MOASH

michigan organization on
adolescent sexual health

LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity Toolkit

The purpose of this toolkit* is to **provide support, strategies, and resources** for Michigan health teachers who want to make their sex education lessons more inclusive for all students, particularly LGBTQIA+ youth.

*This is a living document that will be updated when appropriate. Thank you to the folks across Michigan for their contributions! We welcome feedback if you have it.

Why this toolkit exists

Many LGBTQIA+ youth (for an explanation of terms go to page 1) thrive in school, relationships and their communities, but it is important to recognize that LGBTQIA+ youth are also at high risk for experiencing violence and bullying, and have disproportionately high rates of unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, depression, and substance abuse.* **Comprehensive and inclusive sex education can help improve these outcomes for all youth.**

MOASH supports the full inclusion and equitable treatment of LGBTQIA+ people in all aspects of society. Specifically, MOASH supports the implementation of inclusive and affirming sexual health education and services in schools and healthcare facilities to improve the mental and physical health of LGBTQIA+ youth. Non-discrimination and other protective policies at the state and local levels, which ensure LGBTQIA+ youth safety, are essential to improve the mental and physical well-being of all students.

*"Sexual Minority Youth More Likely to Experience Multiple Risks." Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Some terminology to know

Language is always changing and this list is not exhaustive! These words can mean different things to different people.

Sexuality

Sexual orientation A person's experience of romantic and/or sexual attraction to others

Lesbian A girl or woman who experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to others of the same gender

Gay A boy or man who experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to others of the same gender

Bisexual A person who experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of the same or other genders

Queer A person who experiences attraction to people of many genders; an umbrella term used by some; a reclaimed political identity; academic study

Questioning A person who is questioning their sexual or gender identity

Asexual A person who experiences little to no sexual attraction to others

Aromantic A person who experiences little to no romantic attraction to others.

Pansexual A person who experiences romantic (**panromantic**) and/or sexual attraction to people regardless of gender

Gender

Sex A designation of male or female assigned at birth, typically based on external genitalia

Intersex A person born with a range of sex characteristics that may not fit a doctor's notions of binary "female" or "male" bodies. This includes variations in chromosomes, genitalia, and/or internal organs identified at birth, puberty or later in life

Gender expression External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics

Gender identity A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender.

Transgender A person whose gender identity does not match their assigned sex at birth

Cisgender A person whose gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth

Non-binary A person whose gender identity is outside of the gender binary (man-woman)

Transition The process a transgender or non-binary person may go through during the assertion of their gender identity. It is unique to each person and may or may not include social (e.g., name, pronouns) and/or medical (e.g., hormones, surgery) changes.

Definitions are from MOASH staff, Kim Phillips-Knope, and the Michigan Department of Education.
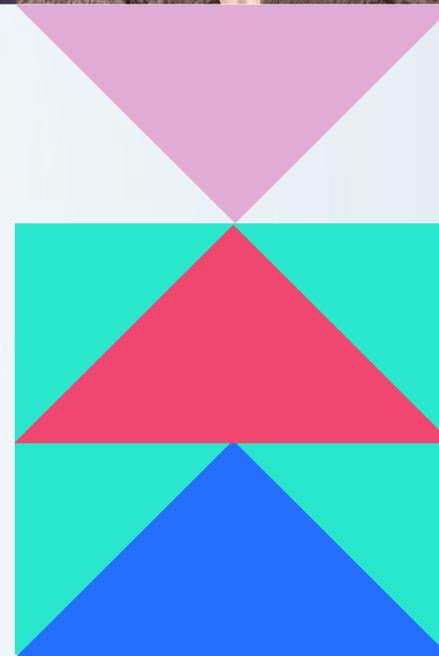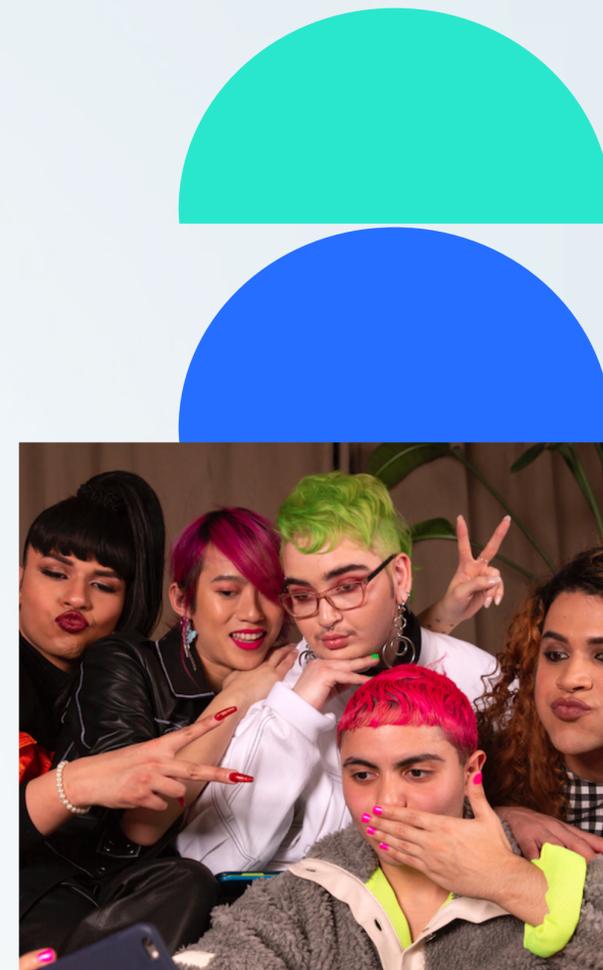
General guidelines for LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in the classroom

