

EMPATHY AND AWARENESS

Building empathy is an important part of having discussions about LGBTQ youth and suicide risk. The exercises below can help students get in an empathetic mindset. You might consider using one of these before you start a discussion on the topic of LGBTQ issues or suicide.

“COMING OUT” STARS ACTIVITY

NOTE: Because of the emotional weight of the exercise, we recommend introducing this activity in environments where there is a strong level of support available for participating students.

Materials Needed:

Blue, purple, red and orange paper stars, pen/pencils for each participant

Type of Group:

High school and college-age youth, service providers, clinicians, and other primarily non-LGBTQ groups.

Length of Time:

Approximately 15 minutes depending on size of group

Size of Group:

Any

Purpose: To examine our judgements of others in a safe and productive way and explore the importance of self-identification

Courtesy of: Jeff Pierce, University of Southern California.

ACTIVITY GOALS

After completing this activity and discussion, youth will be able to:

- Describe aspects of the “coming out” process;
- Discuss the feelings associated with identifying as LGBTQ;
- Explain how this activity will impact their relationships with their LGBTQ peers

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS



Let each person pick a blue, purple, red or orange star and then read the following to them out loud. **It is important to follow this script exactly:**

1

“Imagine that this star represents our world, with you in the center and those things or people most important to you at each point of the star. So we’ll begin by writing your name in the center of the star—making it your very own star! Then, pick a side of the star to begin with. Choose a friend who is very close to you; someone you care about very much: a best friend or a close friend. Write their name on this side of the star.”

ALLOW SHORT TIME TO WRITE

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“COMING OUT” STARS ACTIVITY cont’d

2 “ Next, think of a community to which you belong; it could be a religious community, a neighborhood, your college/university/workplace/profession, or just a group of friends. Write the name of this group that you are a part of on the next side of the star moving clockwise. ”

ALLOW SHORT TIME TO WRITE

3 “ Now, think of a specific family member—someone that you have always turned to for advice. Maybe this person knows how to cheer you up when you’re sad. It can be anyone you consider in your family. A mother, father, aunt, or uncle: any family member who has made a large impact on your life. Please write their name on the next side of the star. ”

ALLOW SHORT TIME TO WRITE

“ What job would you most like to have? It could be your boss’s job or being President. Whatever your career aspiration is, write it on the next side. ”

4

ALLOW SHORT TIME TO WRITE

5 “ Lastly, what are some of your hopes and dreams? Maybe you want to be a millionaire; maybe you want a family. Think of a few of your hopes and dreams and write them on the last side of your star. ”

ALLOW SHORT TIME TO WRITE

Have everyone stand up in a circle. (If the classroom/room layout does not permit a circle, please ask participants to turn their chairs/desks so they can observe their fellow participants during this activity.)

6

Explain that **for the purposes of this activity, each person is now a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender young person about to begin the coming out process.** Tell them that they **cannot talk** for the rest of the activity and then read the following prompts and accompanying bullet points to them:

“You decide that it will be easiest to tell your friends first; since they have always been there for you in the past and you feel they need to know.”

THEN

“If you have a blue star, your friends have no problem with it. They have suspected it for some time now and thank you for being honest with them. Luckily, they act no different toward you and accept you for who you are.”

IF



“If you have an orange or purple star, your friends are hesitant at first. They are a little irritated that you have waited so long to tell them, but you are confident that soon they will understand that being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender is just a part of who you are. You just need to give them some time. Please fold back this side of your star.”

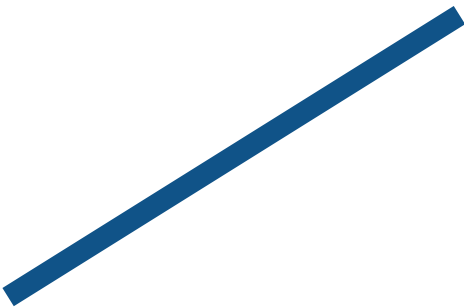
“If you have a red star, you are met with anger and disgust. This friend who has been by your side in the past tells you that being LGBT is wrong and they can't associate with anyone like that. If you have a red star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground, this friend is no longer a part of your life. You are now part of the more than 1/3 of LGBT youth who report losing a close friend when they come out (D'Augelli, 2002, p. 439-462).”

