

A series of reports on issues facing children today

Calls to ChildLine about sexual orientation, homophobia and homophobic bullying

Key findings

- An estimated 2,725 young people call ChildLine each year to talk about sexual orientation, homophobia or homophobic bullying.
- This set of issues appears to be of particular concern for boys. Males account for 55% of the calls about these issues, even though they account for only 25% of total calls to ChildLine.
- The most common problem cited by this group of young people was homophobic bullying. Fear of telling parents (or problems after telling them) was also a significant source of concern.
- Some young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people reported being triply isolated, with schools, friends and families all being unsupportive at best or overtly homophobic at worst.
- Some young people who were homophobically bullied reported being in a catch-22 situation: by reporting the bullying to their school or parents, they would effectively out themselves. Many were not yet prepared to do this, often because of homophobic attitudes they had heard expressed by teachers and parents.
- ChildLine counsellors report that young people calling about their sexual orientation are often extremely lonely, and isolated, and feel that they have nowhere else to turn.
- The findings in this report are based on detailed analysis of one month's calls to ChildLine.

1. Evidence: what young people tell ChildLine

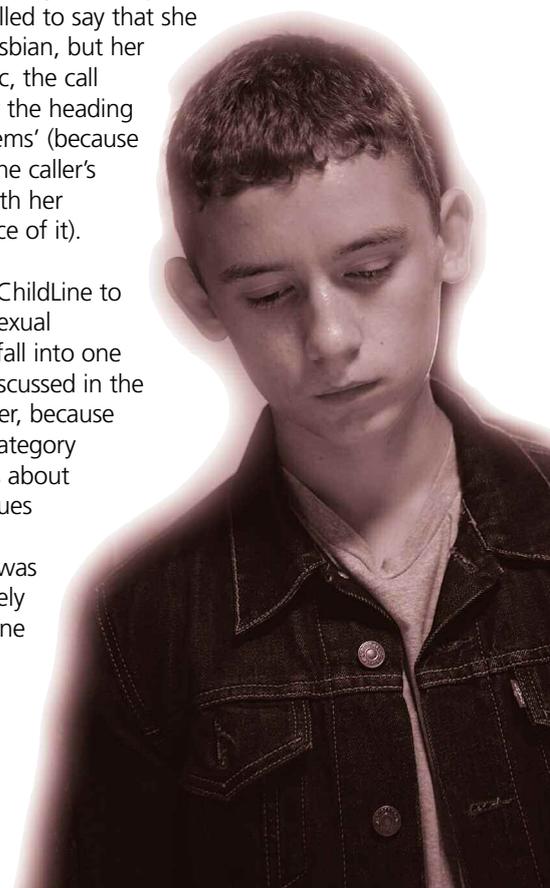
1.1 What information is this document based on?

This report examines calls to ChildLine about sexual orientation, homophobia and homophobic bullying.

1.2 Methodology

After children and young people speak to ChildLine, their calls are categorised under a set of headings based on the reasons they give for calling. For example, a call from a young person who was being homophobically bullied would be categorised as a call about 'bullying'. If a young person called to ask if it was 'okay to be gay', their call would be categorised under the heading 'sexuality'. And if a young person called to say that she was comfortable being lesbian, but her parents were homophobic, the call would be classified under the heading 'family relationship problems' (because the problem is not with the caller's sexual orientation, but with her parents' lack of acceptance of it).

When young people call ChildLine to discuss issues related to sexual orientation, calls tend to fall into one of the three categories discussed in the paragraph above. However, because ChildLine had no single category specifically related to calls about sexual orientation and issues related to it (such as homophobic bullying), it was difficult to record accurately how many calls the helpline received about these concerns. In order to ascertain more accurately





how many young people are calling ChildLine about sexual orientation, homophobia and homophobic bullying, ChildLine has therefore developed a new categorisation covering this range of issues. April 2006 was the first month that this new classification was used, and this briefing is

based on an analysis of calls during this one-month period. Our experience suggests that this analysis of one month's calls provides a good reflection of the calls that ChildLine receives over a whole year regarding these issues.

2. Statistics

2.1 Total calls about sexual orientation, homophobia and homophobic bullying

April 2006			Estimated calls per year*		
Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
98	120	218	1,225 (est.)	1,500 (est.)	2,725 (est.)

*Calls to ChildLine in the month of April regularly account for eight percent of each year's total calls. Therefore, extrapolating the number of calls that ChildLine received about sexual orientation and homophobia in April 2006 over a 12-month period, we can estimate that ChildLine receives approximately 2,725 calls about sexual orientation and/or homophobia per year.

2.2 Issues raised

The following chart shows the 10 most frequently mentioned problems in calls to ChildLine about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. (Please note that many young people mentioned more than one issue – for instance, most children who were being physically bullied also mentioned verbal bullying.)

Most frequently raised issues related to sexual orientation, April 2006

Issue	Female	Male	Total calls (April 2006)	Estimated total for full year
Total calls about homophobic bullying	29	30	59	738
Young person identifies as gay and is being homophobicly bullied	22	24	46	575
Young person does not identify as gay, but is being homophobicly bullied	7	6	13	163
Verbally bullied	24	22	46	575
Physically bullied	5	12	17	213
Friends bullying or not being supportive	16	8	24	300
Afraid to tell parent/carer, or has told parent/carer and is not being supported	20	22	42	525
Confused about or unhappy with own sexuality	16	22	38	475
Lonely/isolated	5	9	14	175
Afraid to tell teacher why being bullied, or has told teacher and is not being supported	6	4	10	125
Bullied for not conforming to gender stereotypes (eg being 'insufficiently masculine')	0	10	10	125



Girl-to-boy caller ratios, selected problems, 2004/05

Issue	% of callers who were female	% of callers who were male	Total calls
Problems with friends	86%	14%	5,443
Suicide	82%	18%	1,039
Family tensions	78%	22%	17,534
Bullying	71%	29%	32,688
Sexuality	45%	55%	3,799
Sexual orientation (April 2006)	45%	55%	2,725 (estimated total per year)
All calls to ChildLine	75%	25%	139,124

2.4 Age

In April 2006, 60% of the young people who called ChildLine about sexual orientation, homophobia or homophobic bullying were 12-15 years old. Thirty-four per cent were aged 16-18, and six per cent were 11 or under. There were no significant gender differences in callers' ages.

sense from callers that homophobic bullying may be an especially effective or powerful form of bullying, because victims are particularly unwilling to seek help, as this would force them to discuss why they are being bullied. Many LGBT young people fear the consequences of admitting why they are being bullied, while heterosexual males who are victims of homophobic bullying may be unwilling to acknowledge the nature of the bullying to teachers or parents, as this would only further serve to highlight their perceived lack of masculinity.

