

Safe and Caring Schools for Two Spirit Youth

A guide for teachers and students

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This guide booklet has been authored by: Maddalena Genovese, Davina Rousell and The Two Spirit Circle of Edmonton Society.

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Since completing her M.A. at the University of Ottawa, Davina has continued to be actively involved with projects that focus on decolonizing dominant ways of knowing, experiencing and being. As a queer woman who is also an avid researcher, ally and liaison, she continues to build meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples in order to better understand how to work together in a good way. Davina continues to participate in projects that strive to understand our collective responsibilities and to break down the devastating myths and stereotypes that are imbedded in discriminatory belief systems.

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Foreword

Two Spirit people have a long history among Indigenous people across Canada. Before first contact with European colonizers, most Indigenous people recognized the importance of Two Spirit individuals and the special responsibility bestowed on them by the Creator. At times they were visionaries, healers, medicine people and leaders of their communities. Two Spirit people were respected as equal and vital members of Indigenous societies. There are individuals documented in history, great women who took wives and carried the bow and men carrying out duties usually assigned to women.

Nevertheless, the impact of colonization has been long lasting; suppressing Two Spirit traditions and roles and leaving generations of Two Spirit people suffering from multiple layers of discrimination and stigma. Two Spirit youth are particularly at risk. Some find themselves shut out of community gatherings; disowned or ostracized from their families and communities. Schools are no strangers to issues of victimization toward Two Spirit students, who are often targeted and maltreated as members of both a sexual and visible minority. Two Spirit youth may feel unsafe and unwelcome at school thus teachers and school administrators can play an invaluable role in addressing and alleviating some of these issues.

As such, this resource hopes to provide a brief but informative window into the challenges that many Two Spirit students face within educational settings as well as contribute practical suggestions that teachers can use to begin addressing these multi layered issues.

Two Spirit Oral History Teaching

By Elder Leonard Saddleback

Elder Leonard Saddleback of the Samson Cree Nation is an Elder who believes in and supports Two Spirit people. He is not a Two Spirit person himself, but he understands and supports the oral teachings that need to be shared with the Two Spirit community, modern day society and the western school systems. Richard Jenkins, James Makokis and Patricia Makokis made a visit to the Samson Cree First Nation to sit and learn from Leonard. After spending several hours with him, we quickly realized that we needed more time and a fluent Cree speaker in order to capture many of the important teachings Leonard was graciously willing to share.

An entire article could be written from the visit (and many more visits need to occur); however, for this booklet we consciously choose to share limited teachings and encourage the reader to find knowledgeable Elders who have these sacred teachings in their respective territories.

According to Leonard, understanding the Cree language is critical to understanding these teachings. The language holds the “Cree Worldview” and in the English translation, much harm and misunderstanding has occurred. To quote him on the harm of not understanding and interpreting the Cree language he shared, “They start using words from white society—change the meaning of our own words until it is not correct and becomes unacceptable. We used different words instead of the incorrect hard core direct English words which are turned into indecent interpretation of our language giving society the wrong view and [this] often creates a lot of disrespect. This is one thing that I wanted to tell you. A little bit of history makes a difference.”

“I hope there is more understanding and knowledge out there that will create a good and better society. Our society is so unique; it had its politics, its sovereignty and its integrity. Everything was there, according to my grandfather it was given to us as a gift from the Creator. We had our own commandments (our guiding principles/ natural laws such as love, kindness and sharing). There was the commandment for fellowship, for everyone to get along with all others and, if followed, would create abundance as told to me by my grandfather.”

According to Elder Leonard Saddleback.

Kiskwekaniskwew (Spiritual Being)

“An all knowing powerful helper who knew both worlds. He/she knew the women’s world and he/she knew the men’s world so it was an all powerful and all knowing being helping the betterment of all mankind. I only know the men’s world.”

On women

“They are holy, they are sacred, our mothers are sacred, and our grandmothers are sacred. They know all herbs used for the wellbeing of women. So too did Kiskwekaniskwew, this super being who shared this knowledge with every living thing. It is said that Kiskwekaniskwew was raised in the society of women and like her had both the male and women gender spirit. Two spirit women could hunt without a man, mount a horse, go kill buffalo, deer, moose and elk, and they were able to do all those things, as they had many different gifts.”

On human kindness and human gifts

“If you raise a healing person with love, care and compassion, they will find their gifts and take their place for their people. This is what my grandfather told me. The belief in Kiskwekaniskwew was not for nothing and Two Spirit people who believe in this spirit as their Spirit Guide, (like him/her) have their ways of helping people. They have their own gifts and can help in their own special ways.”

On ceremony

Leonard shared on the role of Two Spirit people at the Sundance, (one of the most sacred spiritual gatherings) held annually by Indigenous people of the Plains. Two Spirit people assist in conducting most of the ceremonies. He stated that when a Two Spirit person sings at a Sundance, they have the ability to sing like both a man and a woman, demonstrating their unique gift of both male and female voice (he gives a demonstration). Two Spirit people have a special gift to communicate and therefore they are called upon to use this gift to communicate with the Creator at Sundances. Leonard believes that Two Spirit people will return to carrying out this role—a very spiritually significant role they held in the past.

Finally, Two Spirit people had many roles in the daily lives of Indigenous people and were respected and revered. They were often healers, shamans, mediators in marriage and tribal disputes, keepers of history and lore and they took part and often lead the social and spiritual ceremonies.

Concluding comments from The Two Spirit Circle of Edmonton Society

These teachings are oral (passed down verbally); they are not written. Consequently some searching youth do not know where to search for literature and emotional support. The important fact to note is that Indigenous history is full of teachings that recognized that Two Spirit people were—and are—a part of Indigenous peoples' history. They held a very important place in each Nation.

