

GUIDE

How to build an **inclusive narrative**

A response to the moral panic and manufactured fear against the LGBTQIA+ community.

Introduction

The Hope and Courage Collective is a national civil society organisation that works with community groups, advocacy groups, trade unions, activists and academics to stop hate organising in our communities and workplaces.

We support communities and civil society to stay grounded, caring and resilient in the face of far right hate, bigotry and extremism.

Attempts to remove books, harass and cause disruption at public libraries, bookshops, drag story hours, has unleashed a new wave of attacks on LGBTIA+ people. The motivation of those orchestrating these attacks is to spread fear, stoke division, cause hurt in order to undermine and limit the freedoms of LGBTIA+ community.

It is also important to underline that the orchestrators behind these attacks, crossover with attacks on people seeking asylum and those with refugee status, Travellers, people of colour, women, disabled people, and with anti mask and anti vaccine mobilisations.

This document is a brief resource to help respond to, communicate about and engage others on what is happening about library disruptions. It is a work in progress and will grow and expand as we learn more.

Say what we are for

The vast majority of people believe that no matter who you are, where you come from, who you love, genders you identify with, we all deserve to be treated as equals. Our opponents want to distract us from this truth, by attempting to divide, disrupt, distract us.

The more our opponents pull us on to their turf, baiting us into reacting to their stunts, taunts, agendas - the less time, energy, space to talk about what Ireland can be, what we stand for and what we need to have fulfilled lives. When we focus on what communities need, we then pay attention to who has the power to decide the policies, rules, budgets that shape our communities' lived experiences. Importantly we can design strategies and campaigns that mobilise and inspire people to work for safe, fulfilled, decent lives.

Talk about people feeling safe to be their authentic selves

Rather than getting into debates about people's right to exist, the legitimacy of the right to exclude children from education or removing books from libraries - we are more effective when we centre conversations about how people should be respected, trusted, and empowered to make decisions about their own lives and bodies. "Across our races, backgrounds and genders, we want to be treated with dignity and respect."

Fear based narratives

and dog whistles are designed to stoke fear and dehumanise people. When we repeat them in an effort to refute terrible things been said, we are unintentionally helping our opponents ie negating their tropes reinforces their core message “LGBT people are NOT child abusers, Gays are NOT groomers. This extends to sharing screenshots, and content online, which ultimately draws attention to them, boosts controversial content and alters algorithms i.e. gives more oxygen to our opponents.

Myth Busting reinforces our opponents’ frames

A classic trick of opposing voices is to draw us into arguments about *numbers* and *facts*. All this does is force you to discuss the issue on their terms, is dehumanising and shifts the discussion away from talking about what the community is for and amplifying the positive values.

Avoid saying far right and protest

What is happening is an attack on the freedoms of LGBTIA+ people and nothing more than an exercise in intimidation, violence, disruption and hate. Avoid equating these attacks with the legitimate activity of protest.

It’s also best to avoid getting into debates about defining ‘the far right’. Most people do not have a clear definition of what far right means and framing all people involved as far right can reinforce polarisation and evoke the disingenuous framing of ‘far left v’s far right’. Focus instead on the motivations of those who are behind the attacks, and pivot to what it is we want to see happen.

Creating a 'bigger we'

A clear motivation of the haters is to force division and normalise framing LGBTIA+ people, especially Trans people as 'exceptional'. In reality there is a low connection to, and familiarity with what being trans means within the wider community. Research has found that an effective counterpoint is to present and discuss our genders as a spectrum on which both cis and trans people exist. Reinforcing the 'freedom from' framing is also effective. "People of all backgrounds and genders want to be free to fully express themselves and connect authentically with others...."

Gender as a spectrum

Pluralising and personalising genders i.e. making statements about "genders" or "our genders" instead of "gender" as a singular and abstract concept - subtly helps reorient people.

Repeat, repeat, repeat

Our job as community leaders is to make popular what needs to be said, not say what's popular. This means we have to continuously repeat the narratives and messaging that we want to shape how our communities respond.

The messenger is important

When people who are trusted and held in high esteem in our communities speak, people listen. Their word carries further and gets outside the echo chambers we often get caught in ie talking to ourselves! Find community, cultural, political leaders and talk to them about spreading narratives that unite and show that together we are stronger than fear.

Narrative structure matters

Research shows that opening up with solidarity based values directly impacts on how people understand and respond. A basic structure to help frame your communications consists of - open with shared values [what we stand for/unity]. Then name the problem [some trying to divide us and how they are doing it] and move quickly to solutions [what we want this gov/leaders to do]

Whether we are Black, white or brown, Traveller, newcomer - whatever our genders or who we love, we want our kids to have the freedom to be themselves and pursue their dreams. But a small number of haters are putting us in boxes based on what we look like, where we're from, or our genders.

They are attempting to fuel division and fear between parents and teachers to deny children and teenagers an open inclusive education and information. They are trying to stop this community from coming together to push for what we need to have fulfilled lives - by exploiting a lack of familiarity with transgender people.

By speaking out for welcoming, accurate, and fully funded education and libraries we can make our schools and communities places where children, no matter where they come from and genders they identify with or who they love, are free to learn and flourish to be there through authentic selves.