

Safe Schools Coalition has made it to WA!

Safe Schools Coalition began in 2010 in Victoria and in 2013 Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) then in 2013 was funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training to roll out the program in every State and Territory in Australia. Safe Schools Coalition WA joined the national coalition in September 2015 making it the second last to come on board, with NT to be close behind. The aims of Safe Schools Coalition are to reduce homophobia and transphobia in Australian schools, and to create safe and inclusive school environments for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, school staff and families.

Every school in Australia has same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students with around 10% of Australian young people being same sex attracted, 1.7% intersex and 4% gender diverse. Australian Researchⁱⁱⁱ suggests that these young people are disproportionately impacted by bullying with 75% of same sex attracted young people experiencing some form of homophobic bullying and 80% of that bullying occurring within Australian schools. As a result of the 65% of gender diverse young people who experienced transphobic verbal abuse, 80% had thoughts of self harm, 70% had self harmed, 81% had thoughts about suicide and 37% attempted suicide. These instances of bullying were also found to negatively impact the student's educational outcomes with many missing classes or days at school or dropping out all together as well as not feeling safe at school. These figures present us with a real and meaningful opportunity to contribute to positive change in schools!

Students from supportive schools had greater mental health and education outcomes. The research also found that when school staff use appropriate language and support these students, their experiences of transphobia and homophobia are significantly reduced and their health and wellbeing and engagement outcomes significantly improve. Sexual diversity, gender identity and being intersex are not necessarily visible forms of diversity and therefore schools may not find it as easy to meet the needs of these students without specific guidance and actions.

Safe Schools Coalition Australia is available to support all Australian schools, staff, students and families. Safe Schools Coalition WA works with schools across the government, independent and Catholic sector, in metropolitan and regional WA. Safe Schools Coalition WA works with individual schools to meet the needs of their community. For example, a school can request:

- tailored professional development for all or some staff
- printed and digital resources for staff and students including the new teaching resource All Of Us
- guidance on creating supportive and inclusive school policies
- assistance in setting up and developing student led activities to create change
- surveys to better understand their unique school climate and measure the impact of change
- guidance on inclusive practice in all teaching and learning areas

- support in the process of affirming the gender identity of a transgender or gender diverse student

Schools can join up to be a member of Safe Schools Coalition WA for free and this shows a commitment to actively supporting and celebrating diversity in your school. Member schools are listed on the website and are encouraged to actively promote their commitment to creating safer and more inclusive school environments for all students. Being a member school is a statement, a commitment to making school safer for every student, staff member and family.

Some simple ways teachers can be more supportive of diversity everyday:

- Use inclusive language i.e. “good morning class” rather than “good morning boys and girls”
- Don’t assume i.e. use “partner” rather than assume the gender of someone’s partner
- Provide examples of all kinds of diverse experiences i.e. include different examples of families such as those that include same-gender parents or single parent families
- Respect everyone’s name and pronouns and simply acknowledge it, apologise and move on if you make a mistake
- Find ways to include diversity in class topics i.e. for English include text choices that are inclusive
- Show your support i.e. wear a badge, put a sticker on your door that shows you are a safe person for people to talk to
- Consistently challenge homophobic and transphobic language i.e. “that’s so gay”

ⁱ *Writing Themselves in 3* (<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/downloads/arcshs-research-publications/WTi3.pdf>)

ⁱⁱ *From Blues to Rainbows* (<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/research-project-files/bw0268-from-blues-to-rainbows-report-final-report.pdf?sfvrsn=2>)