

Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth

Improving School Culture Through Coordinated School Health

Purpose:

To help educators understand, assess, and improve school climate for all youth, especially those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ, also referred to as “sexual minority youth” or “SMY”).

Unique contributions:

- 1) Intervention focuses on LGBTQ population, but the whole school will feel its positive impact as systems develop to support all marginalized students.
- 2) Can be tailored to your school’s readiness and needs
- 3) School staff will sharpen skills they already possess as they use them to better serve the LGBTQ population.

CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF THE SMY INTERVENTION

The NEEDS that are addressed through this intervention are:

School environments that are perceived as unsafe (physically and/or emotionally) can negatively impact educational and health outcomes for all students, but disproportionately affect LGBTQ students. Research consistently finds sexual minority youth (SMY) to be at higher risk of school failure/dropout, truancy, harassment, homelessness, assaults, suicide, and alcohol and substance abuse.

Some indicators of this NEED at your school might be:

- The Bully-Free Schools survey shows high rates of bullying based on a student’s sexual orientation (whether true or not).
- MiPHY survey results indicate high levels of students who have witnessed bullying.
- There are few or no clearly identified resources for LGBTQ students. Some examples include: Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) student club, rooms that display a “safe zone” sticker, openly gay or allied staff members.
- District and school non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies lack language that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

The CRITICAL FEATURES of this intervention are:

- 1) Acknowledgment of the existence of its LGBTQ population.
- 2) Commitment to provide a safe learning environment for all students, including those who are or are perceived to be LGBTQ.
- 3) Commitment that all students, including those who are or are perceived to be LGBTQ, deserve to be safe, welcomed, cared for, and given equal opportunities for meaningful socialization through school activities.

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Intervention Description

The SMY Intervention can be custom-designed to meet the unique needs of your school, staff, students and parents. Key elements may include the following:

This interactive workshop reviews health and educational risks faced by LGBTQ youth, helps you assess your school's climate, and identifies key steps you can take to better support this population.

You will leave with relevant, tangible resources and tools that can be used immediately to create safer spaces in your school. Workshops are conducted regionally throughout Michigan several times a year or on-site at your school, depending on your school's readiness and needs.

1. Professional Development Training—"A Silent Crisis: Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth"

Training Objectives—At the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- State major health and educational risks faced by sexual minority youth;
- Define current terms related to sexual orientation and gender identity;
- Analyze implications of personal beliefs regarding LGBTQ issues on professional practice.
- Assess current school/agency safety and climate for sexual minority youth;
- State the implications of key legal and policy issues affecting sexual minority youth and a safe school environment;
- Respond with students, staff and the broader school community to create a safer school environment for sexual minority youth;
- Commit to addressing school safety and climate issues that may arise among students, faculty, staff and parents in schools/agencies;
- Implement an action plan to address safety and climate issues for sexual minority youth at the individual, collegial, and the school/community levels;
- Use culturally inclusive local, regional, state, and national resources.

2. Development of a Strategic Plan Designed to Address the Specialized Needs of Your School

3. Follow Up Support and Coaching, including One on One Technical Assistance

Vision of This Intervention in Action:

- Staff intervene consistently when they hear or see harassment, including comments like *"That's so gay."*
- *Anti-discrimination policies include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.*
- Creation or growth of student-led diversity clubs such as a GSA.
- *Professional development sessions that train staff to be culturally inclusive to issues affecting LGBTQ students.*
- School safety assessments identify successes and opportunities for improvement.
- *Review of health education and other curricula for relevance and inclusion of appropriate LGBT content.*
- Identification of school personnel who make LGBTQ students feel safe and supported (e.g. Safe Zone stickers).
- *Recognition of the importance of family acceptance & involvement.*