Useful terms and definitions (alphabetically)¹

Aboriginal peoples: An adjective used to describe individuals or mixed groups of First Nations, Métis or Inuit people. The term has been wrongly used by the media as a noun, as in “The Aboriginals are...” The proper usage is “The Aboriginal peoples are ...”

Ally: A person, regardless of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity, who supports and stands up for the human and civil rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two Spirit, Intersex, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQQ-SIQ) people. Teachers can play an important part in the role of ally.

Berdache: Term originally adopted by European colonizers to refer to Aboriginal individuals who did not seem to fit conventional European definitions of gender and sex roles. The term persists in the literature to refer to Indigenous people who are lesbian, gay and bisexual. It is considered a negative and derogatory term, and it has been replaced by the term “Two Spirit” (Garrett & Barret, 2003).

Bisexual: A person who is emotionally, physically, spiritually and sexually attracted to members of either sex.

Colonialism: A social process characterized by five interconnected phases: denial of Indigenous culture; destruction of symbols of culture; denigration of Indigenous belief systems and ceremonies; tokenism, in which the remnants of culture are tolerated as folklore; and exploitation of aspects of traditional culture, such as music and art, that refuse to disappear. Colonial rulers operate within the frames of conquest, exploitation and repression to break existing social patterns and reassemble them according to European standards.

Coming in: A process by which Two Spirit individuals have formed empowered and resilient identities in response to and in the face of harmful government policies and colonial processes (Wilson, 2007).

Coming out: The process of acknowledging one’s non-heterosexual orientation and integrating that awareness and

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, definitions and terms were adapted from the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity webpage www.teachers.ab.ca, click on Diversity, Equity & Human Rights (under issues in Education) and follow the links.

understanding into one's life. It also refers to disclosing one's orientation or identity to others.

Gay: A person who is emotionally, physically, spiritually and sexually attracted to persons of the same sex. Gay usually refers to males, but it is also used to include females.

Heterosexism: The explicit or implicit assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that this sexual orientation is preferable to non-heterosexuality.

Historical trauma: Hidden collective memories of trauma or a collective non-remembering. It is passed from generation to generation, as are the maladaptive social and behavioural patterns that are symptoms of many social disorders. Also, cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations resulting from massive tragedies (Archibald, 2006).

Homophobia: Fear or hatred of homosexuality, often exhibited through prejudice, discrimination, bullying or acts of violence.

Indigenous peoples: The original people in any region on the planet. The term is usually used when referring to Aboriginal people in an international context. The term Indigenous peoples will be used throughout this booklet.

Intersex: A person who is born with both male and female anatomy or physiology.

Lesbian: A female who is emotionally, physically, spiritually and sexually attracted to other females.

LGBTTT-SIQQ: Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two Spirit, Intersex, Queer and Questioning. Other, and often shortened, versions of the acronym are also used (e.g., LGBT, LGBTTIQ, GLBT etc.).

Queer: A historically negative term for homosexuality, but more recently reclaimed to positively refer to SMGV people (See SMGV).

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, definitions and terms were adapted from the Alberta Teachers' Association's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity webpage www.teachers.ab.ca, click on Diversity, Equity & Human Rights (under issues in Education) and follow the links.

Questioning: An individual's exploration of one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Racism: The belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others. Often exhibited through comments and behaviours that are meant to offend and suppress a specific group of people while privileging another.

SMGV: Acronym for Sexual Minority and Gender Variant individuals. Also used as an umbrella term to replace longer acronyms such as LGBTTT-SIQQ. The acronym SMGV will be used throughout this booklet.

Trans-Identified/Transgender: A person whose gender identity, outward experience, expression and/or anatomy differs from conventional expectations of male or female. Often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender variance or gender non-conforming identities and behaviours.

Transphobia: Fear, disgust and/or hatred of transgender, transsexual and other gender variant individuals because of their perceived gender identity, expression or status. Often exhibited through prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, bullying or acts of violence.

Transsexual: A person who experiences intense personal and emotional discomfort with their assigned birth gender. Some transsexuals may take steps to physically alter their body and gender expression to correspond with what they feel their true gender is.

Two Spirit: A term some Indigenous people use to identify themselves, rather than LGBTTT-SIQQ. Indigenous people believe that Two Spirit individuals house both the male and the female spirit and that the degree of dominance of each spirit ultimately impacts the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual identity of each Two Spirit person. ²

² The term Two Spirit is still transitional while the Two Spirit community resurfaces the appropriate terminology in the original languages (i.e. Cree, Blackfoot, Dene, Lakota, Sioux). Different spellings are used in the literature (e.g., two spirit, two-spirit, two-spirited, Two Spirits) however, the term Two Spirit will be used throughout this booklet.

A bit of history

In 1991, during the annual general meeting for Gays and Lesbians of the First Nations that took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba, attendees decided to replace the European terms of lesbian, gay or berdache with the term Two Spirit. Since then, the community has sought to honour the sacred and unique roles that Two Spirit people held before colonization and reclaim their place in society.



Nebraska State Historical Society, Photo A547: 2-149.

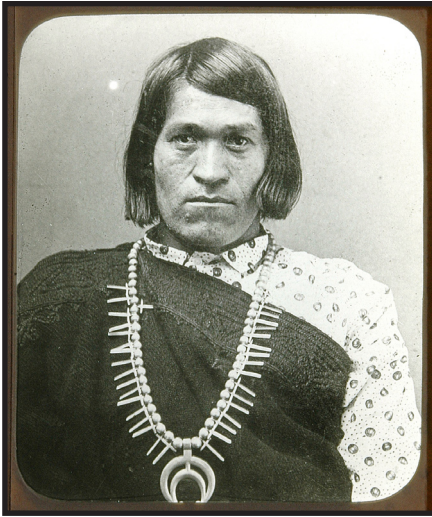
This photograph by John Anderson dates back to 1890. It shows two Sioux, Two Spirit women, both ninety years old, who lived together their whole life until they passed away in the early 1900s (Roscoe, 1998, p.72).

