

Kaleidoscope Manual

SAME SEX ATTRACTION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOL STAFF

Time required: 1 hour 45 mins.

Aim: The aim of this section of the material is to inform and work with school staff on the issues of sexual diversity and homophobia.

Requirements:

*Prepare copies of support materials (including a list of support groups and websites), for example, as available on the Department's sexuality education website (see 'Learning and teaching', 'For parents' and 'Prevention and support' webpages):

www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/health/sexuality/

*Place the support materials on the table in front of each participant.

*A whiteboard marker and duster.

*Gay friendly posters on walls (obtained from the ALSO Foundation ph 9827 4999 and ARCSHS www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/ phone 9285 5382).

*An overhead projector.

*Overhead numbers 1,2,3,4A,4B,5,6,7,8,9A,9B,10,11, 12, and 13A – 13D found in the overhead section.

*Feedback forms if desired (also in the manual.)

1. ADOLESCENCE IN GENERAL. (5 minutes)

Facilitator reads: Adolescence is a time when identity, self-knowledge, social skills and independence are being developed. Potentially, it can be an extremely vulnerable time for Same Sex Attracted or Transgendered Young People.

Facilitator asks: What does Same Sex Attracted mean? (Wait for replies)

Facilitator reads out: Same Sex Attracted refers to anyone who is romantically, sexually or affectionately attracted to members of the same gender. This will encompass those who are questioning their sexuality, people who acknowledge feelings of attraction to both genders and those who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. (Dyson et al. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society", 2003).

Facilitator continues reading: Transgender refers to the gender to which a person identifies. It includes transsexuals (people who identify with the opposite sex to which they were assigned at birth) and cross dressers. (Higgins. "Alsorts, A Sexuality Awareness Resource by the ALSO Foundation", 2002).

2. STATS ABOUT SSAYP. (5 minutes)

Facilitator asks: Does anyone know what the percentage of same sex attracted people in the general population is?

Facilitator reads: During the 1940's and 50's, Alfred Kinsey found that, on average, 1 in 10 people had sexual experiences predominantly with the same sex.

(Facilitator shows overhead 1 and reads:)

Overhead 1.

The Australian Study of Health and Relationships, conducted in 2003, found that, of the almost 20,000 people interviewed, 9% of men and 15% of women, ie. 12% over all, were Same Sex Attracted (SSA).

This means that in a class of 25 students, approximately 3 will be attracted to or have had sexual experiences with people who are the same gender as they are.

For example, some students may have a partner of the opposite sex and identify as heterosexual. They may, however, be physically or romantically attracted to someone who is the same gender as they are. The people in this example are attracted to others of the same sex and would be included in the description of SSA.

Sexuality for many people is fluid, especially during adolescents when a young person is working out how they feel. Over a lifetime, people's attractions and behaviours towards others will often shift around.

Facilitator asks: Can you think of examples or scenarios involving Same Sex Attraction or of fluid and changing sexuality?

Facilitator says: The next topic is youth suicide.

3. SUICIDE

(10 minutes)

Let's look at the relationship of SSAYP (same sex attracted young people) to suicide.

- Suicide is the second highest cause of death (after car accidents).
- Suicide is preventable.
- SSA young people, both male and female, attempt suicide more often than do heterosexual young people. The suicide rate is 2-3 times higher for same sex attracted young people.

Facilitator says:

Get into pairs. Discuss:

- a) Your personal experiences of SSA youth or adults.
- b) Why the suicide rate is so much higher for SSAYP.

Report back. What have you discovered?

4. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION

(10 minutes)

Overhead 2.

Facilitator shows *overhead 2* and says:

This is an overhead of suicide attempts. (Pause while they look.) It shows that the rate of suicide attempts is higher for young people who are undecided about their sexuality. It is in the early stages of a young person's grappling with their sexuality that they are most at risk of suicide. A young person is in a vulnerable state at three stages of their awareness of their sexuality.

