

The Ontario Curriculum: Addressing Barriers to Acceptance of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

Refer to the Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: Health and Physical Education (2015), the Ontario Curriculum Grades 9-12: Health and Physical Education (2015), and the Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies Grades 1-6; Geography and History Grades 7 and 8 (2013) for complete expectations, available at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/>. Expectation numbers in brackets correspond to the curriculum documents within the summaries provided below. Where they are significant, teacher prompts or student responses are summarized here as well. Teacher prompts and student responses are not officially part of the mandatory curriculum but are there to provide guidance to the teacher in the context of discussions that may occur.

Grade 1:

Prior Knowledge, Self-Awareness

Children are taught names of male and female genitalia (C1.3)

NOTE: While not assigned this purpose within the curriculum, knowledge of genitalia is required in order to understand gender identity and sexual orientation and, we believe, is one of the primary purposes for its inclusion for such young children.

Grade 2:

Stereotypes

Same-sex families are one of many types of families (Social Studies A3.1)

Grade 3:

Stigma, Stereotypes, Self-awareness

Self-awareness is a factor in my emotional development (C1.4)

Gender identity and sexual orientation are an invisible difference that makes a person unique. We need to show respect for the differences in others (C3.3)

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Grade 5:

Self-image, Culture (Family)

Conflict between personal desires and cultural teachings and practices can cause stress during puberty. Accessing information about your concerns helps manage stress (C2.4)

Student response: Things I can control include being open to new ideas; whether I make my own decisions or let myself be influenced by others...; Things I cannot control include whether I am male or female, my gender identity, sexual orientation...

Self-concept, Stigma, Stereotypes

A person's actions can affect their own and others' feelings, self-concept, emotional well-being, and reputation (e.g. homophobic remarks) (C3.2)

Teacher prompt: Negative actions can hurt others and result in stigma. One example is how we view someone who has HIV: we may view him or her in a stereotyped manner and make assumptions. Stereotypes can have a strong, negative impact on someone's self-concept and well-being.

Grade 6:

Stereotypes, Self-awareness

Stereotypes, homophobia and assumptions about gender roles and expectations, sexual orientation, gender expression, etc. affect an individual's self-concept, social inclusion, and relationships with others (C1.3, C3.3)

Teacher prompt: Assumptions about what's normal for males/females/sexual orientation are "usually untrue and can be harmful." People who do not fit into expected norms are at risk for discrimination and can feel confused or bad about themselves. Coupled with discrimination, this can damage their self-concept.

Student response: Stereotypes are formed when we don't have enough information. Get to know people as individuals, and challenge stereotypes. Be open-minded, considering other perspectives. "We can understand people's sexual orientations better, for example, by reading books that describe various types of families and relationships. Not everyone has a mother and a father – someone might have two mothers or two fathers (or just one parent or a grandparent, a caregiver, or a guardian). We need to make sure that we don't assume that all couples are of the opposite sex, and show this by the words we use. For example, we could use a word like 'partner' instead of 'husband' or 'wife'. We need to be inclusive and welcoming... If we hear things that are sexist, homophobic, or racist, we can show our support for those who are being disrespected."

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Grade 7:

Self-awareness, Culture, Religion, Stigma

When making decisions about sexual health, consider gender identity, sexual orientation, cultural teachings, etc. (C2.4)

Teacher prompt: Thinking about sexual health can include religious beliefs and moral considerations when making a decision to have sex or wait.

The truth about HIV is downplayed. The following is shared: (C1.5)

- Condoms help protect against HIV.
- People with HIV can live a near-to-normal lifespan. HIV treatment can reduce the amount of HIV in someone's body to the point where it is much less likely that HIV will be transmitted.
- One of the best things you can do to stop HIV is to stop the stigma that is associated with it, e.g. gossiping.

Grade 8:

Self-awareness, Acceptance, Religion, Culture, Media

Factors that can affect an individual's decisions about sexual activity include awareness and acceptance of gender identity and sexual orientation, religious beliefs, cultural information, media messages, etc. (C1.4)

Demonstrate an understanding of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation (C1.5)

- **Gender identity** (e.g., male, female, two-spirited, transgender, transsexual, intersex) is a person's internal sense of being male or female, which may or may not be the same as a person's biological sex.
- **Gender expression** refers to how you demonstrate your gender through the ways you act, dress, and behave.
- **Sexual orientation** (e.g. heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual) refers to a person's sense of affection and sexual attraction for people of the same sex, the opposite sex, or both sexes.

Teacher prompt: Gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are connected to the way you see yourself and to your interactions with others. Individuals of all identities can develop a positive self-concept by understanding and accepting their gender identity, and being accepted by family and community

Student response: Understanding and accepting your gender identity and sexual orientation is supported by having all gender identities and sexual orientations portrayed positively in the

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media, in literature, school materials, and role models; having support from family, school, community, trusted adults, community organizations, and gay-straight alliances.

Grade 9:

All identified factors directly addressed, specifically Culture and Religion

Factors that can influence a person's understanding of their gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are addressed as acceptance, stigma, culture, religion, media, stereotypes, homophobia, self-image, self-awareness (C1.5)

Teacher prompt: "What determines a person's sense of self? How do social expectations and stereotypes about gender and sexuality influence how a person may feel about their gender identity or sexual orientation?"

Student response: "A person's sense of self is affected by the person's cultural and family background, religion, and what they have come to value. Media images, role models, support systems, and acceptance or lack of acceptance by others could influence how different people feel about their gender identity or sexual orientation." "Expectations or assumptions about masculinity and femininity and about heterosexuality as the norm can affect the self-image of those who do not fit those expectations or assumptions. This can make it difficult for a person to feel accepted by others."

Student response: Students can be supported in their gender identity or sexual orientation by talking to others who may be dealing with the same issues, LGBTQ community organizations, gay-straight alliances, guidance counsellors, health professionals, trusted adults and friends, etc.

Grade 10:

Culture, Religion, Homophobia

Describe some common misconceptions about sexuality in our culture, and explain how these may cause harm to people and how they can be responded to critically and fairly (C3.4)

Teacher prompt: Understanding about gender, gender identification, and sexual orientation varies widely and can be based on erroneous information.

Student response: Getting more information, having open-minded discussions, and thinking critically about the assumptions behind various ideas can help us think critically about their credibility. We must also encourage people to respect the rights of others. That respect is enshrined in the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Human Rights.

Teacher prompt: Heterosexism (the assumption that if someone is in a romantic or sexual relationship, it is with someone of the opposite sex) affects those who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. Using inclusive language reduces heterosexism and homophobia.

Student response: Showing respect, objecting to and reporting harassment, and participating in gay-straight alliances promote understanding and healthy relationships.