3. Key issues

3.1 Homophobic bullying

According to callers to ChildLine, homophobic bullying can easily become the defining aspect of a young person's school life. Because being gay is seen by many as 'wrong' or 'not normal', callers indicate that friends are more likely to be unsupportive, to join in with the bullying, or even to initiate it after a young person has come out to them. Young people report that many teachers do nothing to stop homophobic bullying, even when it is at its most overt. 'It feels like everyone at school is picking on me,' said 15-year-old Jason. 'They shove me in the corridor and call me "gay boy". It happens in almost every lesson, too. My so-called friends don't stand up for me, and the teachers don't do anything to help, even when half the class is calling me names. I was bullied in my last school for being gay – that's why I left. Here it's even worse. I don't know what to do.'

Calls about homophobic bullying (29 from females, 30 from males) accounted for 27% of the April 2006 calls to ChildLine about sexual orientation-related issues. There is a

3.1.1 Verbal bullying

- For callers to ChildLine in April 2006, verbal homophobic bullying was significantly more common than physical bullying (46 mentions of verbal bullying, compared to 17 for physical bullying). Girls and boys were equally likely to report verbal bullying (24 girls, 22 boys), and the bullying involved a variety of names. 'Kids at school are calling me "poo boy",' said 10-year-old Geoffrey, while 11-year-old Anna said, 'They're calling me "dyke" and "lemon".' Rumour mongering was also reported. For instance, Anna went on to say, 'People in my class are spreading rumours around the school that I'm a lesbian. I'm too embarrassed to talk to my teacher about it.'

3.1.2 Physical bullying

- In April 2006, boys were more than twice as likely to report being physically bullied (12 boys, five girls). For both genders, physical bullying was twinned with verbal

bullying. Harassment by large groups of people was a regular theme. In one call, when a ChildLine counsellor answered the phone, a 12-year-old boy said loudly to her, 'Dad, I'm by the phone booth outside school. You're just around the corner, right?' The counsellor then heard banging and shouting in the background, which died down after about 30 seconds. At this point, the caller explained what was going on: he had been near a phone booth just after school and had seen a gang of his regular tormentors coming towards him, so he had raced into the booth and pretended that he was about to be picked up by his father. 'I'm bullied because I like boys,' he said. 'They call me a "fucking poof".'

- Another boy, 16, told ChildLine that he had been attacked at a school sporting event several months before, because he is bisexual. With his mother's support, he got the police involved and is pressing charges against his assailant.
- Girls were not immune to physical violence. For example, 12-year-old Caroline called to say that in addition to being verbally abused, she was being pushed and kicked by schoolmates. She then burst into tears, saying, 'I feel so rejected.'

3.1.3 Homophobic bullying of young people who do not identify as LGBT

- Boys who do not conform to stereotypical gender norms report being subjected to homophobic bullying. 'I wouldn't mind being gay, I suppose,' said 15-year-old Darren, 'but I'm not. But a group of kids at school keep calling me "poofter". They make fun of me for everything – calling me gay's just part of it. They also call me "spazzer", and say that I walk like a girl.' Lindsay, 12, said, 'They call me a "smelly lezzie ginger freak". I think it's because I'm from a different country.' Another girl, 15-year-old Keesha, told ChildLine that she thought girls were calling her 'lezzie' because, 'I'm a different colour from everyone here, so they don't like me.'

- Do I have a girl voice?' one male caller asked ChildLine. 'People at school say I talk like a poofter.'

3.2 Young people's feelings about their sexual orientation

While bullying was the single most common issue cited in calls to ChildLine about sexual orientation, a significant number of young people (16 girls, 22 boys) called not to talk about problems that others had with their sexuality, but problems they had with it themselves: the confusion and sometimes even anger they felt at the idea that they might not be heterosexual.

- Some said that they were finding themselves attracted to members of the same sex and were confused, scared, or unhappy about this. For example, 13-year-old Jessica said, 'I'm really attracted to other girls, but I don't want to be gay. It's not right.' According to 14-year-old Jack, 'I look at some boys and get really excited, but I don't like fancying them. It feels wrong.' Charlie, 16, said, 'I'm confused. I've always thought I was straight, but now I've started having fantasies about other boys. The things I'm thinking make me feel like I must be sick.'
- Another boy called to say that he was confused because he fancied girls and boys. 'I mean, you're either straight or you're gay, right?' he asked. His ChildLine counsellor assured him that this was not necessarily the case, and that he should trust his feelings rather than trying to fit himself into any preconceived definition of acceptable sexuality.
- Other young people had experimented sexually with someone of the same sex and found that they liked it, but were uncomfortable with the possibility that they might be lesbian, gay or bisexual. 'This guy and I had oral sex with each other,' said 16-year-old Antony. 'Thinking about it makes me really excited, but it makes me feel dirty, too I don't know what to do – I can't talk to my mates or my family about it.'

- Still others were in turmoil not because they thought their bisexuality or homosexuality was wrong, but because they were afraid of the social repercussions. 'I'm confused,' said 16-year-old Jodie. 'I've started having sex with a friend of mine and I enjoy it, but I want to stop because I don't want people calling me a lezzie.' Another caller, 14-year-old Evan, said, 'I know I'm gay, but I don't want to be – people will make my life hell if they find out.'