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“ With most of you having such good luck with your friends, you decide that your family probably deserves to know. So, you turn to your closest family member first so that it will be a little easier. ”

THEN

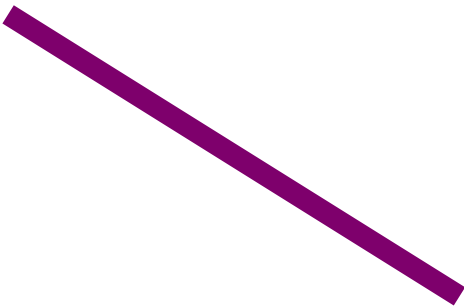
IF



“ If you have a blue star, you are embraced by this family member. They are proud that you have decided to come out and let you know that they will always be there to support you. ”



“ If you have an orange or red star, your family member rejects the thought of being related to a person who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Similar to some of your friends, they are disgusted; and some of you are thrown out of your house or even disowned. If you have an orange or red star, please tear off that side of the star and drop it to the ground. You are now one of the estimated 1.6 million homeless American youth; 20 to 40 percent of whom identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (Ray, 2007, p. 1). ”

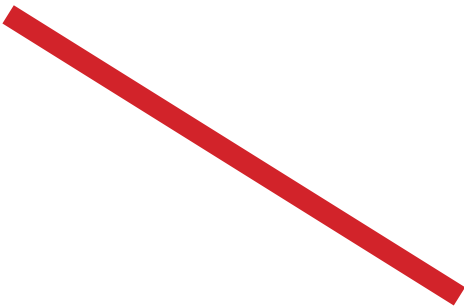


“ If you have a purple star, the conversation does not go exactly how you planned. Several questions are asked as to how this could have happened, but after some lengthy discussion this person who is close to you seems a little more at ease with it. Fold this side of your star back, as they will be an ally, but only with time. ”

“Having told your friends and family, the wheels have started to turn and soon members of your community begin to become aware of your sexual orientation and/or gender identity.”

THEN

IF



“If you have an orange star, you are met with a mixed response. Some accept you and some don't know what to think. You remain a part of the community, and with time, will fit in as you once did. If you have an orange star, please fold back this side.”

“If you have a purple or blue star, your sexual orientation is accepted by your community. They continue to embrace you like anyone else and together you celebrate the growing diversity in your community.”

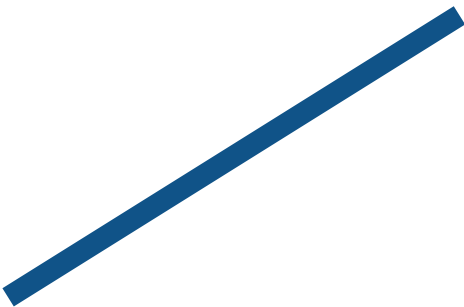
“If you have a red star, your community reacts with hatred. They tell you that someone like you doesn't belong in their community. Those who had supported you in your times of need no longer speak to you or acknowledge you. If you have a red star, tear this side off and drop it to the ground.”

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“ You have heard that rumors have started circulating at work regarding your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In the past, you made it a point to confront these rumors as soon as they began, but now you’re not sure if that will do more harm than good. ”

THEN

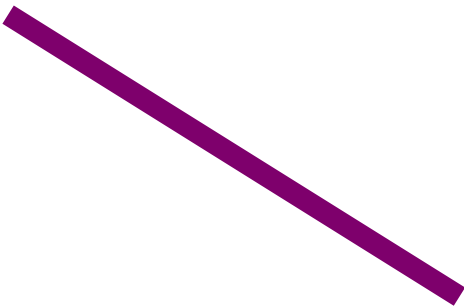
IF



“ If you have a blue star, your co-workers begin to approach you and let you know that they have heard the rumors and they don’t care. They will support you. Your supervisors and boss react the same way—letting you know that you do excellent work and that’s all that matters. ”