Before colonialism,³ Two Spirit people were valued and respected members of their communities. They were believed to house the female and the male spirit within them, hence the term Two Spirit, and played important roles in their communities.

They were teachers, healers, caregivers, medicine people, hunters and warriors.

Unfortunately, colonial contact brought with it homophobic beliefs that quickly threatened and suppressed Two Spirit roles and teachings. Upon their arrival, it would not have been uncommon for colonists to see men dressed in women's clothes carrying out female roles and women dressed in men's clothes carrying out male roles. Nonetheless, colonizers concluded that this switch in roles was abnormal and sinful because these individuals did not

³ Colonialism: a social process characterized by five interconnected phases: denial of Indigenous culture; destruction of symbols of culture; denigration of Indigenous belief systems and ceremonies; tokenism, in which the remnants of culture are tolerated as folklore; and exploitation of aspects of traditional culture, such as music and art, that refuse to disappear. Colonial rulers operate within the frames of conquest, exploitation and repression to break existing social patterns and reassemble them according to European standards. For example, citizenship replaces kinship; and institutions, law and bureaucracy is substituted for face-to-face communal relations. Acts of encroachment, perpetrated by missionaries, settlers or governments, destroy the central meaning of culture and its entire social structure. This leaves Indigenous people deprived of their cultural traditions and meaning in their lives, which then becomes reduced to a mere physiological routine. With the loss of moral values and a sense of heritage, social deterioration inevitably follows (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004).



Picture 2: Braun Research Library, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles: L.S.430. This picture dates back to the late 1800s. It is a portrait of a Two Spirit man named Mewa.

fit “conventional” roles or colonial expectations of men and women. Hence, Two Spirit people were often the first ones to be targeted and killed by European explorers.

In an attempt to protect their Two Spirit brothers and sisters, many Indigenous communities hid their Two Spirit members and stopped passing on the Two Spirit teachings to the next generation. Over time, many communities forgot the roles and the importance of Two Spirit people and today they suffer from the

stigmas perpetuated by homophobia. As a result, some Two Spirit individuals find themselves shut out of community gatherings—disowned or ostracized by their communities. Regardless, as demonstrated by the pictures and the stories captured in this booklet, Two Spirit people were and continue to be integral members of Indigenous communities.

Coming In: Native American Two Spirit people

By Dr Alexandria Wilson

The following section is presented with the permission of Dr. Alexandria Wilson from Opaskwayak Cree Nation and professor at the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan.

“Coming in,” my Lakota friend Wayne told me, “Coming in—that’s what Two Spirit people do.” I knew exactly what he meant. He was pointing out that, as Native people who are not straight, we had become comfortable with who we are not because we had “come out” (a process that seems like a prerequisite for happiness in modern books and movies about gay or lesbian people). We became comfortable with ourselves and empowered when we came into our identities as Two Spirit people.

The term Two Spirit is a self-descriptor used by many Native American and Canadian lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. We call ourselves Two Spirit as a way to take control of our identities and experiences. We are Native American people who are LGBT and our stories about how we grew into our identities are typically very different from conventional coming out stories. Rather than trying to fit ourselves into the established mainstream identities for LGBT people, we are developing identities that fit who we are.



A Spiritual Purpose

My family is from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, a community six hours north of Winnipeg, Manitoba. In the Swampy Cree dialect of our community, there are no gender-specific pronouns and, I have been told, no word for homosexual. Rather than singling out people or things as female or male, our language distinguishes between what is animate and inanimate. Anything that

is animate is understood to have a spiritual purpose. Our language and our culture are rooted in this understanding—that every living creature and everything that acts in and on this world is spiritually meaningful.

The term Two Spirit acknowledges and reminds us of this truth. My identity as a Two Spirit woman pulls together the most fundamental aspects of who I am: Cree, gay, spiritual, a part of my family and community, connected to my traditional culture and lands, situated in the long history of my peoples and a professor at a university in the city nearest to my home.

For the last 15 years, my academic work has focused on what it means to be Two Spirit. I began this work for very personal reasons. I knew that by learning more about Two Spirit people, I would strengthen my own sense of self. I also believed that this knowledge could help strengthen our own communities. Within both the Native population and the LGBT population, young people are much more likely to attempt suicide than they are in the general population. Learning about and talking to our youth and other community members about Two Spirit identity could help them move along their own healing paths.

I am not the first person to write about or research Two Spiritedness. Anthropologists, queer theorists, historians and other folks have had lots to say about who we are and how we got here. I went through this literature and, to be honest, found very little about what I wanted to know. What I was most interested in were the daily experiences of Two Spirit people.

Searching for Acceptance

I knew what my own life had been like. I was lucky to have been born and raised on my First Nation. My earliest memories are of being well cared for, loved and accepted for who I am. I also remember that, as I grew older, racism, homophobia and sexism were directed at me, often all at the same time and sometimes by my own people. As I approached adulthood, I began to believe I belonged in the city. There, I imagined I would have the opportunity, anonymity and freedom to explore my sexuality. Like so many other Native people, I moved from my home community to the city only

to discover that the truth fell far short of my imagination. As I had expected, I was able to meet other LGBT people (many of whom were Cree) and explore my own sexuality but I did not feel any more comfortable or happy with who I was. If anything, I felt worse. I still had to deal with racism, homophobia and sexism but now I was alone, far away from my family, community, land and all the things that had kept me connected and helped restore my spirits at home. The conventional “coming out” stories that circulate in mainstream American culture typically feature a declaration of an independent identity. The story goes something like this: a LGBT person musters their courage, prepares for conflict and then announces their sexuality to a friend or family member. More often than not, their announcement is met with anger, resistance, rejection, abandonment or violence. As my friend Wayne puts it, in these stories, the gay person is trying to come out of a dark closet and someone else is doing their best to push them back in and shut the door behind them.