3.2.1 Comfortable being gay

- ChildLine is a helpline, so gets few if any calls from young people wanting to say that they are content with their lot in life. However, some young people who called ChildLine in April 2006 to speak about homophobia or related issues did make a point of saying that they were comfortable with their sexuality, even if most of the people around them were not, or would not be if they knew the truth.
- 'I'm only attracted to girls,' said 17-year-old Sofie. 'I'm comfortable with that – it doesn't feel wrong or odd – but my friends all talk about how disgusting they think lesbians are. Eventually, I told two who I thought I could really trust, but then they told everyone else and now no one will talk to me.'
- 'I'm happy I'm gay,' said 11-year-old Jude, 'but nobody else is. Everyone calls me "batty boy" and kicks me when I go past.'

3.2.2 Transgender

- In April 2006, ChildLine received a small number of calls about transgender issues, including cross-dressing and the desire for a sex change.

3.3 Lack of support – from parents, teachers and friends

Young people who suffer homophobic bullying often find themselves between a rock and a hard place: if they do not seek support from teachers or family, the bullying is less likely to end, but if they do seek

support, they may be confronted with even more homophobia, this time from their teachers or loved ones. Even if parents and teachers are not homophobic, many young people fear that they are. For instance, 17-year-old Natasha told ChildLine that she had begun a relationship with another girl, and was being bullied because of this. She told ChildLine that she was willing to tell her parents and teacher that she was being bullied, but did not feel she could tell them why, as she thought they would disapprove.

3.3.1 Unsupportive parents or carers

- Many homosexual children know – through years of hearing slurs – that their parents are homophobic. The fear of telling parents and problems that resulted from telling them was the second most frequently mentioned issue for young people calling ChildLine about their sexual orientation. In April 2006, 20 females and 22 males told ChildLine that they were gay, but were either afraid to tell their parents, or had done so and met with negative reactions.
- 'I was being bullied at school,' said 13-year-old Nick. 'When my dad found out, he was sympathetic, but that's because he didn't know why I was being bullied. When he found out I was gay, he freaked. Since then, every time he gets angry at me for something, he threatens to throw me out of the house. He never used to do that.'
- 'My parents are very religious,' said 14-year-old Dipesh. 'They say that being gay is a sin – I'll never be able to tell them the truth.'
- 'I think my parents are okay with gay people in general,' said 16-year-old Georgia, 'but I think they'll freak if they find out I'm a lesbian. I'm an only child, and my mum's always talked about how much she's looking forward to being a grandmother.' The ChildLine counsellor explained to Georgia that lesbians can have children, and that this is increasingly common.



- Beth, 15, said she was afraid that homophobia was jeopardising her foster care placement. 'Since I came out a year ago, my carer has been making lots of homophobic cracks,' she said. 'It's like she doesn't trust me any more or something, or thinks I'm a different person.' Beth went on to say that the weakening relationship with her carer was making her very nervous. Her life had been very chaotic and violent before being placed with this particular family, and now she was worried that if her carer no longer wanted her around, she would be kicked out.
- Some young people said they were having problems with other members of the family, for instance a brother, sister or grandparent. 'Is it okay to be gay?' asked 14-year-old Billy. 'My sister says it's wrong, and that makes me really upset. I don't know why I'm so bothered by it – it's just that we always got along really well, and now that she knows I'm gay it's like she loves me less or something.'

3.3.2 Supportive parents

- A small number of young people said that they had reported homophobic bullying to a parent, and had been supported. But even when a parent was supportive, there were sometimes caveats. For instance, 16-year-old Zoe said, 'I told my mum I'm a lesbian, and she was alright about it – but she told me not to tell anyone else. I know that's partly to protect me, but it feels weird to have this big secret, especially when all my friends are talking about boys. What am I supposed to say?'

3.3.3 Teachers

- Teachers or head teachers were mentioned in 13 calls about sexual orientation in April 2005/06, and were only spoken of positively in three of those. Unfortunately, in each of the calls where young people spoke positively about one or more teachers, the young person also spoke negatively about other teachers, indicating that even in

schools where young people feel some level of support regarding their sexual orientation, that support is patchy and inconsistent, and exists within a broader context in which disapproval and lack of support is not the exception, but the rule.

- In some cases, young people said they were embarrassed to talk to their teacher because they did not want to bring attention to their sexual orientation. For instance, 13-year-old Daisy said that people were bullying her because she was a lesbian, but told ChildLine: 'I'm too embarrassed to tell a teacher why they're bullying me.'
- Some children said that they had worked up the courage to tell a teacher about homophobic bullying, but then were not believed. Freddie, 10, said, 'Every day, other kids call me "poofter" and kick me on the playground. When I told a teacher, he said he didn't believe me. Why would I make that up?'
- Other callers reported being offered impractical advice that did not address the homophobic bullying. For instance, 11-year-old Katie said that other pupils were calling her a 'fat lesbian'. When she told a teacher, she was told to 'just keep away' from the children who were bullying her. As Katie somewhat exasperatedly said to ChildLine, this was woefully inadequate advice: 'I see them in class, on the playground, in corridors and outside school. How am I supposed to "just keep away" from them? Become invisible?'
- In some cases, teachers were colluding in homophobic bullying by allowing it to go unchecked, despite their knowledge that it was occurring. For instance, 14-year-old Leon called ChildLine one day after school to say, 'I'm not sure I can take it any longer.' That day, he said, boys and girls in his maths class were shouting 'gay boy' very loudly at him. 'The teacher could hear

everything,' he said, 'but she didn't do a thing.'