If ever you feel lost or not sure what to do, you can always return to these few principles to guide you.

01 Assume that your classroom is diverse.

By starting with the assumption that your class includes people of a variety of gender and sexual identities (which it does), you are less likely to convey homophobic or transphobic messages and more likely to communicate acceptance. Providing examples in class that include same-gender relationships and diverse families, as well as substituting gender-neutral terms such as "partner" for "boyfriend/girlfriend" or "relationship" for "marriage," can go a long way toward making your classroom more LGBTQIA+ inclusive. On the flip side, allowing a phrase like "that's so gay" to go unaddressed not only associates LGBTQIA+ individuals with undesirable characteristics, but also fosters a homophobic environment. It's crucial that teachers proactively create an environment where LGBTQIA+ students feel safe and supported.

02 Allow students to self-identify, and respect their identities.

As there are numerous possibilities for how a young person might identify with regard to their gender and sexuality, it is important to allow students to indicate the language with which they feel comfortable identifying. Steer clear of describing a student as "gay," "straight," "bisexual," or "transgender," unless they have first referred to themselves in that way. Never force anyone to self-identify. Furthermore, as some transgender and non-binary students change their name from the one given to them at birth, it is important to honor students' requests to be called by a first name with which they identify, which may be different than the one listed on your class roster. It is incorrect and harmful to use "it," "he/she," or "s/he" if a student's pronoun is unknown. Instead, use "they" or "them." It is important to consider that some students may identify as non-binary, and thus may not identify as "male" or "female." Avoiding splitting up the class by sex/gender is always a good practice in making the classroom feel more inclusive.

03 **Familiarize yourself with LGBTQIA+ vocabulary.**

Many educators worry about saying something wrong. Since terms change over the years and not everyone within the community has the same opinion about terms, it can feel tricky. When in doubt, check with a reputable resource like ones we list later - do not put that burden on your students! For instance, the phrase "sexual orientation" is preferable to "sexual preference," because it implies that one's sexuality is a natural orientation, rather than a choice or preference. Many people do not identify with the labels "gay" or "straight," so instead of using that as a blanket term to include everyone, we recommend "all genders and sexualities" instead. Because "homosexual," "transvestite," and "hermaphrodite" are terms that have been used to negatively label LGBTQIA+ people in the past, many members of the community find those terms offensive. Although some folks have reclaimed formerly negative labels such as "queer," it should not be assumed that all LGBTQIA+ folks view such terms positively. If you're unsure, do some research and check in with reputable sources - educating yourself goes a long way!

04 **Affirm diversity in gender, bodies, and sex.**

A safe and supportive environment includes respecting gender expression - things like how students dress, act, speak, etc. - especially when it falls outside of established gender norms. Interrupt and address any negative comments around someone's gender, or anyone reinforcing gender roles, stereotypes, and the gender binary (including asking students invasive questions). It's important to take the time to redirect students and fellow teachers who might use this language, even if they don't intend for it to be offensive. This also includes using a student's legal name or incorrect pronoun (*misgendering*). If someone misgenders a student, correct it, and move on. Normalizing transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary students is necessary to have an inclusive, supportive classroom. Further, intersex and asexual identities are often excluded, especially in sex education. It's important to acknowledge that sex, like gender, is not a binary and that not everyone has similar feelings or desires around sex and relationships. Check out our resources section for more guidance on this.

