Fostering a Gender-Inclusive School Environment

Using unassuming language that respects sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression helps create an inclusive, supportive and safer school environment for all. Gender inclusive language can help prevent harmful stereotypes and prejudices and allows students the opportunity to celebrate diversity. As school staff, you have the opportunity to foster respect and acceptance through the use of inclusive language. Here are a few examples to help get you started.

Instead of Saying …	Try...	Why
Good morning my name is X	Good morning my name is X and my pronouns are….	Doing this demonstrates you know that there are diverse identities and pronouns and makes space for students to tell you theirs.
Good morning boys and girls	Good morning everyone/class/friends/students	Shifting to gender inclusive language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumptions.
His or her when pronoun is unknown	Use gender neutral pronouns such as they/their or the pronouns or name that the student uses	
Mother and father	Family, parents, guardians, caregiver	Families and relationships come in many diverse forms.
Boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife	Partner, spouse or significant other	
The terms male/female when teaching Human Development and Sexual Health curriculum	People assigned as Male or Female at birth	Someone's gender identity may not be the same as their sex assigned at birth.
Feminine Hygiene Products	Period Products	A person who identifies as male could still require these products.

Avoid...	Focus on...	Why
Identifying a person's gender based on the way they look/dress	Addressing each student by their identified pronouns. If you don't know, create opportunities for them to share their pronouns with you.	A person's gender expression does not always match their gender identity. Gender expression is how a person presents their gender e.g., appearance, name, pronoun and social behaviour. Gender identity is the internal sense of identity as female, male, both or neither, regardless of their sex assigned at birth.
Dividing students by boys and girls	Grouping students by birth month, alphabetically, numerically	Creates safer, respectful, welcoming and caring school environments for students families and staff.
Ignoring hurtful language like "that's so gay"	Taking it seriously! Address the inappropriate language and emphasize it could be hurtful. Explore what they meant to express and identify other ways to say it.	
Stereotyping traditional gender roles in society	Using gender neutral language and avoiding gender stereotypes when discussing careers (firefighter, police officer; acknowledge that any gender can be in any career)	Stereotyping limits choices and possibilities for our children and youth.

Please remember, we all make mistake sometimes and that's okay. Always acknowledge mistakes, make a brief apology, learn from it and move forward. Your students will appreciate your intentions!

For more information on this topic please contact your school's Public Health Nurse, or refer to the following resources:

https://www.fraserhealth.ca/health-topics-a-to-z/school-health/sex-education-and-sexual-identity/gender-and-sexu-al-identity-in-schools#.Y3zdJknMJPY

https://teachingsexualhealth.ca/teachers/sexual-health-education/understanding-your-role/get-prepared/inclu-sive-language/

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