(Sometimes here, people will ask about the number of actual suicides of SSA young people. The response is that we don't know because we can't ask them why they suicided. And we know that some young people have never told anyone about their sexuality so when people are guessing as to why they did it, they would probably think of other reasons.)

Overhead 3.

Facilitator shows *overhead 3* and reads:

These three stages are when the young person is:

- a) in a stage of confusion
- b) thinking that he or she is probably SSA or
- c) deciding whether to tell anyone.

Facilitator asks: Why are they at a higher risk of suicide at these times?

Participants call out their thoughts.

These points may be made:

- *conflict within
- *no community to align themselves to
- *feelings of negativity due to society's negative attitude towards gays and lesbians
- *not getting support from trusted individuals at this stage of identity confusion

5. ACTIVITY

(15 minutes)

Facilitator: To understand why so many SSA young people take their own lives, we need to look at internal and external pressures. The following activity demonstrates why so many same sex attracted young people are at risk.

Let's believe that we live in a world where having teeth is considered utterly disgusting. If anyone in this world has teeth, they are discriminated against and considered inferior to everyone else. In this world, no-one has teeth but you. Everyday you hide your teeth from your friends, your family and your teachers.

Now, for one minute, take it in turns to tell the person next to you about a holiday you have been on or a holiday you are planning to go on. But remember, the person must never find out that you have teeth.

(After one minute instruct the pairs to swap over so that the other person has a turn to speak.)

Facilitator asks:

- *What was it like to carry on that conversation?
- *How did it feel?
- *How would a SSA young person feel?
- *Do you think that most SSA young people feel that they need to hide?

Overhead 4 A and 4B

Facilitator shows *overhead 4A*, external pressures, followed by *4B*, internal pressures.

Facilitator says: The link between social and environmental issues and the suicide rate of SSA young people becomes clear. It is not being SSA that puts a young person at risk of suicide. It's a homophobic society and people's homophobic attitudes. Therefore, it is important that schools take a holistic approach rather than looking at individual treatment. It is also important to remember that alarm bells shouldn't be ringing just because someone is SSA. It is not negative for all. Young people whose friends, family and school are supportive are in a much better position to feel good about their sexuality and thus themselves. By increasing protective factors and reducing risk factors, many of the triggers for suicide are prevented.

Facilitator asks: does anyone know of a SSA young person who is happy?
What supports are in place for this young person to make them feel good?

Facilitator: In your handouts there is a list of support groups, websites and other resources for SSA young people, adults and workers.

6. EXPERIENCES OF SAME SEX ATTRACTED YOUNG PEOPLE (10 minutes)

Facilitator announces the next topic. What do SSA young people themselves tell us about their experiences?

The facilitator will have made a decision prior to the professional development about the three choices offered below.

- A SSA young person could be invited to speak to the participants about her or his experiences, especially in school.
- Or, the following comments from www.mogenic.com can be read out and put up on overhead.

Overhead 5.

People kept coming up to me and making fun of me. They would call me horrible names and I would cry all the time. Letters were put in my locker saying things about AIDS and how my parents shouldn't have had me and how I should just die. Kids would threaten me after school and follow me home yelling things at me. No-one should have to go through what I went through in school."

Overhead 6.

I dropped out of school after being at different schools. I am gay and was made fun of so much that I got sick of being in school. I couldn't stand worrying about what was going to happen to me each day when I got there so I stopped going. I was beaten up all during my time in school and the fights and threats started when I was pretty young. As I said, I did try different schools including a private one. The last one was pretty good, but by then I was so fed up that I had lost any interest in school.

Overhead 7.

There was no-one in my school for me to talk to about my issues. I felt completely alone and unsupported. I had nowhere to unload the burden I was feeling unless I ended it.

When SSAYP experience ongoing homophobic bullying, peer rejection and violence, their level of resilience to it reduces and the potential for suicidal risk increases. It may then only take one precipitating event for them to take their own life.

At this point a supplementary activity using case scenarios can be introduced. See *overheads 13 – 13d*.

