

Teasing, name-calling, and bullying



Parents of rainbow families worry a lot about whether their children will be subject to teasing and bullying because of their family structure. Most schools have a policy on bullying, and procedures in place to deal with incidents as they arise. Schools vary in how effective they are in dealing with this problem.

Many rainbow families report that their initial fears are unfounded and that their children experience no more or less teasing or bullying than other kids. Where teasing occurs, it is just as likely to be about the things kids have always teased each other about: weight, height, hair colour, glasses, cultural background, interests or ability.

That's so gay as a general insult or term of criticism still seems to be fairly common, starting in the higher grades of primary school and becoming more entrenched in high school. Some teachers challenge this language telling students it is offensive and explaining why. Many, however, do not.

Sometimes your child having a sense of humour, or not taking things too seriously, can contain a problem or reduce its impact. Giving your child strategies and language to deal with any potential teasing or bullying can also help them negotiate difficult situations.

If you are worried about how bullying is handled, you can ask to see the school's policy (often it's on their website), or arrange to see the principal to discuss your concerns. Keeping the channels of communication open with your child's classroom teacher and talking to them about your family structure can be helpful.

Discussing the issue with your children and asking them how they would like you to handle it – especially as they get older – can be a good idea. It may be that your child has the skills and resilience to cope with minor incidents on their own and you may only need to get involved if the behaviour becomes harmful or persistent.

Parents say ...

Experiences

I never got any sign that there were any conversations going on in the schoolyard that were uncomfortable or difficult, or any teasing or anything like that. I certainly appreciate that we have had quite a fortunate journey on this and that was part of the reason I wanted to speak to you. It's not always difficult. **Mark**

You get all this media about cyberbullying and we talk about that stuff a lot. If they are telling me the truth, it has never been something that they've experienced to any degree that has caused them concern. **Julie**

We've had no problems with bullying. As an educator, I think it is unfortunately one of the biggest fears of parents generally. And unnecessarily so, really. I think that all the early years of parenting we do (and gay parenting is good parenting in my view), helping kids to have good self-esteem, have a bit of a sense of humour, not take themselves too seriously, and become quite resilient – hopefully does make them into pretty resilient kids. **Julie**

Most of the kids at school know that Frances has two mums and there have been a couple of tiny incidents, but really it could have been about her red hair or her glasses. And certainly, the school administration is very supportive. **Trudy**

We went to a parents' orientation evening and I got a really bad vibe. I asked about their approach to bullying and their response was that they think it's a term that is bandied around too much and often it's about teaching the child who has been bullied some resilience. I just didn't like that approach at all. **Patricia**

Strategies

I actually raised the issue of a diversity or inclusion policy with the junior school principal a while ago. They've got a strong anti-bullying culture and policy and he said he thought it was inclusive enough. He didn't really see that we needed a separate policy, because it was included in the anti-discrimination policy.

I do understand that to some degree. They are aware of the issues and sensitive to them. **Jenny**

They did have an anti-bullying policy and, by the time he got to trade school, they had all the LGBT support and counselling and awareness. It was a good school. **Mark**

She's occasionally got, 'You must be a lesbian because your mums are'. Her response to that has been, 'No, I'm not'. She came home and talked to me about it and I said another possibility would be, 'Maybe?' She said she tried that and the reaction was hilarious so she's going to do that again. **Nicola**

We chose not to send her to the local school because the school is not across bullying. They don't have good strategies around it and they don't know what to do. They can't articulate what to do with the bully, the onlookers, the families, the broader circle, and we just didn't really feel safe about sending her there. **Katrina**

The only thing I would say in terms of this bullying thing with Chris was that it did end up escalating to the point that the principal of the middle school pulled both boys up to have a chat to them. They wouldn't go so far to say that the other boy's behaviour was discriminatory – they said both boys were behaving inappropriately and I guess they were. But some of the stuff this kid was saying was really vile; that we were going to hell and that he felt sorry for Chris growing up in our household. It was nasty and I think the school probably could have handled that a little more firmly. **Jenny**

We chose the school because of their capacity to support kids who come from a really interesting and challenging range of backgrounds. The town has got a very significant proportion of highly-disadvantaged kids and the school she goes to is now has some very good strategies in place around inclusivity, which we really liked. It's working really well. **Katrina**

Some kids would ask, 'So is your dad gay?' and he would say, 'Yeah', and they would say, 'Okay, right', and that was it. That is the nature of conversation when they are kids; it's quite funny and it's such a non-event. **Mark**

They have an anti-bullying policy, not that we've ever talked about it that much. They're more focused on the cyberbullying stuff and are pretty on the ball with that. **Nicola**

That's so gay!

'That's so gay' was sort of standard practice for a little while. I don't know that it is anymore. I don't hear it now.

Mark

When he was about nine – that bullish boy age where they start hanging out with the lads – I had a couple of his mates staying over for the weekend. We were in the car and one of them said, 'That's so gay', which Jeremy never used at home. Then the kid said to me, 'You're not gay, you're homosexual'. I said, 'It's not nice', and they said, 'Yeah, yeah, sorry'. They were completely aware of my sexuality and my partner and all the rest of it. **Mark.**

My daughter says that everyone says, 'That's so gay', all the time and that some of the teachers have said that it's not okay, and some of them don't intervene at all. I wish they would do more about it. There doesn't seem to be much impetus to deal with it. My partner is a high school teacher and she talks about it with her class; it's not hard. **Nicola**

The kids have never said anything about hearing, 'You're so gay' or 'That's so gay' in the playground. **Julie**

From time to time my son does use the term, 'You're so gay' or 'That's so gay', which I hate and he knows it, but I think that's part of the age and the culture. But, fundamentally, he will stand up for anyone. He has that real sense of justice: *this is right, this is wrong.* **Jenny**

Our daughter says it is too exhausting to fight all the time in relation to some of the comments. Even though she's an early adolescent, she is very focused on her peer relationships, being popular and not being different. She keeps quiet a bit. She used to pull people up if they said things like, 'That's so gay', or made homophobic slurs, but she doesn't anymore. She lets it go. She doesn't join in. If her friends do, she will pull them up, but not the wider class or in the playground. **Nicola**



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