



Teenhelp

menu 

Homophobic and sexual bullying

- My friends have been slagging off a girl behind her back. They've been saying she's a lesbian and calling her names. I saw some graffiti that said 'Aishling is bi.' Why are they doing this?
- My boyfriend keeps pressuring me to have sex and I am not ready to do this yet. Is this a type of bullying?
- What other things could be sexual bullying?

Q. My friends have been slagging off a girl behind her back. They've been saying she's a lesbian and calling her names. I saw some graffiti that said 'Aishling is bi.' Why are they doing this?

A. This is **homophobic bullying**. Homophobia is the hatred of or when people discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people (LGBT), or people they think may be LGBT. The term includes biphobia (hatred of bisexual people) and transphobia (hatred of transgender people).

Anti-gay graffiti, spreading rumours that someone is gay, being abusive, jeering or violence towards someone who is LGBT are all types of homophobia.

Sometimes people who bully may target another because they are LGBT. People who are heterosexual (sexually and emotionally attracted to someone of the opposite sex) can also be victims of homophobia because the people bullying think that they are LGBT.

What does transgender or 'trans' mean?

Transgender means someone whose gender differs from the one they were given at birth. Someone who is transgender may identify as male, female or feel that neither label fits. To express their gender, some transgender people may choose to change from their birth gender by changing their name or the way they dress. Others may choose to make a medical transition with the help of specialists who prescribe hormones and/or surgery.

Sometimes people use the word 'gay' in a casual manner to describe something they don't like, e.g. 'that car is so gay'. This homophobic language sends negative messages and could make people who are LGBT feel they don't belong or there is something negative about being gay.

The victim of homophobic bullying can feel lonely and isolated. Because of homophobia, they might be afraid to talk to anyone about their sexual or gender identity. They may feel pressure to be in heterosexual relationships so bullying stops, hoping this will mean they are accepted by others.

Homophobia is just as serious as any other type of bullying. Everyone has the right to be treated equally and with respect.

Being LGBT is not just about physical attraction, it includes the basic need to be accepted, loved and loved in return. As with all close relationships, the relationships between people who are LGBT are private and personal.

If your friends have been bullying someone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender you should call them up on it. Point out that what they are doing is wrong. Explain that saying 'that's gay' is an offensive term.

Support the victim of the bullying by letting them know you disagree with it and do not want to be part of it. It is also important for teachers or supervisors to know about the bullying.

Breaking silence is the key to stopping it. Report the bullying.



My boyfriend keeps pressuring me to have sex and I am not ready to do this yet. Is this a type of bullying?



Yes, this is called sexual bullying. It is wrong to put others under pressure to have sex or to do anything they aren't happy about, this includes touching or being touched in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Both boys and girls can sexually bully another person. Sexual bullying doesn't just happen in relationships, it can happen in groups of friends too. Check out the Q&A below for more information.

Sexual intimacy belongs in a relationship where there is respect, understanding and trust with both people feeling safe, valued and cared for.

You are entitled to say no and your feelings should be respected.

Be as assertive as you can and let your partner know that you are feeling under pressure. You may need to say this several times to get your point across. If the pressure continues, it may be time for you to get out of the relationship.

Even if you really like the other person, if they cannot respect your wishes this is not good enough and means your relationship is unhealthy.

In Ireland, the age which someone can legally have sex is 17. This is known as the age of consent. If you go to www.b4udecide.ie you can find more information about this law as well as advice and tips regarding sexual relationships



What other things could be sexual bullying?



- Touching you in a way you don't want to be touched.
- Asking you to touch in a way you feel uncomfortable with.
- Forcing you to do anything against your will, in private or in a group.
- Taking photos of you without your permission. For example, a classmate may take photos of you while in a changing room and then circulate these photos.
- Sending you crude text messages or sexually explicit emails.

- Targeting or name calling someone by referring to their sexuality, for example 'queer', 'slut', 'lezzer'. See the Q&A above on homophobic bullying.
- Spreading rumours about someone and talking about their sexual activity.
- Breaking up with someone and telling people about private things of a sexual nature.
- Making sexual comments about someone's physical development, body shape or how they dress.
- Making you watch sexually explicit movies or internet material. Asking you to look at books, magazines of a sexual nature when you don't want to.
- Grabbing someone physically and touching private areas. Giving a 'wedgie' (lifting someone up by their underwear and causing genital pain).

Having sex with someone without their consent or forcing someone to do something sexual against their will is a criminal offence. Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual contact. You can find out more about this at ie.reachout.com