7. DISCUSSION: WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO? (15 minutes)

Facilitator asks: What can a teacher do? In small groups or pairs, discuss two things. The first is what you, as a teacher, can do to promote tolerance in the classroom and support same sex attracted young people and the second is what your school as a whole can do to aim towards a school free of homophobia and accepting of sexual diversity. You have 10 minutes. Write down your thoughts.

Participants move into groups.

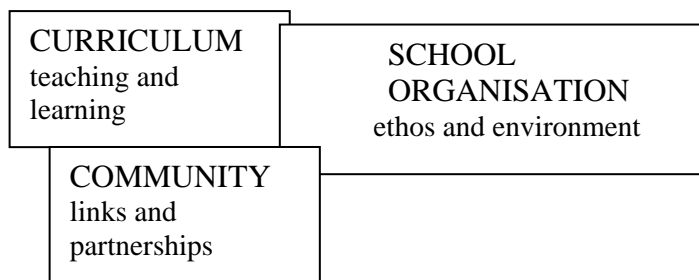
Facilitator writes the two topics on the board.

Overhead 8.

Facilitator then shows overhead 8.

Facilitator asks: Did you have many of the ideas on this list? Did you have any other ideas?

A whole school approach is most effective in supporting SSA young people and minimizing homophobia. This approach is supported by health promoting schools and Mind Matters(which is a mental health resource for secondary schools). It can be portrayed like this:



This approach includes school audits filled out by the staff and students, included in this manual, a committee to drive change, professional development, engaging and working with students, attending to policy and demonstrating awareness and support to the students by putting up posters, stickers and other gay friendly material around the school. A whole school approach is essential to creating real and sustainable change. (See a description of a whole school approach in this manual and also on the SSAFE website.)

By attempting to make your class and school free of homophobia, you will not only be supporting same sex attracted students but you will be complying with the law and therefore staving off any law suits that might be filed against you.

8. THE LAW

(10 minutes)

Facilitator asks: does anyone know what a school's responsibility is under the law?

Participants to reply.

Facilitator says:

Policy and legislation supports the work of schools in responding to homophobia.

Under the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995, it is unlawful to discriminate against someone or treat them unfairly because of their sexual orientation, real or assumed, or because of the sexuality of a friend, family member or other associate.

Overhead 9A and 9B.

Facilitator shows *overhead 9A* entitled: *Equal Opportunity Act* and reads out.

Facilitator shows *overhead 9B* also entitled: *Equal Opportunity Act* and reads out.

Overheads 10 and 11.

The next overhead is then shown; *overhead number 10, Equal Opportunity and Schools.*

Overhead number 11 describes *inaction* on the part of a teacher or school.

Facilitator says:

Schools must provide an environment that is equitable for all students. This includes developing an Equal Opportunity Policy within the school that covers discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation. The policy needs to be promoted and accessible to all staff and students. A sample policy is available on the 'For Principals' page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's sexuality education website:

<www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/health/sexuality/>.

Duty of Care is a legal requirement for schools and teachers. This will be explained shortly. First, it needs to be made clear that disclosure of sexuality does not require mandatory reporting. Laws covering confidentiality mean that if a young person discloses her or his sexual identity, this is to remain confidential and not to be told to others, including parents or the principal, unless you have the student's permission. Confidentiality is a legal requirement.

In regard to discrimination and harassment, a student can complain to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission against a school because they failed to provide a safe environment free of discrimination and harassment. Individuals and the Department could be named if they did nothing to protect the student. Parents can lodge a complaint on the student's behalf.

For teachers to protect themselves from legal suits, one suggestion is to set the ground rules at the beginning of a class that encourage respect for all students regardless of sexuality, race, ability, gender. Encourage non-harassment and state that there are consequences for bullying behaviour. Be prepared to take action. You need to try to create a safe environment and provide evidence to demonstrate that you take these concerns seriously. In this way you will be complying with the law as well as contributing toward making the school environment a safer place for SSA young people.