3.3.4 Friends

- Unfortunately, many children who are bullied for whatever reason report having problems with friends as a result. In some cases, friends refuse to help bullied children, for fear of being bullied themselves. In other cases, friends even join in the bullying. In calls to ChildLine about sexual orientation and/or homophobia in April 2006, 16 girls and eight boys said that their friends were either not being supportive or were actively bullying them because of the caller's sexuality. Blanking was common – for instance, Zoe, whose mother told her not to tell anyone (mentioned above), said, 'Eventually I did tell a friend – someone I was really close to – and now she won't even look at me.'
- Several young people said that they had told one friend in confidence – generally the one considered most trustworthy – and that friend had then immediately spread the story around school. 'I only had one good friend at school,' said 16-year-old Paige. 'When I told her I was gay, she told lots of other people, and now everyone calls me lezzie. I feel really betrayed, and now I'm lonelier than ever.'
- Still other young people told ChildLine that their friends actively bully them since finding out they are gay. 'I told my closest friends that I'm gay,' said 12-year-old Sean. 'Now they call me names and insult me. I'm confused and upset – and angry, too. I don't know what to do.' Rosie, 13, said, 'Since I told my best friends that I'm a lesbian, they've been bullying me and threatening to tell everyone else. I'm scared that if my parents find out they'll disown me.'

3.3.5 Supportive friends

- A small number of callers (all female) did say that their friends (or some

friends) were supportive. 'I'm lucky,' said 17-year-old Brooke. 'I've got a good group of friends – we look out for each other.'

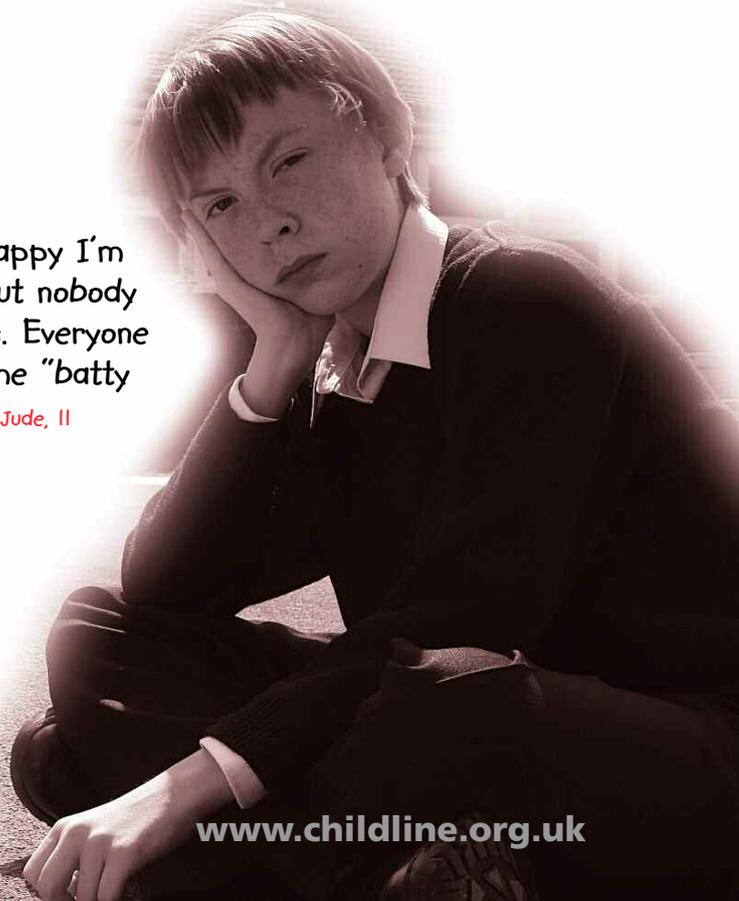
3.4 Religion

At a time when being accepted and having a sense of belonging are central to one's well being and self-identity, family, friends and school are the three core aspects of most young people's lives: the sources of most of their socialisation, where they spend almost all their time, and where they get their values from. For some young people, church is also an important aspect of life, but for the few callers who spoke to ChildLine about religion, it was a source of conflict rather than solace. 'My family is very religious, and I am, too,' said Mohammad, 'but in our religion, being gay is wrong.'

3.5 Loneliness and isolation

Because of a lack of support from family, friends and school, LGBT young people often report feeling lonely and isolated. While 14 young people spoke specifically about feeling isolated or alone, this feeling was an undercurrent in many calls.

'I'm happy I'm gay, but nobody else is. Everyone calls me "batty boy".' *Jude, 11*



4. Counsellors' views

ChildLine counsellors have a unique insight into the feelings and experiences of children and young people. In this section, some of these counsellors discuss what children tell them about sexual orientation, homophobia and homophobic bullying.

4.1 Coming to terms with one's sexuality

- 'I had a call about this earlier today,' says one counsellor. 'At first, the girl was trying to work out if she was lesbian or not. At its heart, it was like any other call where a young person is trying to understand and cope with the fact that they are becoming this sexual being who has attractions to other people – but in this girl's case, she wasn't able to talk about any of this with her friends, because she was attracted to other girls rather than boys. Being able to come to terms with your sexuality by talking and joking with your mates is something that heterosexuals take for granted, but kids who are gay don't generally have that luxury.'

4.2 Coming out

The girl mentioned above also wanted to talk about coming out to her parents.

- 'After talking for a while, she said she was sure she was gay. I think she just needed the opportunity to say it out loud to someone to know that it felt true. She said she had a close relationship with her parents, so wanted to tell them – but she wasn't sure how they'd react. So we talked about how she was going to break the news, and I helped her run through various scenarios for how they might respond, and then we talked about how she might respond to what they did and said. One thing we talked about was that their first response wasn't necessarily their last or even trust response. We talked about what she would do if their reaction was bad, or shocked, or disappointed, and how she could respond to something like that in a way that, instead of leading to a big bust-up, was more constructive.'

- 'In a lot of cases,' says another counsellor, 'a young person doesn't call to talk about how to come out, they call to talk about the tremendous fear they feel about what will happen when he or she – but especially he – does come out, or gets found out. For some callers, a few people already know the truth, and the young person lives in fear of what will happen if those people tell others.'

- 'For girls who are coming out,' says a counsellor, 'perhaps there isn't such an element of it being about vulnerability and failure. But for boys, in terms of accepted notions of masculinity, coming out also means making themselves more vulnerable, and more of a target, verbally and physically – and making yourself vulnerable is the opposite of what traditional masculinity is all about. Being gay – or even "soft" – is seen as being a failure as a male, and then when they get bullied for that, boys tend to feel like even more of a failure.'