A Circular Path

My “coming in” story and those that other Two Spirit people have shared with me, however, are not about declaring our independence. When we come in to our Two Spirit identity, we are affirming our interdependence—our collective identity. Being Two Spirit is about presenting oneself and being fully present as a Native person who is LGBT. We understand that we have a place in—and are valuable to—our families, communities, cultures, histories and the present-day world.

These are things I have learned from my own experience and from other Two Spirit people. In the research I conducted for my doctoral dissertation, I brought Two Spirit people together to talk about what it means to be Two Spirit: *I feel like I am really a part of the circle, like I belong to something bigger... Things seemed to make sense once I found the Two Spirit community. It was and is healing. Two Spirit is healing.*

Things started to clear. I realized it wasn't about colonization and oppression... It wasn't about measuring up and comparing and not being good enough or smart enough. It wasn't about wasn'ts. It is about our strength, our land... our hearts.

It has taken me a long time to see that I am valuable. Now that I see it and feel it, everything seems possible. I looked to so many places by travelling and even dating “exotic” people. But here the answer was right within me and the answer is in our communities. We are our communities and they are us. Being Two Spirit means I am always at home.

Coming into a Two Spirit identity is a journey along a circular path. It is our nature to be whole and to be together. We are born into a circle of family, community, living creatures and the land. If we encounter racism, homophobia, sexism or other behaviours that oppress us, the balance may be disturbed and we may lose our place in the circle—but even if we lose our place we can still find guidance in our traditions, histories, memories and collective experience of this world. Two Spirit identity does exactly that. It enables us to circle back to where we belong and reclaim, reinvent and redefine our beginnings, our roots, our communities, our support systems and our collective and individual selves. With that promise, we come in to the best of who we are.



Photo courtesy of Grey Wolf

I close with a story from the first time I participated in a Two Spirit gathering.

On the wall of the main cabin, a sign was posted that said “Pow-wow—Saturday night.” I read and immediately felt dizzy. It blew me away just to think about it—Two Spirit people dancing!

I have lived with dreams of dancing, dreams where I pick my feet up and spin around. There are many feathers on my arms and my body and I know all the steps. I am an eagle. Arms extended, I lift off the ground and begin to fly in big circles.

Was this my chance?

I waited patiently for Saturday night to come, for the pow-wow to start. I sat still that evening, listening and watching. The drumming started and we gathered in a circle. And then a blur flew by me and landed inside the circle. It was a Two Spirit person dancing.

More and more of our dancers drifted into the circle. I still waited, sitting still and on the edge of tears. I had invited my ancestors to join me and I knew they were with me. We watched together through the night, proud of our sisters and brothers and a little jealous of their bravery.

It was time for the last song. Everyone was expected to dance. As I entered the circle, I could feel the drumbeat in my heart. The songs came back to me. I circled the dance area and in my most humble moment, with the permission of my ancestors, my 11 year old Two Spirit steps returned to me.

I danced.

James' story

By Dr James Makokis



My name is James Makokis and I am a Two Spirit from the Saddle Lake Cree First Nation. I have known I was different since I was a little boy, probably as young as four—maybe even before that. When other little boys were playing cars and guns, I took to playing dress-up and “house” with my sister. We would turn our living room into our very own stage and choreograph dance routines to Cyndi Lauper and Madonna. But you learn very quickly as a young boy that “boys shouldn’t like Madonna,” nor should they be wearing dresses or playing house. I remember

one time being specifically told by a male adult when I was four years old that I should not wear dresses. So at the tender age of four, I knew that I had to conform and to try and act more like a boy. I knew that I had to act like someone who I was not—to hide and to conform to the role society ascribes to “males.”

Initially I got along fine; young children are still very much open to difference and are willing to accept it if they are just explained to “why” things are. However, as I progressed into higher grades within elementary and then junior high school it was more difficult to hide. My classmates and other people would say that I “talked like a girl,” “walked like a girl,” or “acted too much like a girl.” To a young person who is trying to fit in and find one’s place in the world, this is a very detrimental thing because it immediately categorizes you as “different.” On top of being different because I was Two Spirited, being First Nation added another layer to which my rural Albertan

classmates could discriminate against.

Puberty was tough because there was absolutely no way to express the feelings which were happening inside of me. Growing up hearing comments like “fag,” “homo,” and “that’s so gay,” used constantly to put others down did not make for the most comfortable



and safe environment for a Two Spirited youth. In school, our sexual education teachers would tell us that it was normal to feel attracted to members of the same sex and that it would pass. I prayed that this was the case, except it wasn’t. The feelings only got stronger. Family gatherings were also tough because while all of my other male cousins were starting to date and have girlfriends, my uncles would ask me “So, do you have a girlfriend yet?” There was no safe place where I could just be myself without ever having to worry about being ridiculed, questioned or worried about being “found out.”

So finally the summer before I started grade twelve and at the age of sixteen, I told my parents that I would be moving to Edmonton to live with my sister and finish high school in the city. This was probably one of the best decisions I could have made, as I was allowed to finish my secondary schooling in a very large school with students from many diverse ethnic, religious, cultural, and sexual backgrounds. Looking back, I realize that I was seriously depressed in high school and had I stayed to finish grade twelve in my rural provincial school, I’m not sure what self-harm I may have committed.

Like many Two Spirited people, I finally “came-out” when I was in college. I was dating someone at the time who encouraged me to tell my family so that I could finally share, but more so release the “burden” that I had been holding for so many years. I told my mom first, in a restaurant just before she was leaving town on a business trip. We cried together and she told me how much she loved me and that it did not change anything. I told my dad a couple weeks later. He took it a little differently and blamed himself for not spending enough time with me as a young boy. We told him it was not his fault, it wasn’t anyone’s fault. He shared the news with his brothers and sisters who told him that “James is still James and we still love him.” It was then that one of my uncles told my dad about Two Spirited people and how we have always had important roles in our traditional societies. This comforted my dad as he now knew that people who were “different” were respected amongst our Nation.