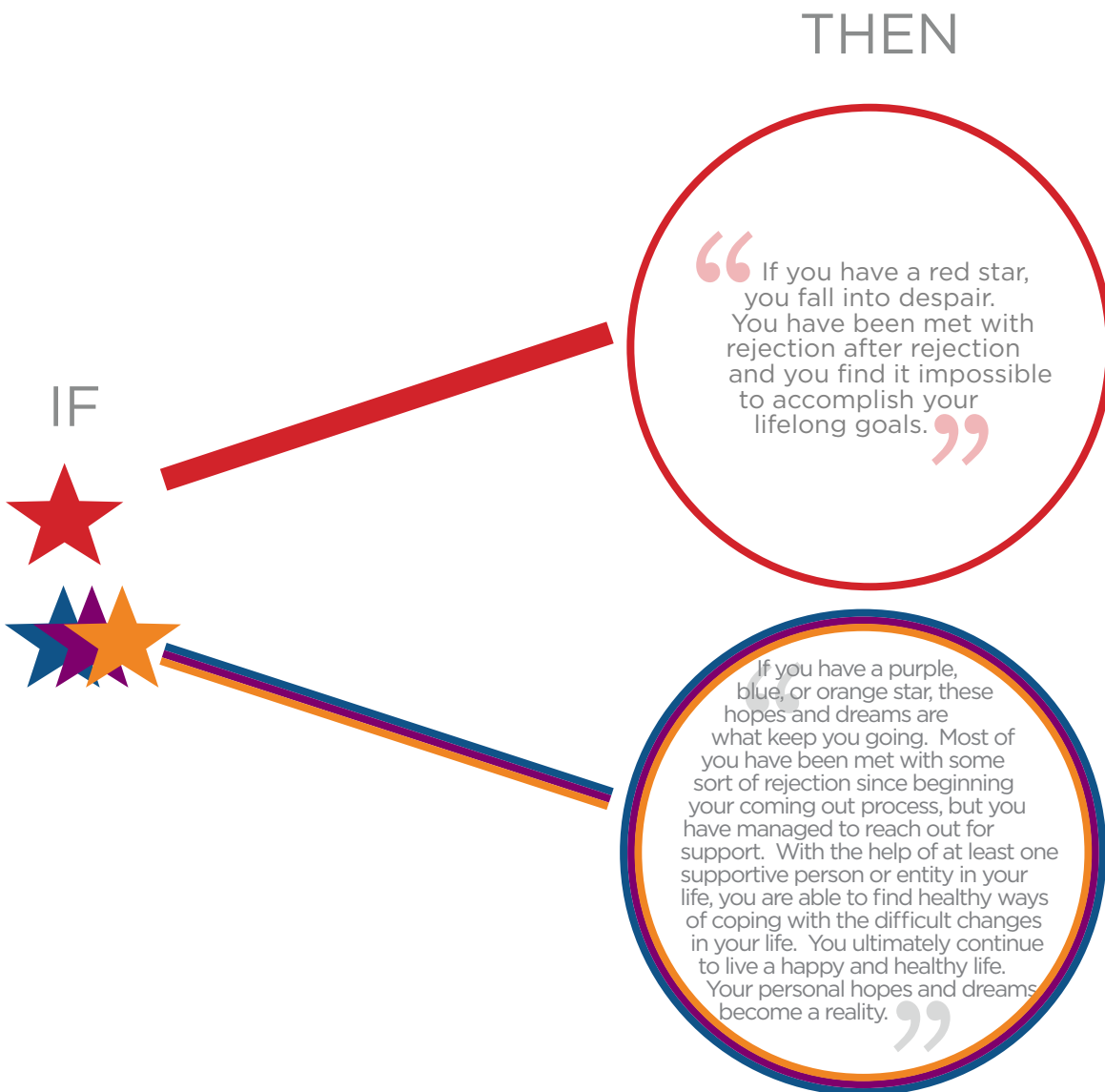


“ If you have a red or orange star, you continue to work as though nothing is happening ignoring the rumors that have spread throughout your workplace. One day, you arrive at work to find your office has been packed up. You are called into your boss’s office and she explains that you are being fired. When you ask why, she tells you that lately your work has been less than satisfactory and that she had to make some cutbacks in your area. If you have a red or orange star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground. ”