4.3 Loneliness and isolation

- 'I've spoken several times in the past with a young Muslim boy,' says a counsellor. 'He was pretty sure he was gay, but he was very scared about what his family, friends and school would think. He wasn't going to be supported in any of these areas, but didn't have anywhere else he could turn.'
- 'If you're heterosexual,' says another counsellor, 'your sexuality is only a part of who you are as a person. We'd like to think that's how it is if you're homosexual, but for the young people I talk to, things are more complicated than that. Because they're gay, they are bullied and isolated. Experiencing that isolation and loneliness and, in some cases, even self-loathing, can mean that the whole of the person become invested in that one aspect of their identity – the aspect that has made everyone else turn against them.'

4.4 Homophobic bullying

- 'I think that society imagines that being gay has become easier for young people because it is for adults, but in many ways, that's not true. I get far more calls about homophobic bullying now than I used to.'

4.5 Schools

- 'I think that the legacy of Section 28¹ [which from 1988-2003 said that local authorities were not allowed to 'promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a "pretended family relationship"'] made it very difficult for schools to be supportive to pupils,' says a counsellor. 'If they were seen as being supportive, they might be accused of promoting it. I think that has a legacy which remains even now.'
- 'Kids are marginalised, and their lives are made a misery at school,' says another counsellor. 'One young person said to me that walking through the corridors at his school was his idea of hell.'
- "Cultural factors can also be an issue,' says a counsellor. 'At some schools, being respectful of what are seen as cultural norms is more important than addressing homophobia. For instance, if some kids are calling others "batty boy" or using "gay" as an insult, the school will say, "Oh, that's a cultural thing, and therefore we don't address it. Because this is a school that celebrates all cultures, and if that sort of language and behaviour is a part of some cultures, we won't challenge it.'"

4.6 What would help?

- "I've heard that most schools don't have anti-bullying policies that mention homophobic bullying,' says one counsellor. 'Do they think they don't have any gay pupils in their school?' [For more on this issue, see point 6.2.5]
- "Policies aren't worth anything if they're not implemented, but if you don't even have the policy as a starting point, you're not going to get very far,' says another. 'And even with the best policies in the

world, if staff at schools are colluding in homophobic bullying, as we so often hear they are, you're not going to get anywhere.'

- "Perhaps it all comes down to training,' another concludes. 'I feel that a lot of teachers and heads just don't have a clue how to deal with this problem.'



5. Recommendations

5.1 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

It is essential that the non-discrimination principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) set out below, which provide a firm foundation to challenge and tackle homophobic bullying in the UK, are fully implemented, and that these should form the basis of the recommendations which follow.

The UNCRC enshrines fundamental civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that children are entitled to and that States Parties to the treaty must ensure they take measures to promote. Rights contained in the Convention are each individually important; however, there are certain provisions that are overarching but also apply to homophobic bullying. These Rights include:

Article 2

States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

Article 4 states that States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights contained in the Convention, effectively imposing a duty on all signatories to ensure that children's rights are upheld.

5.2 Improved Personal, Social and Health Education

5.2.1 England

Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), which covers bullying, should be made a foundation subject at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Evidence shows that PSHE is an important intervention for preventing bullying.² PSHE lessons and activities should be used, for example, to raise awareness of the nature of bullying and its effects in order to encourage pupils to think of possible solutions to the problem in their own contexts.

PSHE lessons can also be used to help develop children's self-esteem, self-confidence and assertiveness, to address attitudes to relationships and issues of violence and power within those relationships, to recognise that bullying, aggression and violence are wrong, and to help children understand the importance of difference and celebrate diversity.

5.2.2 Scotland

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues should be included in the curriculum, particularly in areas such as citizenship, personal and social development (PSD) and religious and moral education (RME).

5.2.3 Northern Ireland

The PSHE programme being developed by the Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland should include the issue of homophobic bullying in the development of modules. The issue should be included in an age-appropriate way in current Key Stages 1 and 2 and be incorporated into development of Key Stages 3 and 4.

5.3 Research

5.3.1 UK

Further research should be undertaken on a UK-wide basis to look at the ongoing experiences of LGBT young people at school and the impacts of



homophobic bullying. The research should cover emotional impacts, as well as the effects on academic achievement, and should examine best practice.

5.3.2 *Scotland*

Research undertaken for the *Promoting Equal Opportunities in Education*³ report should be fully implemented. It is essential that this research is used to inform anti-bullying policies, training and services.

5.4 Strengthened anti-bullying policies

5.4.1 *England*

Since September 1999, local education authorities (LEAs) have had specific duties to combat bullying. Schools must have anti-bullying policies and procedures and LEAs must ensure that their schools comply with their duties. Since 2004, all schools and LEAs have a duty to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, as set out in Section 175 of the Education Act 2002.

It is essential that schools include in their anti-bullying policies procedures for dealing with homophobic bullying.

5.4.2 Children and young people play an integral role in the development of anti bullying policies and they must be fully consulted and involved at all stages in the development of policies. Children and young people should be encouraged to challenge homophobia if and when they experience it, and be given information and support about how to do so.

5.4.3 Understanding and procedures for dealing with homophobic bullying should be a compulsory component of every school's anti-bullying policy. Members of staff in the education service must be trained in dealing with homophobic bullying, as it is vital that they understand how they may be bullying children and young people, and if so how to change their behaviours accordingly. They must also be able to respond to such bullying when they are aware of or witness it.

5.4.4 Clear guidelines and procedures on how to work with individuals should be

included in anti-bullying policies to ensure that consistent responses are made to all incidents of homophobic bullying. These should include procedures to change the behaviour of children who bully; mechanisms for young people to report homophobic bullying and seek confidential support; dealing with incidents in a sensitive and inclusive way; support for the victims of bullying and help for them in developing appropriate response behaviours; and work with bystanders, who must also be able to respond to such bullying when they witness or are aware of it.