I should note that my dad attended residential school where any form of difference in children was discouraged, usually by abuse which could take several forms. That was the start of our family’s discovering and learning about the Two Spirit people in our Nations. Without the support of my family, I would not be where I am today, free to be who I am, free to share my life with whom I choose, and having completed medical school – helping people with their health, which is in fact one of the traditional roles of a Two Spirit person in our Nehiyawak societies.

Bio: Dr. James Makokis, B.Sc, M.H.Sc, MD, from the Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Alberta.

Feeling unsafe

As James points out, it is common for Two Spirit students to feel unsafe while attending school. Lack of safety leads many students to miss classes and even school days, which ultimately jeopardizes their chances at successfully completing school.

Two Spirit students report feeling unsafe in:

- change rooms
- washrooms
- hallways
- classrooms
- school yards

Two Spirit students frequently experience:

- homophobia
- bullying
- sexual harassment
- verbal harassment
- physical fights and assaults
- exclusion and rejection
- discrimination due to race and physical appearance
- destruction of personal property

It is not easy to ask for help:

- Two Spirit students do not feel safe to approach school staff for assistance.
- Less than 50% of Two Spirit students know if their school has a policy for reporting homophobic incidents.
- Two Spirit students feel that school staff are unlikely to intervene or say anything to address the situation.

These experiences place Two Spirit students under intense stress which may ultimately impact their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing. There are very few studies documenting risk factors specific to Two Spirit youth; however, based on studies looking at all SMGV youth, Two Spirit students are more likely than their heterosexual classmates to:

- report depression and anxiety issues
- attempt suicide
- be kicked out of home or run away
- drop out of school
- abuse drugs and alcohol

When thinking about why these differences exist, most researchers agree that it is not because Two Spirit youth are more likely to have a mental illness per se. Rather, it follows from the stress of such things as racism, negotiating coming out, fear of, or actual familial disapproval and rejection, victimization by peers and the chronic stress associated with having a dually stigmatized identity.

What schools can do

It is clear that despite Canada's leadership in human rights, Two Spirit youth experience discrimination and homophobia. The lack of understanding surrounding Two Spirit culture has been a major obstacle to responding adequately to address these challenges in schools. Below are some useful strategies that can help teachers advocate for Two Spirit students and foster safe and caring schools.

- Advocate an inclusive, respectful anti-homophobia policy in your school district and your school. Make this policy well known to students, parents, administrators and all staff as a positive part of their commitment to making their school safe.
- Lobby for the provincial Ministries of Education to include Anti-Homophobia policies in safe schools policies and programs, including those of Catholic Schools.
- Administration should encourage teachers to work with students to start a GSA club in those schools where Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) have not been created.
- Assess and ensure that youth services and providers are inclusive, responsive to, and affirming of the needs of Two Spirit students and refer them to these services and providers.
- Ensure that staff receive educational seminars and workshops on Two Spirit issues to increase awareness, improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive staff available to students.
- Increase student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding Two Spirit people, history and events through inclusive curriculum, library resources and access to approved Internet resources through school computers.
- Include the topic of coping with stress and discrimination and integrate specific activities for Two Spirit youth in life skills training and programs to prevent risk behaviours.

- Use gender neutral language and assume that students could be of any sexual orientation or gender identity and respond accordingly.
- Place display posters on the walls, resources in the library and notices about Two Spirit conferences and events.
- Make connections with Two Spirit organizations within the city and the country to request updated resources, invite speakers and keep informed on Two Spirit related events.
- Include Two Spirit youth, Elders and community members in program development and evaluation.
- Invite community members, Elders and/or Two Spirit people who hold Two Spirit teachings to do a classroom presentation on the topic. ⁴

When these recommendations are in place Two Spirit students feel safer. Students are more likely:

- To feel that their school community is supportive.
- To feel more comfortable talking to a counsellor and to a classmate.
- To hear fewer homophobic comments.
- To report homophobic incidents to staff and their parents.
- To say that staff intervened more often.
- To feel attached to their school.

Students are less likely:

- To have had lies and rumors spread about them at school or on the Internet.
- To have had property stolen or damaged.
- To have been verbally or physically harassed.

⁴ The following insights and suggestions are drawn from The Two Spirit Circle of Edmonton Society (2009), Egale (2009), Kosciw (2007), the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre (2007) and the McCreary Centre Society. (2003). Refer to pgs. 30 - 37 in this booklet for a list of Two Spirit and SMGV community agencies.

Classroom resources and activities⁵

There are many things teachers can do to counter stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination in the classroom. The following are resources and activities designed to foster reflection and discussion around these topics.

Anti-Racism Kit

This manual includes strategies that would be effective and meaningful to youth and teachers interested in combatting racism through education.

- **Source:** www.unac.org/yfar/

Gay-Straight Student Alliances in Alberta Schools: A Guide for Teachers

This guide offers practical strategies, suggestions and a list of frequently asked questions to create a Gay-Straight Student Alliance.

- **Source:** www.teachers.ab.ca

Learn How to Facilitate Talking Circles

This book provides guidance and tools to help teachers learn how to facilitate talking circles.

- **Source:** **Pranis, K. (2005) (See References)**

LGBTQ Resource Centre – University of Missouri

The University of Missouri LGBTQ Resource Centre provides a broad range of activities and resources on SMGV and Ally issues (e.g., Being Closeted for a Day, Unisex and Single-Occupancy Restrooms on Campus, Coming Out, LGBTQ Pride Symbols, Transgender Introduction, Riddle Homophobia Scale).