“ If you have a purple star, your workplace has become quite interesting. Everyone seems to think that you’re lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender even though you haven’t mentioned it to anyone or confirmed any of the rumors. Some people speak to you less, but the environment has not changed too drastically. If you have a purple star, please fold back this side. ”

“ Now your future lies ahead of you as an LGBT young adult. For some of you, your hopes, dreams and wishes for the perfect life are all that remain. ”



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to take part in this activity?
- Who had a red star? How did that feel? Who had a blue star? How did that feel?
- What did you learn from this activity?
- What do you feel you can do to make our classroom a more supportive place for LGBTQ people?

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EMPATHY AND AWARENESS

TRUE COLORS ACTIVITY

Materials Needed:
None

Type of Group:
Middle and high school age youth

Length of Time:
Approximately 10-20 minutes
depending on size of group

Size of Group:
Any. If you have a large group
(20-30), it may be beneficial to
split into 2 smaller groups (10-15)
for timing purposes.

Purpose: To examine our judgements of others in a safe and productive way and explore the importance of self-identification

ACTIVITY GOALS

After engaging in this activity, youth will be able to:

- Describe the feelings and reactions associated with assumptions;
- Compare and contrast the positive and negative aspects of assumptions;

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Without giving any other instructions or indications, ask the group to form a standing circle without speaking.
- 2 Ask everyone to silently look to the person to their left and, based on their interaction with them so far, to identify a color for that person.
- 3 Select someone to start with, and have them say what color they chose for the person on their left and why.
- 4 Continue until everyone in the group has gone.
- 5 After everyone has had a chance to assign a color on their neighbor, ask the participants to pause and reflect for a moment. After a few seconds, ask each individual to say what color they would ascribe to themselves, this time WITHOUT giving a description of why.

TRUE COLORSACTIVITY cont'd

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What did it feel like to have someone else label your color without knowing much about you?
- How many of you feel like the color you were given was an accurate assumption? If so, what did that feel like? If not, what was that like?
- How do you think this factors into what we're talking about today?
- In what ways do our assumptions about other people negatively affect our relationships with them?
- Sometimes it's difficult to tell when someone is going through a hard time and part of what we're here to do today is talk about how to identify those signs and how to be supportive. How do you think this activity relates to that?
- How did it feel to share the color that you felt best described you? How do you think it would have felt if you weren't given the opportunity? How can we create spaces and opportunity for people to share with us who they are and how they feel?

EMPATHY AND AWARENESS

GENDER BOXES ACTIVITY

Materials Needed:

Blackboard, Whiteboard or Flip Chart and Chalk/Markers

Length of Time:

Approximately 10 minutes depending on size of group

Type of Group:

Middle and high school age youth

Size of Group:

Any

Purpose: To build a better understanding of the hurtful ways people are treated when they act outside society's expectations of what it means to be a boy or a girl

ACTIVITY GOALS

After completing this brainstorm and discussion, youth will be able to:

- Explain the stereotypes associated with genders;
- Describe society's role in creating and judging these stereotypes;
- Describe what happens when individuals do not fit these stereotypes.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

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2
3

1 Draw two big boxes on the board with the terms "boy" and "girl" (or "man" and "woman") in them.

2 Ask group to brainstorm activities, material possessions, characteristic traits and behavior traits that girls and boys are meant to follow.