5.4.5 It should be recognised that young people in the school community may have lesbian, gay or bisexual parents/carers, brothers, sisters, carers or friends and that this might be a source of homophobic bullying. Education staff should make it clear that this will be challenged appropriately and in consultation with parents/carers.

5.4.6 Anti-bullying policies and procedures should be well publicised, monitored and reviewed. It should be clear that homophobic bullying is unacceptable and will be dealt with in a manner similar to other forms of bullying.

5.4.7 *Scotland*

The Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED), Education Authorities (EAs) and schools should include homophobic bullying in their anti-bullying and equal opportunities policies. SEED should also take lead responsibility for promoting the importance to schools and Education Authorities of tackling homophobic bullying.

5.4.8 Homophobic bullying and lesbian, gay or bisexual issues should be included in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). The continuing professional development of all education staff should include methods on how to identify and challenge homophobia in the school community.

5.4.9 Approaches to challenging homophobic bullying should include circle time with younger children, theatre in education



(TIE) with older pupils, increased inclusion of LGB issues and same-sex relationships in the curriculum, and inviting external speakers into the school from the LGB community and the voluntary sector.

5.4.10 *Wales*

The Welsh Assembly Government should ensure that all staff in the education service should have initial and ongoing training which covers different types of bullying. Homophobic bullying should be a key part of this training to raise awareness and develop best practice in dealing with specific incidents.

5.4.11 *Northern Ireland*

Schools in Northern Ireland should take account of homophobic bullying in the development of anti-bullying policies and should ensure the participation and involvement of children in the development of these policies. Initial teacher training and post-qualifying teacher education should ensure awareness-raising on this issue and promotion of best practice.

5.5 Safe environment in schools

5.5.1 *England, Scotland and Northern Ireland*

The most effective anti-bullying initiatives are those that form part of a whole school strategy. Alongside devising and implementing anti-bullying policies, all members of the school community, including teachers, support staff, pupils, parents, governors in England and School Boards in Scotland, should be involved in creating and maintaining a safe environment.

5.5.2 Creating and maintaining a safe environment in schools requires a culture of vigilance and a clear understanding by everyone of acceptable behaviour. It also requires members of the education service to uphold standards of behaviour as set out in the anti-bullying policy, prevent all forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying where possible, and act swiftly when it does take place.

5.6 Support services in schools

5.6.1 *England*

It is vital to set up an advisory and support

service in schools to which children and young people who are experiencing homophobic bullying can turn. Independent counselling schemes in schools give children and young people someone to turn to who can help them deal with their worries and difficulties. They also enable children and young people to build up their resilience and self-esteem. The National Healthy Schools Standard states that a healthy school

*'has a confidential pastoral support system in place for pupils and staff to access advice and this system actively works to combat stigma and discrimination'.*⁴

Such a service could be developed through training of teaching or non-teaching staff or putting in place an advisory support service. Peer support and advice services are also important, to enable older children to support younger children about these issues.

5.6.2 Resources and funding for support services need to be ring-fenced to ensure that every child and young person in school who may be experiencing problems or worries including homophobic bullying has access to an adult who they can trust and speak to on their own terms.

5.6.3 *Scotland*

Signposts to support and specialist services for LGBT young people should be available to all young people in schools.

5.6.4 *Wales*

Recommendations set out by the Children Commissioner for Wales Clwyd Inqu⁵ to ensure that every child has someone to turn to in schools through continuing its development of an independent school counselling strategy should be implemented by the Welsh Assembly Government.

5.6.5 The Government should also ensure that recommendation 21.30 of the Clywch Inquiry is universally implemented. This states that school governing bodies should provide all

children and young people with information about relevant organisations they can contact to talk about any problems or concerns they may have.

at the Department of Education Northern Ireland should pay particular attention to how a school deals with incidents of homophobic bullying.

5.6.6 *Northern Ireland*

It is important that all children in Northern Ireland have access to a range of listening services, including independent school counselling. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland (DENI) should take account of homophobic bullying as an issue in the development of the regional schools' counselling service.

5.7 Funding for listening services

England, Scotland and Wales

Children and young people need to be able to talk confidentially if they are at risk of or experiencing homophobic bullying and any other issues that affect their lives. This is particularly important for children and young people who are socially excluded, hard to reach or in need of protection. It is vital that listening and advice services such as ChildLine and there4me.com are adequately funded so that children and young people have somewhere to turn when they cannot find help and are at risk of or are experiencing homophobic bullying.

5.8 Monitoring, inspection and evaluation

5.8.1 *England*

Schools' anti-bullying policies are criteria for validating their achievement of national healthy school status. Anti-bullying policies are also monitored as part of a school's Ofsted inspection. To satisfy both national healthy schools status and Ofsted's inspection, procedures for dealing with homophobic bullying should be required to be included in anti-bullying policies. Where procedures for dealing with homophobic bullying are missing from a school's anti-bullying policy, Ofsted and the national healthy school programme should require that it is included in the policy.

5.8.2 *Wales and Northern Ireland*

When carrying out an inspection, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, ESTYN, and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)



6. Appendix: Putting ChildLine's evidence into context

Sexual orientation, homophobia and homophobic bullying in the UK

6.1 Defining homophobia

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) defines homophobia as 'dislike or fear of someone who is lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB)'. Homophobic attitudes, says DfES, 'can also affect anyone who is perceived to be homosexual or who does not conform to stereotypical standards of masculine or feminine behaviour'.⁶ Homophobia is often related to heterosexism, the assumption that everyone in a particular setting – for instance, a school – is heterosexual. Research indicates that homophobic bullying is often not taken as seriously as other forms of bullying, and is often seen as normal behaviour for boys.⁷

