What to Say to Gender-Creative Children and Their Parents

It's hard to be a gender non-conforming child. Reach out. Don't be afraid.
Talk to the child; see what comes up….

- You say you have the best of both worlds: you're both a boy and a girl. Wow! Do you want to talk about that? It sounds pretty magical, but I bet it could feel confusing too, huh?
- Do you ever feel like you're just not who everyone thinks you are?
- Do you like being a girl (boy)? Do you sometimes wish you weren't?
- It's okay to like girl things better than boy things and still be a boy. What makes a toy a "girl toy" or a "boy toy" anyhow?
- Suzie has short hair and she's a girl; does her short hair make her less of a girl?

It's hard to be a parent to a gender non-conforming child. Reach out. Don't be afraid.
Often it will have nothing to do with being transgender. Sometimes it will.
Suss out if these kids are being supported at home, or maybe shamed.
Meet the parents where they are.

- I saw Jimmy playing Barbies with the girls yesterday. It's so good to see a young child so comfortable just being himself. How do you feel about his creative side? Do you worry sometimes?
- I understand Suzie likes to pretend she's Sam while she's here at school. Isn't that courageous of her? Do you ever wonder if it's more than just play? Are you comfortable with her exploration?
- Times are changing. Just as 30 years ago we were making room for little girls who were in touch with their masculine side, there is much more room today in society, and in this school, for little boys who are in touch with their feminine side.

How to Respond to "That's So Gay!"

What can you say?

- It's not okay to say that.
- That is hurtful and disrespectful.
- I don't think you mean to call all gays and lesbians stupid, do you?
- Remember, saying "that's so gay" is a put-down and we don't put-down others in our school.

Educate students

- If you hear "that's so gay" used anywhere, take the time to make sure the students know what "gay" means and why it is hurtful and disrespectful.
  - Being gay is about who you love (just like being straight is).
- Explain that when they use the word "gay" in a negative way, they are being hurtful to other students who may have parents, siblings, uncles, aunts, neighbors, friends or other family members who are gay.

Don't make excuses for the bad behavior.
- Don't say "Suzie doesn't understand what it means."
- Don't pretend it was just a joke and not intended to hurt.

Intervene every time you hear "that's so gay" or anti-gay slurs
- Do not be afraid of making a mistake. Using whatever words you have to stop the harassment is far better than silence.
- Silence encourages the tormentor and shows tacit support.
- Ignoring the hurtful comment sends the message to everyone (the tormentor, the tormented and bystanders) that it is okay to say hurtful things.

What YOU can do is POWERFUL!
One moment of you stepping up on behalf of a child
can mean the world to that one child.

- Begin to notice and point out bullying and stereotypes based on gender identity and expression.
- Say the words: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.
- Include lesbian, gay and trans people and their history in your curricula, in your conversation, on posters and on your walls.
- Volunteer to run your Gay Straight Alliance, even in middle school (Remember: same-sex attraction can begin as young as age 9).
- Intervene when you hear gay, faggot, dyke, freak, pervert, etc.
- SAY SOMETHING!

From Groundbreaking Research of the Family Acceptance Project
- Family accepting behaviors towards LGBT youth during adolescence protect against suicide, depression and substance abuse.
- LGBT young adults who reported high levels of family acceptance during adolescence had significantly higher levels of self-esteem, social support and general health.
- LGBT young adults who reported low levels of family acceptance during adolescence were over three times more likely to have suicidal thoughts and to report suicide attempts.
- High religious involvement was strongly associated with low acceptance of LGBT children.

Data show the most important four things your school needs to make a safe environment:
1. Include sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in non-discrimination and harassment policies.
2. Provide training for administration, faculty and staff.
3. Provide support through student groups (Gay Straight Alliance).
4. Inclusive curriculum and media resources.