- **Source:** <http://web.missouri.edu/>

Risk Assessment Exercise for Teachers

The Risk Assessment Exercise can help teachers identify and understand their comfort zone and what level of risk they would need to take in order to respectfully include SMGV materials in their classroom curriculum.

- **Source:** <http://www.usc.edu/>

⁵ All of these resources can be found by accessing the web link and pasting the name of the exercise, or resource in the search box of each individual site.

Ten Things You, as a Teacher, Can Say or Do When You Hear “That’s So Gay!”

This link provides helpful suggestions on how to create teaching opportunities in response to the commonly used, and discriminatory expression “That’s So Gay”.

- **Source: <http://bctf.ca/>**

Teaching Tolerance

This website offers excellent resources and activities for teachers and students from Pre K to Grade 12 (e.g., Bullying: Tips for Students, I Am Special, Peer Exclusion, Boundary Crossing, Examining Your School’s Climate, Breaking Down The Walls of Intolerance, Homophobia Quiz).

- **Source: www.tolerance.org click on Classroom Activities.**

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities

This website offers resources on how to build safe, caring and inclusive schools and communities. Here you can find copies of this booklet, as well as many more publications on similar topics.

- **Source: www.sacsc.ca, click on Resources, and Supporting a Safe and Caring School Resources.**

Understanding Prejudice

This is an excellent website for classroom material and exercises for teachers and students to gain awareness around racial and sexual prejudice.

- **Source: www.understandingprejudice.org**

Sexual Minority Studies

The University of Alberta Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (ISMSS) provides resources and speakers as well as hosts events to address issues to SMGV.

- **Source: www.ismss.ualberta.ca**

Policies, Rights, Regulations and Legislations

Alberta's Ministry of Education has taken steps to develop curriculum that incorporates Indigenous perspectives and policies that protect the dignity and safety of SMGV students including Two Spirit youth. Below are some crucial policies and resources that teachers should be familiar with when working with Two Spirit students.

1. The Alberta School Act Section 45(8)

A board shall ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board is provided with a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours.

Source: www.qp.gov.ab.ca/catalogue

2. The ATA's Code of Professional Conduct

In relation to pupils: (1) "The teacher teaches in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice as to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socioeconomic background or linguistic background.

Source: www.teachers.ab.ca search for **ATA's Code of Professional Conduct**

3. The ATA's Diversity and Human Rights Homepage

Is an online resource intended to help teachers build inclusive school communities in Alberta. It includes resources specific to Aboriginal Education, Anti-Racism and Religious beliefs, Gender Equity and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

Source: www.teachers.ab.ca search for **Diversity, Equity and Human Rights**.

4. The Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers

(9) “Teachers have the right to be protected against discrimination on the basis of prejudice as to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socioeconomic background or linguistic background and have the responsibility to refrain from practicing these forms of discrimination in their professional duties.”

Source: www.teachers.ab.ca search for The Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers

5. Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Policy Brochure

Developed for the Alberta Teachers’ Association to, “encourage school boards and the Department of Education to be aware of their legal, professional and ethical responsibilities in creating a safe, caring and inclusive environment for SMGV students and teachers.”

Source: www.teachers.ab.ca search for The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Policy Brochure

6. Alberta Human Rights Act

Between April 2, 1998 and October 1, 2009, sexual orientation had been “read in” as a protected ground under Alberta’s human rights legislation. As of October 1, 2009, sexual orientation is written in as a protected ground under the Alberta Human Rights Act.

Source: www.albertahumanrights.ca search for the Alberta Human Rights Act.

Additional Two Spirit resources

Two Spirit Community Organization

Two Spirit Circle of Edmonton Society (TSCES)

This group brings together Two Spirit peoples from Edmonton with their friends and family members. This provides an opportunity to help build and maintain a supportive community for Two Spirit youth, adults and seniors.

President: Richard Jenkins, Vice-President: Dr. Patricia Makokis
Email: rico13332@yahoo.com - Facebook: Two Spirit Circle of Edmonton Society

Two Spirit speakers

Ed Lavalee

TSCES Cultural Elder
Email: Edlavallee@shaw.ca

Dr Alexandria Wilson

Email: alex.wilson@usask.ca

Dr James Andrew Makokis

Email: james.makokis@gmail.com

Dr Patricia Makokis (Ally)

TSCES Vice-President
Email: patm@bluequills.ca

Elder Leonard Saddleback (Ally)

Samson Cree Nation
Hobbema, Alberta

Richard Jenkins

TSCES President
Email: rico13332@yahoo.com

Two Spirit Movies ⁶

Ansbacher, H. (Producer), & Nibley, L. (Director). 2010. Two Spirits [Motion picture]. USA: Say Yes Quickly Productions.

Basmajian, S. (Producer), & Alberta, C. (Director). 1999. Deep inside Clint star [Motion picture]. Canada: National Film Board of Canada.

Chaiken, J. (Producer), & Bezucha, T. (Director). 2000. Big Eden [Motion picture]. USA: Chaiken Films.

⁶ Ratings could not be found for these titles. Please use with discretion.

Estes, L., Rosenfelt, S. (Producers), & Sherman, A. (Director). 2002. *The business of fancydancing* [Motion picture]. USA: FallsApart Productions.

Jenkins, R. (Producer), & Unknown. (Director). 2003. *Two spirits in motion* [Motion picture]. (Available from Two Spirit Circle of Edmonton Society, Edmonton, Alberta).

Maurice, G. (Producer), & Manzano, J. (Director). 2000. *Johnny greyeyes* [Motion picture]. Canada: Nepantla Films.

Unknown. (Producer), & Santiago, C. H. (Director). 1983. *Stryker* [Motion picture]. Philippines: HCI International.

Two Spirit narratives

Allen, P. G. 1989. *Spiderwoman's Granddaughters*. Columbine: Fawcett.