Changing your language: it makes a difference!
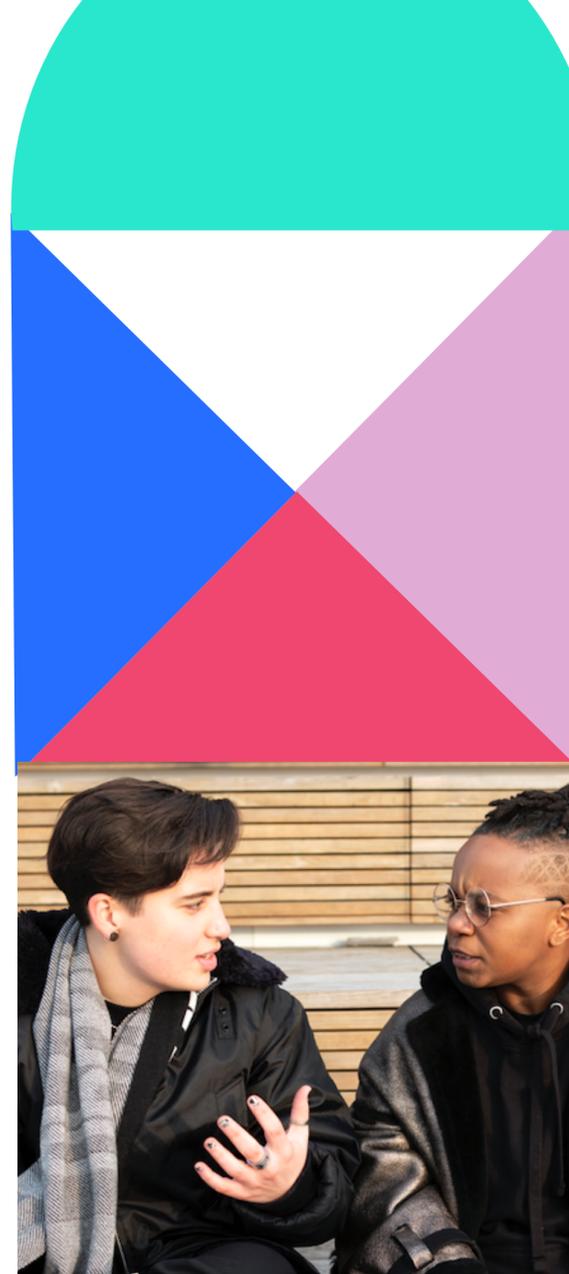
More gender-inclusive language

Language that avoids judgment or assumptions

Instead of...	Try using...	
Mother, Father	✓ **Parent, Guardian, Caregiver, Family**	Families and relationships are diverse. When discussing sexual health it is important to acknowledge this diversity, as students who do not see their own identity, desires, or experiences reflected in these discussions are likely to feel alienated.
Girlfriend, Boyfriend, Wife, Husband	✓ **(Romantic, Sexual) Partner, Significant other, Couple**	Using gender neutral terms to refer to relationship partners is more inclusive for LGBTQIA+ youth and avoids inaccurate assumptions that all young parents identify as heterosexual or exclusively date people of the opposite sex or gender.
Marriage	✓ **Committed relationship, Life-long relationship, Monogamous relationship**	Using an assortment of terms to describe relationships validates a variety of relationship types. It's important to remember that marriage isn't the goal for everyone, and that marriage wasn't an option for many LGBTQIA+ people until recently.
Girl, Boy/Guy, Boys and girls, Young women and men	✓ **Youth, Young person/people, Teenager**	Using gender-neutral terms to refer to people avoids awkward and inaccurate assumptions about gender and how someone may identify. Remember you can't assume someone's gender by looking at them!
Sex, Sexual intercourse	✓ **Oral, vaginal, or anal sex**	Because the terms "sex" and "intercourse" are commonly associated solely with penile-vaginal intercourse, it is important to introduce an expanded definition. Youth of all genders and sexualities may be engaging in oral, vaginal, and/or anal sex.
Girl/female or boy/male	✓ **People with uteruses, people with vulvas, people with penises, people with prostates, etc.**	When teaching anatomy, reproductive systems, or pregnancy, separate gender from body parts. Being specific about the body part or function is more inclusive of transgender, non-binary, and intersex students.

Discussing Pregnancy & HIV

LGBTQ+ youth experience sexual health disparities, including increased rates of pregnancy* and HIV/STIs, for a number of reasons. This may be due in part to the fact that LGBTQ+ youth are:

- more likely to use substances before engaging in sex
- less likely to use a condom or other form of birth control
- potentially engaging in behavior that may not align with their sexual orientation

as a result of discrimination, stigma, and lack of access to inclusive education and sexual health services.

Because of this, LGBTQ+ youth are also less likely to be aware of their HIV status and more likely to pass HIV on to future partners.^ While you might be hesitant to teach this information for fear of further stigmatizing LGBTQIA+ folks, as long as you emphasize that this increased risk has to do with the way LGBTQIA+ people have been marginalized and excluded, and emphasize that all young people who engage in unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex are at risk, you will help to make your sexual health curriculum more inclusive.

Youth of all genders and sexualities can be involved in a pregnancy. When talking about pregnancy, discussing multiple barrier methods (like condoms, dental dams, or gloves) and birth control methods, and emphasizing that youth across identities and relationships use them, will make your sexual health lesson more LGBTQIA+ inclusive.

^Center for Disease Control. (2013). "HIV Among Youth."

*Not enough data exists on the pregnancy rates of intersex, asexual, and transgender youth.

Want to learn more?

- glsen.org/educate/resources
- advocatesforyouth.org
- tolerance.org/lgbt-best-practices
- plannedparenthood.org
- amaze.org
- gsanetwork.org
- genderspectrum.org
- interact.org

Feedback? We'd love to hear it!

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