3 Write each response in the respective box.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When young people behave in ways outside their 'assigned' box, how does society react?
- How do their peers treat them? What names are they called?
- How do expectations of boys and girls, called "stereotypes," affect the way we treat LGBTQ people?
- Gay men often act masculine and lesbians often act feminine, and people all along the LGBT spectrum express their gender differently. Do all gay men have to act outside the boy gender box and all lesbians act outside the girl gender box? (use this as a learning point to talk about the differences in gender expression and sexual orientation - as the two are often conflated.)
- How would you feel if you were victimized for your self-expression?

EMPATHY AND AWARENESS

TOP 10 THINGS ACTIVITY

NOTE: Because of the emotional weight of the exercise, we recommend introducing this activity in environments where there is a strong level of support available for participating youth.

Materials Needed:

Pens and a sheet of paper for all participants

Length of Time:

Approximately 15 minutes depending on size of group

Type of Group:

High school and college-aged youth, service providers, clinicians, and other primarily non-LGBT groups of people.

Size of Group:

Any

Purpose: To build a greater understanding of the loss that leads young people to contemplate and/or attempt suicide

ACTIVITY GOALS

After participating in this activity, youth will be able to:

- Identify things in their life that hold importance to them;
- Describe their reactions to “losing” these important things;
- Describe how this process may relate to the experience of LGBTQ youth.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

“Today we are going to talk about suicide among young adults. Right now, we’d like to do a **silent exercise** to give you a chance to reflect. Please write down a list of the 10 most important people or things in your lives—it can be friends, parents, your iPod, your cat, your Phillies jersey, so long as it is a list of 10.”

After everyone has their list completed:

- 1 Ask them to cross out 3 things/people they can do without if need be. **PAUSE**
- 2 Ask 1 willing participant to discuss how losing those 3 things/people felt
- 3 Ask everyone to cross out 3 more people/things that they can do without. **PAUSE**
- 4 Ask 1 willing participant to talk about how it is to lose these 6 things/people
- 5 Ask everyone to cross all but 1 of the remaining things/people off. **PAUSE**
- 6 Explain that we all started with a full list of things/people that we cherish and look forward to having in our lives every day. These are the things/people that keep us going and keep our lives whole; they bring fulfillment.
- 7 Ask them to all cross out the last item. After they’ve done this, talk about the profound sense of loss and grief, and that is how someone who is feeling suicidal might feel.

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TOP 10 THINGS ACTIVITY cont'd

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How would our lives change if we lost our most beloved people and possessions?
- Were there any differences in the way you felt about crossing off a person and crossing off a possession?
- How do you think this relates to being an LGBTQ young person?

music
My cat books
Soccer
My bedroom
the internet
my phone
Friends
my cousins Parents

EMPATHY AND AWARENESS

POWER OF OUR WORDS ACTIVITY

Materials Needed:

Blackboard, Whiteboard or Flip Chart and Chalk/Markers

Type of Group:

Middle and high school students and non-LGBTQ audiences

Length of Time:

Approximately 15 minutes depending on size of group

Size of Group:

Any.

Purpose: To build a greater understanding of the harm negative words and phrases can have on LGBTQ people

ACTIVITY GOALS

Through facilitated brainstorm and discussion, youth will be able to:

- Understand the connotations associated with words used to describe the LGBTQ community;
- Describe the feelings that negative words can create for youth;
- Understand the effects their words may have on others

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

1
2
3
4
5

Ask the students to brainstorm a list of all the terms or phrases they have heard, used and can think of to describe people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

After they have completed brainstorming, go through the list with them and ask the group if each can be used “offensively” or “to hurt someone.” *(Some examples of these words youth might come up with are: “fag,” “dyke,” “weird,” “tranny,” “queer,” or the phrase “that’s so gay.”)*

Put a line or an X through each offensive word. The likely result is that nearly all, or all, of the words will be crossed out. If the list is not overwhelmingly negative, you can alternately ask

“Which of these can be used positively?” Circle any words that are positive.

Point out that you didn’t initially ask for the group to brainstorm “negative words,” but that most of the words ended up being offensive or hurtful.

