Understanding LGBTQ Youth & Ensuring Inclusivity in Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs

Introducing LGBTQ Youth

LGBTQ is an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning. LGBTQ is frequently used as an umbrella term for individuals with diverse genders or sexual orientations. LGBTQ youth are often grouped together, but these individuals have unique needs[1] both in general and when it comes to teen pregnancy prevention.

Sexual orientation and gender are important aspects of a person's identity. Expressing and exploring gender identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation is part of adolescent development. This process is unique to each individual and is not a one-time event. Personal, family, cultural, and social factors may influence how one expresses their sexual orientation and gender identity[1].

LGBTQ youth experience various challenges, often because of how others respond to their sexual orientation or gender identity[2]. The disparities faced by LGBTQ youth are influenced largely by stigma and discrimination from others. Stress associated with these experiences can put LGBTQ youth at greater risk for negative health outcomes, including homelessness, school victimization, suicide, drug use, and teen pregnancy[3].

2-3x More likely than non-LGBTQ youth

LGBTQ Youth Involved in Teen Pregnancy

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[1] http://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/key-terms-and-concepts
[2] Institute of Medicine, 2011
[3] Hunter & Schaecher, 1987; Reis, 1999; Reis & Saewyc, 1999; Ray, 2006; Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; SAMHSA, 2014; Saewyc, Poon, Want, Homma, Smith, & the McCreary Centre Society, 2007

Making the Connection:
# LGBTQ Youth and Teen Pregnancy

There are often incorrect assumptions made about LGBTQ youth and the risk for teen pregnancy. It is important to recognize that sexual identity is separate from sexual behavior and that sexuality is fluid and may change over time. For instance, a young person may identify as lesbian or gay, but may still engage in sexual behaviors with someone of the opposite sex. Similarly, a young person may not identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and engage in sexual behaviors with someone of the same sex.

Research has consistently found that LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk for teen pregnancy[4]. A recent study found that students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or reported both male and female sexual partners, had higher odds of unintended pregnancy than heterosexual students or students who only had opposite-gender sexual partners[5]. Other studies found that LGBTQ youth are more likely than heterosexual youths to have had their first heterosexual intercourse before the age of 14 and to have had more sexual partners[6].

It is important to understand that simply being LGBTQ does not put a youth at risk. Like any vulnerable group, not all LGBTQ youth are at high risk. While it is important to be aware of the potential risks, we must avoid assuming that all LGBTQ youth are at risk. The same protective factors that lead to positive youth development apply to LGBTQ youth, including having supportive family and peers and being in a safe and supportive environment.

Median Percentages of Students who Engage in Sexual Behaviors
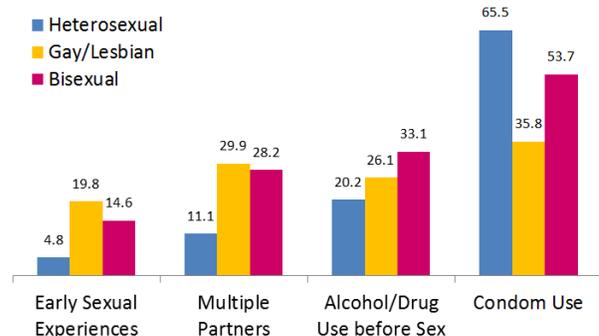
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Risk Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9–12 — Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, Selected Sites, United States, 2001–2009. MMWR Early Release 2011;60, June 6, 2011.

To ensure that Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) programs are relevant and address the needs of LGBTQ youth, they must be responsive to and inclusive of LGBTQ youth. Many evidence-based TPP programs were designed specifically for heterosexual teens and may not be inclusive of LGBTQ youth. Researchers have noted that, if sexual education programs ignore LGBTQ youth, they may conclude that the information is irrelevant to their lives, and "tune out" important information about contraception and safer sexual