6.2 How common are homophobia and homophobic bullying?

6.2.1 Despite increasing acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adults, there are indications that, amongst young people, homophobic bullying is on the rise.⁸ 'Gay' has become a standard term of disparagement in primary and secondary schools. A 1998 GALOP survey found that 83% of LGB young people had experienced verbal abuse and 47% had experienced physical abuse,⁹ up significantly from 1984, when a survey showed that 60% had experienced verbal abuse and 20% had experienced physical violence.¹⁰ Research by Rivers has found that, among those who had been homophobic bullied, 80% had suffered name-calling, 69% had been openly ridiculed by pupils and occasionally teachers, and 59% had been hit and/or kicked. More than half (55%) had had stories spread about them, 49% had been teased regularly, 45% had been stared at in a frightening way, 23% had been blanked or 'sent to Coventry' (ostracised or shunned), and eight per cent had been sexually assaulted.¹¹

6.2.2 A 2003 Northern Ireland survey of LGBT people under the age of 25 found that 63% of respondents had experienced negative attitudes at school regarding their sexual orientation. Of that group, only 13% sought support.¹² Research in Scotland has found that pupils are less likely to report homophobic bullying than they are to report more general bullying: 69% of respondents who had experienced general bullying had reported it to school staff, whereas only 15% of those who had experienced homophobic bullying had done so. Of those who had reported homophobic bullying, only 10% were satisfied with the outcome.¹³

6.2.3 One of the key reasons cited for not reporting homophobic bullying was being unwilling to out oneself to a teacher, either because the young person considered this to be too big a personal step to take, or because the young person feared encountering homophobia from school staff. A survey of lesbian, gay or bisexual men and women in England and Wales who had been bullied at school found that almost 30% reported being bullied by their teachers because of their sexual orientation. Only 22% reported this to another teacher, and only 16% told that other teacher why they were being bullied. Girls were more likely to tell another teacher than were boys.¹⁴

6.2.4 In 2002, a DfES survey found that 82% of teachers were aware of verbal homophobic bullying in their school, with 26% being aware of physical incidents.¹⁵ Callers to ChildLine also report seemingly wilful ignorance by teachers. In Scotland, a 2006 report found that nearly 40% of responding schools believed that they believed incidents there had been absolutely no verbal homophobic bullying at their school in the last year, with nearly 70% of schools reporting that there had been fewer than five incidents at their school in that period. However, research carried out for the same report amongst LGBT pupils themselves found 84% of respondents saying that they were aware of homophobic bullying at their school.¹⁶

6.2.5 According to DfES, 'many schools fail to challenge homophobic bullying in the way they would, for example, racist bullying.'¹⁷ Some research has found pupils reporting that many teachers 'did not define homophobic name-calling as bullying and so did not impose sanctions on those who engaged in it'.¹⁸ This finding is congruent with a 2002 Ofsted report saying that in many schools, nothing was being done to challenge homophobic attitudes.¹⁹ And DfES found that while almost all schools have written anti-bullying policies, a mere six per cent of those policies mention homophobic bullying.²⁰ In Scotland, research carried out by LGBT Youth Scotland and published by the Scottish Executive found that while 70% of responding schools make explicit reference to racist bullying in their anti-bullying policies, only 25% refer to sexual orientation, homophobia or homophobic bullying.²¹

6.3 Characteristics of homophobia and homophobic bullying

6.3.1 Research indicates that because homophobic bullying is often targeted at heterosexuals, many schools do not take it as seriously as other forms of bullying.²² An unwillingness to enforce anti-homophobia measures ignores the normative (i.e. standard-setting) function of homophobia, in which heterosexuality is held to be the only 'normal' option, and variants are labelled as deviant, or as 'useless' or 'rubbish'. When being gay is equated with being rubbish, then homosexuals are being insulted, whether they can hear the insult or not. At primary school age, homophobic name calling is sometimes excused because the children involved do not yet fully understand sexual orientation, but this too hurts people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. As one researcher notes, 'Long before they have any real understanding of what the word means... children have already been instilled with the belief that to be gay is something terribly unnatural and shameful.'²³ Acceptance of 'casual homophobia' also ignores the fact that very few young LGBT people are 'out',

and will often overhear or witness homophobic behaviour, generally being forced to suffer in silence. Research in Northern Ireland, for instance, has found that on average LGBT youth wait five years between discovering their sexuality and coming out.²⁴

6.3.2 Homophobic bullying often starts before most children understand what 'gay' means, with the term being used synonymously with 'rubbish' or 'useless'. For many, it soon also comes to mean 'insufficiently masculine'. For instance, DfES²⁵ cites an incident in which a young male pupil accused his male teacher of being gay. The boy had seen the teacher and the teacher's girlfriend kissing in public, and had felt that such an overt display of romantic behaviour was unmanly, and therefore 'gay'. Such tightly constrained definitions of acceptable male behaviour help shape the role that homophobic bullying plays in enforcing gender norms. Homophobic bullying is frequently used as a means of policing how boys in particular are allowed to behave (by others and themselves), and as a means by which boys demonstrate and verify (to themselves and others) their developing masculinity.²⁶ Ethnographic research indicates that many boys simultaneously hold the position that being called a homophobic pejorative is a dangerous and threatening thing for one's social status, but that homophobic bullying, when they do it, is just a way of joking around.²⁷

6.3.3 For callers to ChildLine, homophobia in the family is often a more significant issue than homophobic bullying at school. Research in Northern Ireland highlights the problems LGBT youth face at home: 63% of LGBT respondents to a Youthnet Northern Ireland survey did not feel that they could come out to their parents as early as they came out to others.²⁸

6.4 Effects of homophobia: long-term and short-term

LGBT youths are one of the most at-risk groups in society, according to research.²⁹

As pupils, they have higher levels of absenteeism and truanting in secondary school, are less likely than their heterosexual peers to enter further education, even if outperforming them academically, and are more likely to contemplate self-harm and suicide.³⁰ Research from Northern Ireland indicates

that LGBT young people are five times more likely than average to be medicated for depression.³¹ In Scotland, one survey of LGBT people found that 27% of gay or bisexual men had attempted suicide, compared to four per cent of the general population.³²