Allen, P. G. 1991. *Grandmothers of the light: A medicine woman's source book*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Allen, P. G. 1992. *The sacred hoop: Recovering the feminine in American Indian traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Allen, P. G. 1997. *Life is a fatal disease: Selected poems 1962-95*. Albuquerque, N.M.: West End Press.

Allen, P. G. 2003. *Pocahontas: Medicine woman, spy, entrepreneur, diplomat*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.

Brant, B. 1988. *A gathering of spirit, a collection by North American Indian women*. Toronto: Women's Press.

Brown, L. B. 1997. *Two Spirit people: American Indian lesbian women and gay men*. Philadelphia: The Haworth Press, Inc.

Deschamps, G. 1998. *We Are Part of a Tradition: A Guide on Two Spirited People for First Nations Communities*.

Site: <http://www.2spirits.com/WeArePartOfTradition.pdf>

Jacobs, S. E., Thomas, W., & Lang, S. 1997. *Two Spirit people: Native American gender identity, sexuality, spirituality*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Proulx-Turner, S. 2008. *She walks for days inside a thousand eyes: A two spirit story*. Winnipeg: MB. Turnstone Press.

Roscoe, W. 1988. *Living in the spirit: A gay American Indian anthology*. New York: St Martin's Press.

Roscoe, W. 1998. *Changing ones: third and fourth genders in Native North America*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Spanbauer, T. 1992. *The man who fell in love with the moon*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Williams, W. L. 1988. *The spirit and the flesh: Sexual diversity in American Indian culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Two Spirit and related websites

2-spirited People of the First Nations

Source: www.2spirits.com

Dancing to Eagle Spirit Society

Source: www.dancingtoeaglespiritsociety.org

Egale Canada

Source: www.egale.ca

*Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*⁷

Source: Go to the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada webpage at www.ainc-inac.gc.ca and search for the Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

The International Two Spirit Gathering Website

Source: www.intltwospiritgathering.org

The North American Aboriginal Two Spirit Information Pages

Source: www.ucalgary.ca search for The North American Aboriginal Two Spirit Information Pages

⁷ This report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concerns government policy with respect to the original historical nations of Canada. It is a compilation of valuable knowledge and history of Aboriginal Peoples to 1996.

SMGV Community Organizations in Alberta⁸

Calgary

1.877.OUT.IS.OK – Distress Centre Calgary

A: 300 1010 8 Ave

P: 403-266-HELP (4357)

W: www.distresscentre.com

- A toll-free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week support/crisis line operated by the Calgary Distress Centre to support sexual minority and questioning youth.

Calgary Outlink – Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity

A: 1528 16th Avenue SW

P: 403-234-8973

E: <http://calgaryoutlink.ca/>

- A safe community space for the SMGV community in Calgary.
- Offers support services, education opportunities, a crisis line, access to resources as well as specialized groups for youth, women, men, Trans-Identified, Two Spirit, Ethno-Cultural communities, SMGV Parents/Families and Parents of SMGV individuals.

MiscYouth

P: 403-282-0127

W: www.miscyouth.ca

- A website designed to provide and increase education, support and resources with regards to SMGV youth and community, through youth friendly gatherings and educational programs.

Queers on Campus

E: qcampus@ucalgary.ca

W: <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~qcampus/>

⁸ Please note that these agencies/programs and their relative contact information were in service as of May 2011.

- A campus resource for everyone at the University of Calgary. Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans, Two Spirit, Straight, Asexual, Queer, or Questioning. All are welcome!
- Also presents “Ally”, a program to make more visible the support that already exists for the UofC SMGV community; to spread and encourage this support; to get people talking about homophobia and forms of oppression based on sexuality, sex and gender, and encourage Allies to speak out against/about these forms of discrimination and privilege. Volunteers interested in joining the cause are always welcome.

Youthsafe.net

P: 403-220-2505

E: aclrc@ucalgary.ca

W: www.youthsafe.net

- A project formed to address the gaps in violence prevention services offered to SMGV youth.
- The goals of Youthsafe are to promote learning, awareness and understanding about problems that youth with sex and gender differences face in their schools and communities; increase safety for marginalized SMGV youth; create greater access of services for SMGV youth across Alberta; facilitate a means for service providers at violence prevention agencies to be trained around issues faced by communities with sex and gender differences.

Edmonton

Camp fYrefly

W: www.fyrefly.ualberta.ca

- Camp fYrefly is Canada’s largest leadership retreat for sexual minority youth between 14 and 24.
- The camp is held each summer in Edmonton and focuses on helping to build the personal resiliency and leadership necessary for youth to become leaders in their schools, families and communities.

Diversity of Identities Acceptance of all Minds (DIAM) for LGBT visible minorities

P: 780-908-8495

E: info@diamonline.org

W: www.diamonline.org

Facebook: Diversity of Identities Acceptance of All Minds

- DIAM is a volunteer-based group that offers opportunities for networking and social supports within the SMGV community.
- Its purpose is to provide a safe space for individuals who identify themselves as being an ethnic minority and a sexual minority.

Hate and Bias Crime Initiative: Edmonton Police Service

P: 780-423-4567

W: <http://www.edmontonpolice.ca/>

- The Hate and Bias Crime Initiative advocates for a safe and inclusive environment for our diverse and multicultural society. The initiative is committed to building a framework to manage issues and prevent occurrences involving hate.
- The Edmonton Police Service also has a longstanding SMGV Liaison Committee that has been actively working to develop community responsive policing policies, programs and services.

OPTIONS Sexual Health Association (OPTIONS)

A: 50 9812 106 St

P: 780-423-3737

W: www.optionssexualhealth.ca

- OPTIONS is a pro-choice charitable organization that provides sexual health education and counselling services in Edmonton and surrounding communities.
- This center offers free pregnancy testing, pregnancy options counselling, sexual decision making strategies, birth control information, telephone counselling, sexual health education, sexual orientation support, as well as sexuality training for professionals.