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[4] Institute of Medicine, 2011; Saewyc, Poon, Want, Homma, Smith, & the McCreary Centre Society, 2007; Blake, Ledsky, Goodenow, Sawyer, & Hack, 2001; Lindley & Walsemann, 2015
[5] Lindley & Walsemann, 2015
[6] Saewyc, Skay, Bearinger, Blum, & Resnick, 1998; Saewyc, Bearinger, Blum, & Resnick, 1999; Blake, Ledsky, Lehman, Goodenow, Sawyer, & Hack, 2001; Saewyc, Poon, Homma, & Skay, 2008; Charlton , Corliss, Missmer, Rosario, Spiegelman &, Austin, 2013; Tornello, Riskind, & Patterson, 2014

practices[7]. This can prevent LGBTQ youth from learning the information and skills needed to make healthy decisions.

Supporting LGBTQ Youth

There are important protective factors that promote the well-being and resiliency of LGBTQ youth. Research has identified policies, programs, and practices that help promote safe and supportive environments for LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ youth who experience family acceptance and attend schools with supportive staff, anti-bullying policies, and gay-straight alliance clubs are less likely to be victimized, skip school, or attempt suicide[8]. One study found less sexual risk taking among participants who experienced an HIV/AIDS curriculum inclusive of LGBTQ youth[9]. Programs can support LGBTQ youth by being inclusive of and responsive to their needs, helping LGBTQ youth connect to caring adults and family members, and creating safe and supportive environments that do not tolerate bullying or discrimination. Such practices benefit all youth, regardless of their sexual orientation or identity.

Understanding Complex Concepts and Terms

One way to support LGBTQ youth is to understand key concepts and terms, such as biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, and their differences.   Many people confuse these concepts. However, in order to support youth, it is important to develop an understanding of and familiarity with these concepts as well as with key terms. Sexual orientation and gender identity are two separate, independent characteristics of an individual.

- *Sexual orientation* is a romantic attraction to others.

- *Gender identity* is an internal sense of being male, female, or another gender independent of one's sex assigned at birth. Gender identity is not related to a person's sexual orientation.

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[7] Saewyc, Poon, Homma, & Skay, 2008
[8] Institute of Medicine, 2011; http://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth
[9] Institute of Medicine, 2011; Blake, Ledsky, Goodenow, Sawyer, & Hack, 2001

There are many key terms relevant to LGBTQ youth; the following list includes a few common terms, adapted from http://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/key-terms-and-concepts.

