White Ribbon

Other Resources

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