

Core knowledge content

Self-esteem

When a person is happy with who they are. They have confidence in their abilities, feel good about themselves and value who they are, are proud of what they can do, and respect the decisions they make, the good and the bad. The biggest component of self-esteem is believing in yourself, even when at first you don't do well or succeed. It is also okay to make mistakes, but recognize and accept them.

A positive self-esteem helps with building self-confidence and improving their self-concept.

Self-concept

The perception a person has of his or her own identity. People form their self-concept using interpretations of information they acquire about themselves through experiences and interactions with others and their environment. A person's self-concept can be influenced by the opinions of others, reinforcement of behaviour, and explanations or understanding of one's own behaviour or actions. Unlike self-esteem, self-concept is not positive or negative, but rather accurate or inaccurate, or extensive or narrow (Ontario Ministry of Education – Health and Physical Education Curriculum, 2019, p. 313).

Self-concept is what makes a person unique. It is part of their identity, created through experiences with others, knowing the things they like about themselves, and is sometimes affected by what others think about them.

Self-concept and Sexual Orientation

A person's self-concept is connected to and includes sexual orientation, gender expression, and biological sex. Students get their ideas about sex and gender, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression from a variety of sources. For example, media, school, culture, faith, community, and society.

Having role models that you can relate to — for example, people of similar ages or cultures — is important. Therefore, having curriculum and content in school that is inclusive of all gender identities and sexual orientations is also very important. It is also crucial that gender identities and sexual orientations are portrayed respectfully and positively in the media, in literature, and in materials we use at school. When students view content that

shows gender and sexual diversity in a negative manner, this can negatively affect their self-concept, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

Family, school, and community support are crucial to the development of a positive self-concept. Positive development of self-concept is promoted when a person understands and accepts their gender identity and sexual orientation and is accepted by their family and their community. It can be harder to develop a positive self-concept, however, if the way a person feels or identifies does not meet perceived or real societal norms and expectations, or if they do not feel supported by their family, friends, school, or community. In other words, a person's positive development of self-concept can be harmed if they do not have support in dealing with their feelings of uncertainty, and self-concept can be strengthened when a person feels connected to a supportive and understanding community.

LGBTQ+ and Sexual Orientation

As part of a broadly based sexual health curriculum, it is important to speak openly about sex, gender expression, and sexual orientation. "Sexual orientation and gender expression are an important part of each student developing a positive self-concept. During childhood, it is quite common for children to have many different kinds of sexual feelings and experiences. During adolescence and into adulthood, people are compelled to define themselves through their sexuality. Though academics generally agree that sexuality includes a spectrum of feelings and actions, adolescents report enormous pressure to characterize themselves as 'straight'. According to [Statistics Canada](#), Canada is home to approximately one million people who identify as part of the LGBTQ2S+ community, accounting for 4% of the total population aged 15 and older in 2018. All students deserve a safe and inclusive environment in which to learn about sexuality.

Students who identify as LGBTQ or transgender have a disproportionately high rate of suicide attempts and self-reported suicidal ideation when compared to their straight and cisgender counterparts. The good news is that research also shows that connectedness to a school community is a protective factor for LGBTQ2S+ and transgender students. When LGBTQ2S+ and transgender issues are taught within the curriculum in a positive way, reports of school connectedness increase within the population of LGBTQ2S+ and transgender students.

Supplemental Knowledge

Glossary of Terms

Anti-Discrimination and harassment: includes bullying awareness and prevention programming.

Bi-sexual: refers to an individual with the potential to be emotionally and/ or sexually attracted to members of any sex.

Cis-gendered: refers to an individual who's gender or sense of identity corresponds to their biological sex.

Equity: refers to the right of the individual to a fair share of the goods and services in society.

Gay: refers to an individual who is emotionally and/ or sexually attracted to a person of the same sex; often interchangeable with the term homosexual.

Gender Identity: refers to how we view ourselves as masculine or feminine. For many, gender identify matches their physical body. For some, the way they see themselves as masculine or feminine is different form their physical body.

Heterosexual: refers to an individual who is emotionally and/ or sexually attracted to members of a different/ another sex.

Heterosexism: the belief in the inherent superiority and 'normalcy' of heterosexuality. It is the foundation for homophobia.

Homosexual: refers to an individual who is emotionally and/ or sexually attracted to members of the same sex.

Intersex: a medical term for someone who is biologically not clearly male or female; generally more accurate and more acceptable than hermaphrodite.

Lesbian: refers to a female who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to the same sex. Lesbian is the preferred term for women.

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two-Spirited, Queer, and Questioning

Queer: a term used in a number of different ways, i.e. as an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and other non-heterosexual identities. It is also used as a way of reclaiming and co-opting a once negative term; to remove 'queer' as a term of abuse. However, not everyone finds the term empowering; some resist it because of its use among homophobic people. Queer is a term that is increasingly gaining acceptance as an academic term.

Questioning: refers to a person who is exploring the possibilities of, or who is in the process of figuring out their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexual Orientation: encompasses the range of human sexuality from gay, lesbian, bisexual to heterosexual.

Transgender(ed): trans-identified is a broad term that describes people who feel that their anatomical sex does not match their gender identity, and/or whose appearance and behaviours do not conform to the societal roles as expected of their sex.

Transsexual: a person who experiences intense personal and emotional discomfort with their assigned birth gender and may undergo treatment (e.g. hormones, and/or surgery) to transition genders.

Two-spirited: refers to a member of the Aboriginal community who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Individual Aboriginal peoples have their own words in their own languages that describe different gender identities and sexual orientations.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Please refer to the [FAQ section of the American Psychological Association website](#) for commonly asked questions and evidence based responses.

Resources

Alberta Health Services. Teaching Sexual Health. (www.teachingsexualhealth.ca)

Kids Help Phone. (<https://kidshelpphone.ca/> or 1-800-668-6868)

Niagara Region Sexual Health Centers.

(https://www.niagararegion.ca/living/health_wellness/sexualhealth/sexual-health-centres.aspx)

Physical & Health Education Canada. Always Changing.

(<https://phecanada.ca/programs/always-changing.>)

Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, Sex & U. (<http://www.sexandu.ca>)

References

Ontario Ministry of Education (2019). The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Health and Physical Education. Toronto: Ontario. Print.

Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report.* Toronto, ON: Egale Canada HumanRights Trust.