Analyze some of the negative words. If “that’s so gay,” is mentioned, have your group analyze the phrase. For example, explore possible ways to replace “gay” with what they really mean to say. Ask them to consider the impact of hearing the negative words you collected, regardless of how they mean it, on someone who is not “out” or is questioning their sexuality.

POWER OF OUR WORDS ACTIVITY cont'd

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How would someone who identifies as LGBTQ feel knowing that nearly every word used to describe them can also be used to hurt them? Are there any other groups you can think of where nearly every word used to describe them is also hurtful? If so, what groups?
- What do you think the outcomes of all this negative language are on the feelings and thoughts of (young) people who identify as LGBTQ?
- Do you think that is why there are LGBTQ people right here at your school who are too scared to come out?

“THAT’S SO GAY”

=

“That’s stupid.
That’s dumb.
That’s annoying.”

SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

Materials Needed:

Blackboard, Whiteboard or Flip Chart and Chalk/Markers

Type of Group:

Middle and high school aged youth

Size of Group:

Any.

Length of Time:

Approximately 30-40 minutes depending on size of group; additional time needed for supplemental exercises

Purpose: To encourage self-care and help-seeking behavior among youth, to educate audiences about help-seeking behaviors and common barriers faced by youth who reach out for help and to introduce the concept of self-care to a wide audience.

ACTIVITY GOALS

Through facilitated discussions and engaging in a group activity, youth will be able to:

- Understand and describe self-care;
- Describe help-seeking behaviors;
- Identify barriers associated with help-seeking;
- Identify ways that they feel comfortable reaching out for help

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

“ Reaching out for help when you need it can be difficult. There are many factors that affect how and when we ask for help.

Let’s talk about 2 things today: How you help yourself when you need to; and how and to whom you reach out for help.

1

Self-care is how you take care of yourself. These are the things we do to make ourselves feel better when we’re stressed out, overworked, unhappy, or overwhelmed.”

SELF-CARE (BRAINSTORM)

2

“ What are the things you do after a stressful day or when you’re upset that make you feel better? ”

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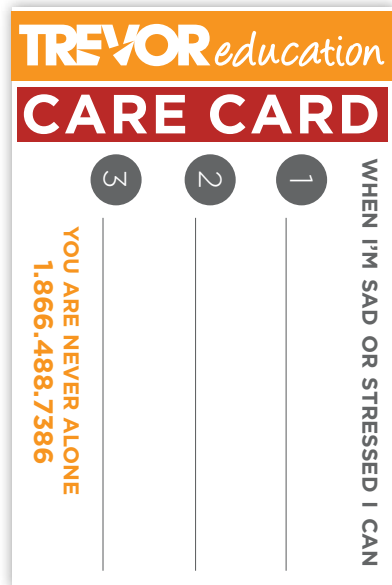
SELF-CAREACTIVITY cont'd

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Looking at our brainstorm and personal lists; are these healthy behaviors?
- When you're flying on an airplane, in an emergency you'll be instructed to place your oxygen mask on yourself before helping other people. Why do you think that is? How does this relate to self-care?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Self-Care card (included in this kit).



EMPATHY AND AWARENESS

HELP-SEEKING ACTIVITY

Materials Needed:

Blackboard, Whiteboard or Flip Chart and Chalk/Markers; supplemental exercises are included below

Length of Time:

Approximately 30-40 minutes depending on size of group; additional time needed for supplemental exercises

Type of Group:

Middle and high school aged youth.

Size of Group:

Any.

Purpose: To encourage self-care and help-seeking behavior among youth, to educate audiences about help-seeking behaviors and common barriers faced by youth who reach out for help and to introduce the concept of self-care to a wide audience.

ACTIVITY GOALS

Through facilitated discussions and engaging in a group activity, youth will be able to:

- Understand and describe self-care;
- Describe help-seeking behaviors;
- Identify barriers associated with help-seeking;
- Identify ways that they feel comfortable reaching out for help.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Once you've allowed your group to identify self-care strategies, begin a facilitated discussion on help-seeking behavior and consider using the following brainstorm/prompts to get conversation going on help-seeking behavior: ●●●●●●●●●●

HELP-SEEKING (BRAINSTORM)

1 “What does it mean to reach out for help? What are some ways you seek help?”