References

- ¹ Local Government Act 1998. London: Stationery Office.
- ² Office of the Children's Commissioner (2005). *Journeys: children and young people talk about bullying*. London: Office of the Children's Commissioner.
- ³ LGBT Youth Scotland and the Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland (CERES) (2006) *Promoting Equal Opportunities in Education*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh.
- ⁴ Department of Health (2005) *National Healthy School Status: A Guide for Schools*. London: Department of Health.
- ⁵ Children's Commissioner for Wales (2004) *Clywch: Report of the Examination of the Children's Commissioner for Wales into allegations of child sexual abuse in a school setting*. Swansea: Children's Commissioner for Wales.
- ⁶ Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004) *Stand up for us: Challenging homophobia in schools*. London: Stationery Office.
- ⁷ Adams N., Cox T., and Dunstan L. (2004) "'I am the hate that dare not speak its name": Dealing with homophobia in secondary schools', *Educational Psychology in Practice*, Vol. 20, No. 3, September 2004, 259-269.
- ⁸ DfES, *Stand up for us*, *op cit*.
- ⁹ DfES (2004) Homophobia: research and facts. Online resource accompanying *Stand up for us: Challenging homophobia in schools*. Available online: <http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/cat.php?catid=1101>. Last accessed: 8 August 2006.
- ¹⁰ Trenchard, L. and Warren, H. (1984) "'Something To Tell You" - The Experiences of Young Lesbians and Young Gay Men in London', London: London Gay Teenage Group. Cited in DfES, Homophobia: research and facts, *op cit*.
- ¹¹ Rivers, Ian (1996) 'Young, gay and bullied', *Young People Now*, January 18, 1996.
- ¹² Youthnet Northern Ireland (2003) shOUT: The needs of young people in Northern Ireland who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Available online: www.youthnetni.org.uk/youthnet/eventdetails.asp?ID=3. Last accessed: 8 August 2006.
- ¹³ LGBT Youth Scotland and the Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland (CERES), *op cit*.
- ¹⁴ Rivers, I. (2001) 'The bullying of sexual minorities at school: Its nature and long-term correlates', *Educational and Child Psychology*, Vol. 18 (1): 33-46.
- ¹⁵ DfES, *Stand up for us*, *op cit*.
- ¹⁶ LGBT Youth Scotland and the Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland (CERES), *op cit*.
- ¹⁷ DfES, Homophobia: research and facts, *op cit*.
- ¹⁸ Phoenix A., Frosh S., and Pattman R. (2003) 'Producing contradictory masculine subject positions: Narratives of threat, homophobia and bullying in 11-14-year-old boys', *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 59, No. 1, 2003, pp. 179-195.
- ¹⁹ Ofsted (2002) *Sex and relationships education in schools*. Available online: www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications. Last accessed: 24 August 2006. Cited in Adams *et al*, *op cit*.
- ²⁰ DfES, Homophobia: research and facts, *op cit*.
- ²¹ LGBT Youth Scotland and the Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland (CERES), *op cit*.
- ²² *Ibid*.
- ²³ Baker, Jean (2002) *How homophobia hurts children: Nurturing diversity at home, at school, and in the community*. New York: Harrington Park Press.
- ²⁴ Youthnet Northern Ireland, *op cit*.
- ²⁵ DfES, *Stand up for us*, *op cit*.
- ²⁶ Phoenix *et al*, *op cit*.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*.
- ²⁸ Youthnet Northern Ireland, *op cit*.
- ²⁹ Thurlow, Crispin (2001) 'Naming the "outsider within": homophobic pejoratives and the verbal abuse of lesbian, gay and bisexual high-school pupils', *Journal of Adolescence 2001*, Vol. 24, 25-38.
- ³⁰ DfES, *Stand up for us*, *op cit*.
- ³¹ Youthnet, *op cit*.
- ³² LGBT Youth Scotland and the Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland (CERES), *op cit*.

About the information in this report

The findings in this report are based on detailed analysis of calls to ChildLine in April 2006. For more information on how we gathered evidence for this report, please see section 1.2. Children and young people often talk to ChildLine because they know they will receive a confidential service and what they say will not go any further unless they wish.

ChildLine will always make an informed judgement as to whether the child can give realistic consent to act on his/her behalf. On rare occasions this contract of confidentiality can be broken if the child is assessed to be in a dangerous or life-threatening situation. The majority of children do not identify their whereabouts and maintain their own anonymity.

The counsellor will listen and take the child or young person seriously when they call. ChildLine will help the child to talk through their concerns and what might make a difference, exploring whether there are supportive adults in their lives. Sometimes the child will practice what they would say to increase their confidence in speaking to such an adult. The counsellor will also give the child information on how other agencies can help. If the child wants ChildLine to make contact on their behalf or this is assessed as necessary, ChildLine will mediate, advocate or refer the child to a relevant agency or person, such as social services, the police, the ambulance service, or a parent or teacher.

ChildLine's data is not comprehensive, as the main priority for helpline counsellors is to provide comfort, advice and protection to the caller, not to gather demographic or other information for research purposes.

The content of ChildLine counselling conversations is captured through written records. Every time a counsellor speaks to a young person, the counsellor notes the main reason the child called, any other concerns raised, and details of family and living circumstances revealed by the child, and a narrative of the discussion. Conversations are child-led, and not conducted for the purposes of research; but it is for precisely these reasons that they often reveal information that formal research might not uncover.

ChildLine provides a confidential telephone counselling service for any child with any problem, 24 hours a day, every day. In February 2006, ChildLine joined the NSPCC as a dedicated service, in order to help, support and protect even more children. ChildLine will continue to use its own name, and the 0800 1111 phone number will remain unchanged. Volunteer counsellors will continue to provide a free 24-hour service for any child or young person with a problem.

For more information, please contact the ChildLine Media Team on **020 7825 2500**, email media@childline.org.uk or visit www.childline.org.uk/casenotes.asp

Photographs posed by models. Photography by Larry Bray Photography. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality.

© NSPCC 2006

NSPCC
Weston House
42 Curtain Road
London EC2A 3NH
Tel: 020 7825 2500
Fax: 020 7825 2525

www.nspcc.org.uk

ChildLine and the NSPCC joining together for children



NSPCC 
Cruelty to children must stop. **FULL STOP.**