9. DISCUSSION/ROLE PLAY: EXAMPLES OF INCIDENTS FROM SCHOOLS (20 minutes)

Now we will practice looking at scenarios that have happened in schools and, using all the information learned in this PD, identifying key issues, teachers responsibilities and directions to take in order to attain a positive outcome for the student and all involved.

Overheads 13a 13c

Facilitator :

Puts *13A* up of a scenario about a SSA student. (cover scenario B and C from view.) Facilitator reads scenario 13A (see below) out loud.

Facilitator: You will be forming small groups to discuss scenarios like this one.

Facilitator: Form groups of about 5.

When they have done so:

Facilitator: Each group can think of a scenario themselves or use the one on the board.

In your groups, role play the scenario, then discuss: a) what you believe the issues to be and b) what the responsibility of the member of staff is. Finally, role play the whole scenario with your ending. (20 minutes for this)

SCENARIOS

Facilitator hands out to those groups that want one:

scenario 13A

Over the year a teacher develops a close working relationship with a withdrawn and isolated student. On one particular day, the girl arrives with badly slashed arms and is clearly more distressed than usual. She remains to speak with the teacher after class and after some time talks about her self-destructive thoughts regarding her confusion about her sexuality. The teacher suggests making an appointment with the SWC but the girl refuses, saying she'll only talk to that teacher.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

WHAT IS THE KEY ISSUE?

WHAT ARE THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES?

HOW SHOULD THE TEACHER PROCEED?

Scenario 13B

An academically bright year 10 student comes out to his friends and family. He has been the victim of gay bashing and taunting at school throughout his school life but when he 'comes out' and others at school hear about it, the bashings get worse. He complains to the Schools Welfare Co-ordinator who says that the Christmas holidays are coming up and suggests that things will settle down and be forgotten by next year. But after the break things are worse. Again he reports the bullying and how unsafe he feels. He says his marks are slipping and if things don't change he'll be forced to leave school.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

WHAT IS THE KEY ISSUE?

WHAT ARE THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES?

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT?

Scenario 13C

A student lives with her lesbian parents. For the first few years no teacher knows that she has two mothers, a birth mother and a non- biological mother. But at a recent parent-teacher interview that was attended by her mothers, they 'came out' to the teacher. His response is that their sexuality is their own business. No further discussion about their sexuality ensues. But, back in class, the teacher is no longer warm to the girl. There are subtle changes that disturb the student. She tells her parents who go up to the school and confront him. He denies it all but nothing changes for the girl and she is scared of being in his class. She has been seeing a school psychologist for some time about an unrelated matter and has in the past confided in her that she has lesbian mothers. On this occasion the girl and her parents see the psychologist and tell her that the teacher has changed and they think this is due to homophobia. The psychologist asks the student to describe what's been happening. "He used to like me and say encouraging stuff and I always got good marks like As and B's. But now he raises his eyebrows at me, he's not interested in anything I've got to say and he never chooses me when my hand is up. Also, my marks are now C+s and Cs.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

WHAT ARE THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES?

WHAT SHOULD THE PSYCHOLOGIST DO?

HOW DOES THE PSYCHOLOGIST PROCEED?

Facilitator: Come back into the large group.

Facilitator : Each group describes their scenario, the issues that were discussed and the responsibilities the staff and school have to keep the student safe. Let's start with this group.

If a group has selected one of the existing scenarios, the facilitator puts it up as an overhead. (10-15 minutes for this)

10. SUMMARY

(5 minutes)

Facilitator says:

There are three important points I would like you to take away from this session.

Overhead 12

Facilitator shows *overhead 12* and reads:

- 1. It is not being SSA that is the problem. Homophobia and discrimination are.**
- 2. Just like most schools don't put up with racist and sexist bullying, we must speak out against homophobic bullying.**
- 3. Ask yourself: If I were in his or her shoes, what support would I need?**

Feedback form to be handed out and completed if school requires this.

This teacher professional development module originally appeared in the Kaleidoscope Manual (2004). The author Viv Ray has provided the module with permission from the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service. Funding for the development of this resource was made available through the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.