

Clinical Best Practices for LGBTQ+ Clients

A Tip Sheet for Members of the DC CoP

At the April 2022 DC School Behavioral Health Community of Practice (DC CoP) meeting, Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth, experts discussed best practices to support the behavioral health needs of the LGBTQ+ community. A special thank you to Brittini Dash, Director of Clinical Services for [SMYAL](#), who presented on this issue. The full presentation is available for viewing [here](#).

Overview

It's important to know how to appropriately provide affirming behavioral health support services to LGBTQ+ youth. Higher rates of discrimination, verbal abuse, physical assaults, and unsupportive families cause LGBTQ+ youth to struggle with higher rates of anxiety, affective disorder-related conditions and substance use issues. LGBTQ+ youth also are three times more more likely to commit suicide or demonstrate suicidal behavior. This resource provides tips for caregivers and providers to create affirming spaces for LGBTQ+ youth to feel safe and loved. This in turn allows youth to feel comfortable enough to be transparent about their health concerns and receive the treatment they deserve.

Tips for Caregivers

- Ensure the child knows they are loved and supported by telling and demonstrating this affection.
- Encourage dialogue to understand what the child is feeling and experiencing.
- Learn facts about the LGBTQ+ community to ensure conversations are based on factual information.
- Look out for signs of bullying and harassment, and intervene as needed.
- Take a team approach by identifying others (such as therapists and school counselors) who can also support the needs of the youth.
- Treat sexual identity as a journey, not a phase. Let the child know it is acceptable that their sexual orientation or gender identity may change over time (for example, a youth may identify as gay or later identify as to bisexual).



Tips for Providers Working with LGBTQ+ Youth

- With new clients, create an accepting and affirming environment by not assuming sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Ensure your office setting shows support and inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth by displaying signs, photographs or other materials.
- Provide physical and emotional safety by meeting the patients needs, clearly establishing and communicating safety procedures and fostering respectful relationships.
- Assess the youth's level of openness and self-acceptance to see if a clinical intervention is appropriate, and if so what kind.
- Be aware that there is no basis for so-called "conversion" or "reparative" therapy. These are unscientific attempts to change sexual orientation through shame-based efforts that result in increased depression, anxiety and suicidality.
- Work with family members struggling with accepting their child's sexual orientation or gender identity. Acceptance decreases suicidal rates, depression and anxiety.
- Screen patients for trauma and provide trauma-informed therapy as necessary. The LGBTQ+ community is disproportionately effected by violence and discrimination.
- Talk openly with patients about their sexual behaviors to ensure youth are able to make informed decisions and avoid risky behaviors.



Learn More

For more resources developed by the DC CoP please visit [our website](#).

For more information on resources shared during the meeting, please visit [this Padlet](#).