Remember that old nursery rhyme your parents used to tell you: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Sadly, it's wrong. "That's so gay," "faggot," "dyke" and "No homo" are some of the most common derogatory expressions used in schools today, but the least addressed by teachers.

For lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, words have the power to shape their identities and possibilities for the future. Put simply: words can hurt or heal. But sometimes our silence speaks much louder than our words. It's time we stop the silence surrounding the daily expression of casual homophobia in our schools, families and communities.

Our institute at the University of Alberta is helping to break the long-held silence that surrounds sexual orientation and gender identity in our schools and communities. Through innovative projects such as NoHomophobes.com, Camp fYrefly and the Family Resilience Project, we are using the power of research to both educate people and inspire action for positive social change.

It's what's next in helping raise awareness and understanding of the struggles of sexual and gender minority youth among us, and empowering them to embrace their identities at school and home and in their communities. It's work that has the ability to not only change lives, but also save them.

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