OUTreach

E: outreach@ualberta.ca

W: www.ualberta.ca/~outreach

Facebook: OUTreach

- The University of Alberta's gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and straight-but-not-narrow-minded group.
- OUTreach acts as an information medium, social group, a place to meet

friends and gain support. The group is member driven and is open to all suggestions for activities.

Pride Centre of Edmonton (PCE)

A: 9540 111 Ave

P: 780-488-3234

W: www.pridecentreofedmonton.org

- PCE offers a number of youth groups and events as well as local education, counselling and support services for SMGV people, their parents, families and friends.

The Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton (SACE)

A: 204, 14964 121A Ave

P: 780-423-4102 Crisis Line: 780-423-4121

W: www.sace.ab.ca

- SACE exists to empower individuals affected by sexual abuse and assault and to empower communities to take action against sexual violence.
- It offers the following services without fees to clients: public education; 24-hour Crisis Line; crisis intervention; individual and group counselling for people over the age of 3; and a Diversity Outreach program, including War Rape counselling.
- SACE is openly SMGV positive and offers professionals trained in providing support to members of the SMGV community.

The Support Network

A: 400 10025 106 St

P: 780-482-0198 Crisis Line: 780-482-HELP or 780-482-4357

W: www.thesupportnetwork.com

- The Support Network is a “first call for help” for the community.
- The center offers help lines, suicide prevention and bereavement support, a walk-in counselling center and information on community services.

Transgender, Transsexual, Intersexed & Questioning (TTIQ)

A: 9540 111 Ave (PCE)

P: 780-718-1412

E: transadvocacy@yahoo.ca

W: www.albertatrans.org

Facebook: Transgender, Transsexual, Intersexed & Questioning (TTIQ)

- TTIQ is a mixed gender support group for people who identify as transgender, transsexual, intersex or are questioning.
- In this place you can share information, educational resources and all things trans related. It is a place for discussion, support, struggles, celebrations and grief as it relates to your journey of gender discovery.

Youth Emergency Shelter Society Y.E.S.S.

A: 9310 82 Ave

P: 780-468-7070

W: www.yess.org

Facebook: Youth Emergency Shelter

- YESS works in collaboration with other agencies, relatives and friends to provide a short term and safe place for youth at risk.

Youth Understanding Youth (YUY)

A: 9540 111 Ave (PCE)

E: info@yuyedm.ca

Facebook: Youth Understanding Youth

- Youth Understanding Youth is a volunteer community organization that provides social and support services for SMGV youth in Edmonton and surrounding communities.

Fort McMurray

Freedom Fort McMurray (Fort McMurray)

E: info@freedomfortmcmurray.com

W: www.freedomfortmcmurray.com

Facebook: Freedom Fort McMurray

- Freedom Fort McMurray is the SMGV private group in Fort McMurray.

Grand Prairie

Gay and Lesbian Association of the Peace (GALAP)

P: 780-513-1990

A: 10113 103 Ave

E: info@galap.org

W: www.galap.org

- GALAP is a newly registered society whose current focus is to bring the SMGV community together for friendship and support.
- GALAP offers a new community resource center in Grande Prairie and an interactive website. It also organizes regular social functions including weekly coffee nights.

High Level

Northern Alberta Support Group

P: 780-926-3989

- A social/support group based in High Level with counselling services.

Jasper

HIV West Yellowhead

A: 622 Connaught Drive

P: 780-852-5274 or 877-291-8811

E: director@hivwestyellowhead.com

W: www.hivwestyellowhead.com

- Offers weekly movie nights on the topics of sexual and gender diversity free of charge.

Lethbridge

PFLAG – Lethbridge and Area

P: 1-888-822-9494

E: bjneil1@shaw.ca

W: www.pflag.ca (Canada)

- PFLAG Lethbridge and Area is available 24 hours a day for information, crisis intervention, family mediation/counselling, individual counselling and support, connections to other SMGV teens/parents and resources.
- Contact person is parent: Betty Neil, MSW, RSW, who is also a community mental health therapist for ages 15-26.

Lethbridge Regional Police Service: Cultural Liaison Unit

P: 403-330-5133

E: dan.walton@lethbridge.police.ab.ca

W: www.lethbridgepolice.ca

- The Cultural Liaison Unit promotes a professional image within diverse communities by demonstrating impartial service and adherence to the rule of law by offering service and friendship to all members of the public without regard to race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, gender, age, mental or physical disability or sexual orientation.

Medicine Hat

HIV/AIDS Society of Southeastern Alberta (HSSA)

A: 202 535 3rd St

P: 403-527-5882

E: hssa.director@gmail.com

- HSSA serves the area of Southeastern Alberta in providing support to and advocacy for those affected and infected by HIV/AIDS/HCV and to educate and inform the public about HIV/AIDS/HCV.
- It also offers resources and a meeting place for the SMGV community.

PFLAG Medicine Hat

A: 80 14 St NW

P: Sheila or Ryan at 403-488-2260 or 403-527-1779

E: pglagmh@yahoo.ca

- Born of a need by parents to help themselves and family members, understand, and support their SMGV children and the new world they are thrust into when their children “come out.”

Planned Parenthood Alberta: Medicine Hat Office

A: 550C Allowance Ave SE

P: 403-526-6111

E: ppseab@telusplanet.net

- Provides educational resources, presentations and training for community and educational organizations in Alberta.

Red Deer

Red Deer College - Pride on Campus (RDC POC)

A: C/O SARDC Box 5005

P: 403-343-1877

Facebook: Red Deer College Pride on Campus

E: prideoncampus@hotmail.com

W: <http://ca.geocities.com/rdpoc/index.htm>

- RDC POC is an organization working to promote healthy views of SMGV people at Red Deer College and the City of Red Deer.

*Please note that this is a list of organizations that we knew about. We appologize for those which are not shown.

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