



## Supporting 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth

*“Everyone starts their journey as an affirming adult from a different place, depending on their life experiences, existing skills, and access to knowledgeable others. **It does not matter where you are starting from, only that you do start**”*

(Egale, 2024, p.22)

By reading this information, you have taken an important step towards trying to better understand and support your child and other children/youth in your life. Know that supporting someone who is 2S/LGBTQIA+ is an ongoing learning journey, and that it is okay to not know everything.

A young person’s experience navigating their identity is not always linear, and neither is your own process of learning. Please feel welcome to take your time, give yourself the grace to make mistakes, explore questions in your learning process, and seek additional support as needed.

\*The 2S/LGBTQIA+ acronym is an umbrella term that is continuously evolving. To familiarize yourself with common terms, please consider visiting [Egale 2S/LGBTQIA+ terms and definitions](#)

**Note:** While we use the term “child” throughout, we recognize that the child in your care may be a teenager or young adult, and that you may be caring for more than one child.

### How can having the support of family promote mental well-being and reduce risks?

Supportive and affirming environments—at school, at home, and in the community—play a key role in the mental health and well-being of children and youth.

2S/LGBTQIA+ youth with supportive adults both inside and outside the home are **FOUR TIMES** more likely to report good or excellent mental health

(Egale, 2021)

When you support and affirm your child’s identity, you are helping them to build positive mental health. You can also help to connect your child, or other children/youth in your life, to the supports and information they need. For example, you can help them to find out about programs, services and/or events and assist them in getting there.



## What should I do if someone “comes out” to me?

“Coming out” is when someone discloses their 2S/LGBTQIA+ identity to you. For many people, this can be an important experience that requires significant vulnerability and bravery. Know that [coming out is not a requirement for everyone, and choosing not to come out does not make their experiences and/or identities less valid](#). These conversations can serve as an [invitation to get to know the person better](#).

### Interested in learning more? Consider the following resources:

- [Egale Canada: What to do when your child comes out to you](#)
- [PFLAG: Quick tips for supporting your LGBTQ kids—and yourself – during the coming-out process](#)
- [Parents & Caregivers for Mental Health: Understanding Gender, Sexuality, and Expression Supporting Queer and Gender-Diverse Children and Youth](#)
- [Egale Canada: The Experiences and Challenges of Being an Affirming Caregiver for Sexual and Gender Minority Youth](#)
- [The Genderbread Person: understanding gender identity and expression](#)

## Supportive actions to try

**There is no single “right” way to support a child’s mental health and wellbeing. Support is something we build with children, not for them.** What matters most is inviting your child into conversations, listening, and taking your cues from them when navigating safety and privacy.

*For example, if you are considering connecting with families who have similar experiences, begin by asking your child whether this is something they want. Be open to their ideas about what that connection could look like, including timing, boundaries, privacy, and activities.*

The suggestions in the table below are simply starting points; ideas to explore together as you learn what support feels helpful to your child.

SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS			
Encourage involvement in a range of social groups, including friendships	Learn about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression on your own	Listen intentionally	Find multiple ways to express to your child that you love them
Talk with faith leaders to help your faith community become supportive of 2S/LGBTQIA+ people	Use their chosen name and pronouns	Bring your child to 2S/LGBTQIA+ events and groups	Ask your child if, and how, you can help them tell other people about their 2S/LGBTQIA+ identity
Ask your child how they’d like to be supported and do your best to follow through on their requests	Connect with families who might have similar experiences	Remind other family members to treat your child with respect	Talk with your child about their 2S/LGBTQIA+ identity openly and listen respectfully ( <i>even if you are still learning and processing</i> )
Volunteer with organizations that support 2S/LGBTQIA+ people	Support youth when others mistreat them – at home, school, or in the community	Take time to process your own emotions and reactions separately from your child	If you “mess up,” acknowledge and apologize for the mistake, correct yourself, and move on



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## What role do schools have in supporting 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth?

Schools have a responsibility to ensure a mentally healthy school culture that is inclusive and accepting of every student. It can be helpful to consider the following when engaging with your child's school:

### Navigate privacy

- Discuss what your child would like to share with the school about their identity.
- Your child should be the one to determine how they navigate sharing their identity at school, at home and in the community (e.g., sharing information about their sexuality, sharing their pronouns, changing their name on school documentation, etc.) Share any expectations regarding privacy with school staff.

### Finding support at school

- Find caring staff within the school community and attempt to foster your own connections with them.
- Pathways to accessing support at school may vary. Connect with trusted school staff to understand more about how your child can navigate accessing services.
- Explore the supports available in their school and community.
- Identify which staff members they trust to initially approach about issues related to their identity.
- Your child's needs may change or evolve. Check in to ensure that school-based supports are still meeting their needs and discuss together how you might navigate adjusting support as needed.

### Advocate

- **Familiarize yourself with school policies and procedures** to know what is expected of school staff regarding the care and support of your child.
- Under the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#), people are protected from discrimination and harassment because of gender identity and gender expression. **Your child is protected under a variety of laws** that can inform your advocacy efforts, including: the [Education Act](#) and the [Accepting School Act](#).
- If your child experiences harm, whether in-person or online, connect with the school to describe your concerns and to seek the needed response and support.
- Advocating for 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth is shared work, and parents/caregivers have a crucial role to play. Think about how you can advocate and support 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth.
- Consider getting involved at the school (e.g., by supporting GSAs and affinity spaces, advocating for more inclusive sex education, gender-neutral washrooms, inclusive school policies, etc.)

**Interested in learning more? Consider the following resource:**

- [How to advocate at school for yourself or someone you love](#)



## Helpful resources

RESOURCES	
<b>SMH-ON resources</b>	<p>These resources have been created by SMH-ON to support 2S/LGBTQIA+ students in schools. They include resources for both school staff and students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">2S/LGBTQIA+ Student Mental Health Social Media Bundles</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Caring Adults: Supporting 2S/LGBTQIA+ Students</a></li> </ul>
<b>Community resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">2-Spirited People of the First Nations</a>: a resource for 2-spirit people that celebrates strength and provides physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual advocacy.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Egale Canada</a>: a resource for affirming adults in the school community who would like to learn to be supportive and affirming to 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Franco Queer</a>: is an organization for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Francophones in Ontario and outside of Quebec. They offer services for migrants and newcomers, social spaces, and more.</li> <li>• <a href="#">PFLAG Canada</a>: a national organization focused on supporting parents and caregivers of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.</li> </ul>
<b>Crisis supports for youth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Black Youth Helpline</a>: call, email 9 a.m. – 10 p.m.</li> <li>• <a href="#">LGBT Youthline</a>: chat, text, email, Sunday-Friday 4:00-9:30 p.m.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Hope for Wellness Helpline for First Nations, Métis and Inuit</a>: call, chat, 24/7</li> <li>• <a href="#">Naseeha Youth Helpline</a>: call, text 24/7 Helpline for Muslims</li> </ul>
<b>Gender-affirming care resources</b>	<p>Gender-affirming care offers a wide range of supports for affirming your child's 2S/LGBTQIA+ identity. These online resources are available for parents/caregivers to access information and services outside of school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Rainbow Health Ontario</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Point of Pride: Affirmative Care for Trans Folks</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Trans Care Plus</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Native Youth Sexual Health Network</a></li> </ul>

## References

Egale (2024). *Affirming Adults: A Guide to Supporting Gender Diverse Children and Youth*. P.5, retrieved from: <https://egale.ca/awareness/affirming-adults-guide/>