(Use the points below as prompts if necessary)

- Calling 9-1-1 in an emergency;
- Asking for it – think about where or how you feel most comfortable asking for help. Notice any trends? Does it change depending on the type of help you need?
- ‘Dropping hints,’ or hoping people will notice.
- Going to a professional – doctors when you’re sick, etc.
- Demanding it.
- Internally – identifying a challenge and working personally to address it.

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HELP-SEEKING ACTIVITY cont'd

ENCOURAGING HELP-SEEKING (BRAINSTORM)

2

“What are some things that inhibit/keep us from reaching out for help?” (Use the points below as prompts if necessary)

- Gender
- Trust
- Confidentiality (If you need help with something that is a secret, can this person keep it a secret?)
- Fear
- Knowledge
- Ability
- Past Experience

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Looking at our list, for how many of you is TRUST something you look for in support? Do you have people/resources that you trust enough to talk to about sensitive topics?
- Looking at our list, for how many of you is KNOWLEDGE something you look for in support?
- Do girls or boys have an easier time reaching out for help? Why might that be?
- Do you fear being judged for making a mistake, or for admitting that you're struggling with something? Do you worry about being 'annoying' or a bother to those you would ask for help? Why might that be?
- Does the person/resource have the knowledge to help you when you've reached out for help?
- Are you able to identify what's "wrong," or what your crisis is?
- Have you had positive or negative experiences when asking for help in the past?

HELP-SEEKING ACTIVITY cont'd

“3 All of these are valid reasons why someone might be hesitant to ask for help. Knowing that these are the barriers to asking for help, how can we overcome them? Specifically, what can we do in this space to make it easier for someone to ask for help?”

(Brainstorm; use the points below as prompts if necessary or refer to the Safe Space poster included in this guide if your group has already completed it.)

- Create a safe space, so all people can feel safe, supported, and respected and that trust can be guaranteed.
- Identify specific people who are the best to go to for help - can be different for different people/needs.
- Accept people's needs for help without judgment.
- No assumptions.
- Acknowledge the bravery in asking for help.
- Confidential help-seeking space - where people can go in private for help.

“Now, let's take a personal look at the support you have in your lives and to whom you feel comfortable reaching out to for help.”

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Support Inventory card (included in this kit).

Use this worksheet to find out where you get different kinds of support from for specific issues.

SYSTEM OF SUPPORT	TYPE OF ISSUE OR CHALLENGE					
	FAMILY The solution or person who helps you solve an ongoing issue with your family	FRIEND/PEER People you interact with often or rarely	RELATIONSHIP Challenges with an important person in your life	SCHOOL/ WORK/LEISURE Challenges with performance, etc.	MENTAL Distress or depression, etc.	CRISIS Any situation that you need help with
Christina	X	X	<input type="radio"/>	X	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TREYOR Education	X	X	X	X	X	X

EMPATHY AND AWARENESS

POWER OF PRIDE ACTIVITY

Materials Needed:

Blackboard, Whiteboard or Flip Chart and Chalk/Markers

Type of Group:

LGBT Middle and high school aged students and their allies

Length of Time:

Approximately 15 minutes

Size of Group:

Any.

Purpose: To encourage self-care and help-seeking behavior among youth, to educate audiences about help-seeking behaviors and common barriers faced by youth who reach out for help and to introduce the concept of self-care to a wide audience.

ACTIVITY GOALS

Through a facilitated brainstorm and discussion youth will be able to:

- Describe the positive aspects of being LGBTQ
- Explain how this knowledge can help themselves or others
- Discuss how they can use this information to empower others and themselves

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

1 2

Ask the students to brainstorm a list of all of the positive things about being part of the LGBTQ community. If they need suggestions you might offer to start with 'Community' or another positive word or phrase.

After they have completed their list of items ask:

- How can this list help you if you are feeling sad or down?
- How can you use the things on this list to empower each other?