



## **Sexual Orientation Gender Identity (SOGI) Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is SOGI 123?**

SOGI education is not a program, course, or curriculum. SOGI 123 identifies three steps school districts are required to take to ensure all students feel welcome and included in our schools. The first are changes to policies and procedures. The District has met this Ministry directive by changing our policies and district and school codes of conduct to include sexual orientation and gender identity in order to meet the changes to the BC Human Rights Code.

The second step is creating inclusive environments. The District has been working towards creating safe, inclusive, learning communities for years. There is no change in practice to staff's approach as the SOGI 123 resources are made available to teachers.

The third step is ensuring that sexual orientation and gender identity resources are included in the current curriculum when appropriate. The SOGI 123 lessons and resources are an addition to those that already exist in schools. Teachers have been using resources that reflect the diversity in our community within their curriculum for years in BC Schools. This practice continues in Central Okanagan Public Schools, whether teachers choose to use SOGI 123 resources or other approved resources.

Finally, SOGI education also informs and supports other work that students and teachers have done across the Central Okanagan district for years – including Alliance Clubs, Diversity Clubs, and events such as Harmony Day, which build acceptance for and the celebration of the diversity in our schools.

### **Why do you teach this topic to elementary students?**

Whenever the topic of SOGI comes up at school, teachers introduce it according to the age and development of the students who are discussing it. The SOGI discussions reflect who makes up our community and promotes inclusive values.

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### **Is SOGI 123 going to require teachers to teach my child sexually explicit acts?**

The simple answer is no. SOGI 123 is NOT Sexual Health Education. Sexual Health Education is Ministry approved curriculum that is embedded in the Physical Health Education and taught by specialist teachers for the elementary, middle and secondary school students. The Sexual Health Education curriculum is age appropriate, and is taught with sensitivity and has a focus on healthy relationships.

The Sexual Health Education lessons begin in Grade 4 (as learners begin to experience puberty) but do not include discussions about sexual acts or practices at the elementary level. Teachers and students discuss more details of sexual practices at the secondary level because learners require information to support healthy relationships. Parents may opt to teach the outcomes of Sexual Health Education in a home program. Parents may NOT opt out of our students learning about who lives in our community and their protection under the Human Rights Act and the District Policy and Codes of Conduct.

### **Are elementary students still too young to learn about gender?**

Discussions about gender at a young age tend to focus on clothing, activities, and students' feelings about themselves. Gender is about self-identity, and learning about diversity in gender can help children feel safe to express themselves and share their ideas.

### **If you are worried about children feeling unsafe or excluded, why not just focus on bullying?**

Just as adults do, children tend to fear or dislike what they do not understand. Sadly, at a young age some children already learn to use homophobic and transphobic slurs against people who appear to be different. SOGI education builds respect and acceptance of diversity, so that every single child in Central Okanagan Public Schools feels safe and welcome.

### **What if you just confuse my child, or cause them to choose a homosexual lifestyle?**

Informing people about the experience of someone else will not make them gay or straight, since these are not choices. As children mature, they will self-identify on their own terms about whether they are gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, or transgender – no matter how they self-identify, it is important that they feel safe and positively reflected in what they learn.

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**Why tell children to ignore clear biological distinctions? Why are you stopping kids from saying "boy" and "girl" or calling their parents "mom" and "dad"?**

Students will NOT be asked to stop using gender-specific pronouns. However, teachers should consider how they address groups of students to ensure that all students feel included in statements. It is as simple as saying, "Good Morning Grade 4's", instead of good morning boys and girls.

**Why is the public School District forcing this new agenda on our community?**

The work to incorporate SOGI education is part of a Ministry of Education's initiative, meaning it is provincial and not unique to the Central Okanagan. The Ministry of Education mandated both public and private school systems to ensure that conversations in the classroom reflect the diversity that exists in school. There is nothing especially new about SOGI education resources. Teachers have been teaching about diversity for years.

**With the introduction of SOGI 123, is the Board of Education going to have boys and girls use group washrooms together?**

No, there is no plan to have group gender-neutral washrooms. District sites and schools have both Male and Female group washrooms, and where possible, single use gender neutral washrooms. New building are being built with all three washroom types in schools. Single use washrooms are identified as "washroom" and do not use gender, handicap or any other specific identifier.

**Does the implementation of SOGI 123 interfere with parental rights and the protections under the Human Rights Code for religion?**

No, the District respects the diversity and the Human Rights Code that protects all individuals from discrimination. It will support and defend the inclusion of all persons it serves with the voice of legislation, policy and practices. Schools are to be safe, inclusive environments for all, free of discrimination. Public school districts are secular by legislation. Parents wishing to teach particular religious perspectives will need to do so at home. There is no provision within the School Act or SOGI 123 that prevents parents from exercising their rights as parents to raise their children and influence their growth and development with values and beliefs that are part of their religion or culture.

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The education of our communities children and youth is a community effort that involves parents/guardians, teachers, and the children and youth themselves, and their views and values. Many people in the community will have views that influence our children and youth. Some ideas will be in opposition of others. It is a parent/guardian's responsibility to have discussions at home that help form the values of the children/youth in their care. It is the District's responsibility to educate students using the filter of approved curricula or resources to meet the Ministry's goal of preparing the "Educated Citizen".

### **Why we will protect, respect and include all students?**

Students who experience discrimination, whether it is based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity or culture have a legal and ethical right to be safe and protected in schools.

### **I think my child may be transgender. What should I do next?**

The Canadian Paediatric Society says:

*"There is nothing medically or psychologically wrong with your child. Gender diversity is not a result of illness or parenting style. It isn't caused by letting your son play with dolls, or your daughter play with trucks.*

*If your child is transgender or gender-creative, they can live a happy and healthy life. Get support from other parents of transgender and gender-creative children, or talk to a mental health professional who specializes in the care of transgender and gender-creative children (if available in your community). Indigenous families can talk to a two-spirit elder or leader."*

For further information, visit the Canadian Paediatric Society – Caring for Kids website at <https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/>.

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