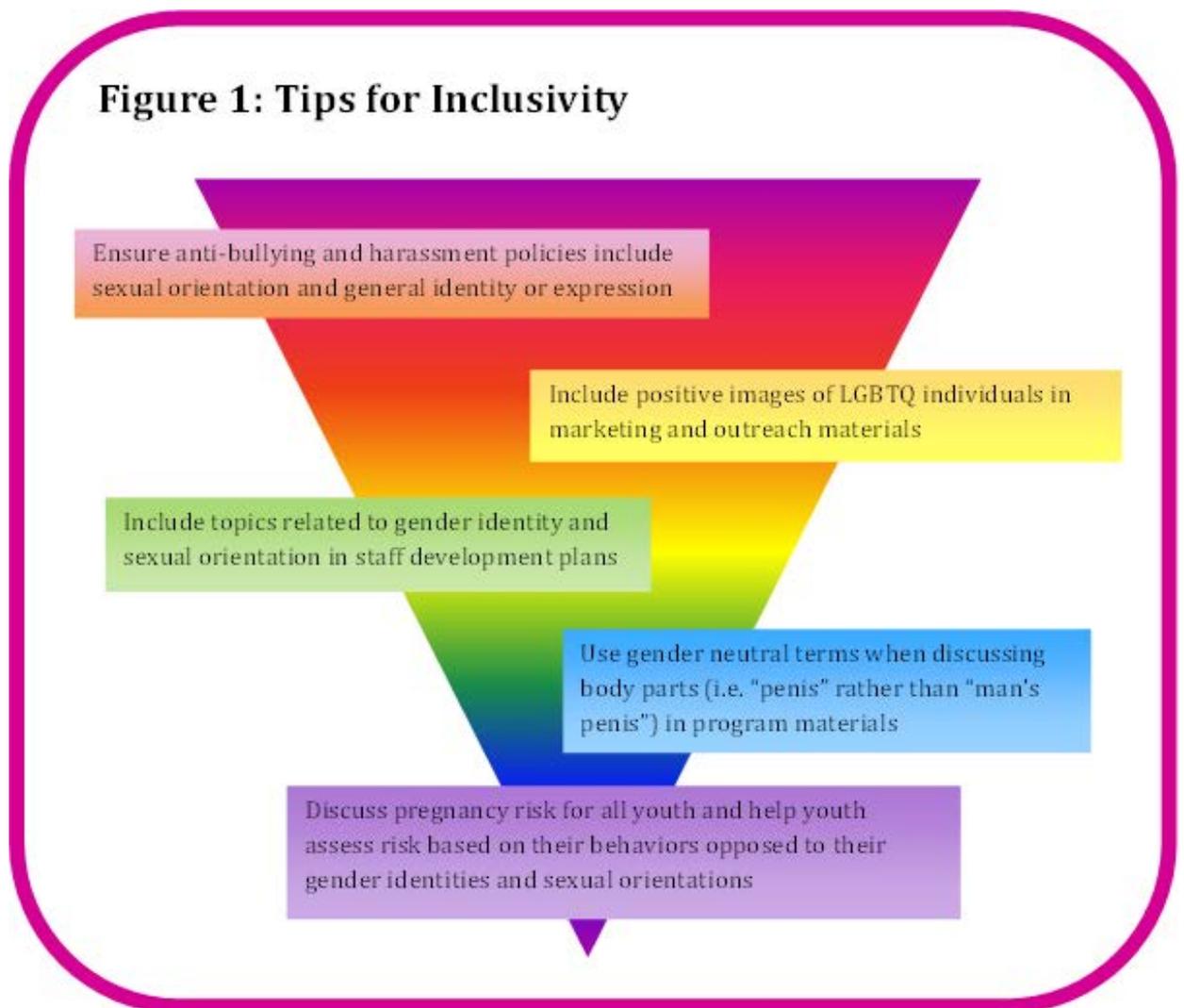|	
Biological Sex	• Genetic/body characteristics with which youth are born, typically labeled "male" or "female." Some are born with a reproductive/sexual anatomy that does not fit typical definitions of "male" or "female." This is sometimes referred to as "intersex."
Gender Identity	• Internal sense of being male, female, or another gender; not necessarily visible to others. "Cisgender" is when gender identity/expression does not differ from assigned sex at birth. "Transgender" describes people whose gender is different from assigned sex at birth; these individuals might want to use a pronoun other than he/she such as they/ze.
Gender Expression	• How people show their gender to others. Many think gender to be binary or only two types, "masculine" or "feminine." However, gender and gender expression is on a spectrum. It can also can change over time and is very fluid.
Transitioning	• When transgender youth express their gender to align with their internal sense of gender identity. Transitioning can include physical changes but may or may not include medical/surgical treatment. Transitioning is an important part of affirming identity for transgender youth.
Sexual orientation	• Romantic attraction to others. Could be attraction to opposite sex/gender (heterosexual), same (gay/lesbian), or both (bisexual) or to people independent of their sex/gender (pansexual or omnisexual). Can also mean low or non-existent attraction to any sex/gender (asexual).
Questioning	• A term used to describe people who are unsure about their sexual and/or gender identity.
Coming Out	• An on-going process in which youth identify, acknowledge, express, and share information about their sexual orientation or gender identity to oneself, friends/peers, family, teachers, colleagues, and community members. Coming out can be affirming, but it can also create stress.
Queer	• A term reclaimed by the LGBTQ community that is used by some individuals to identify. Not all LGBTQ individuals use this term and it should be used with caution.
Two-spirit	• Term used by some Native American communities. Refers to individuals who express gender or sexual orientation roles in Indigenous ways, using tribal concepts, and/or who identitfy as LGBT, questioning, or intersex in a Native context.

What is Inclusivity?

LGBTQ inclusivity means the degree to which programs are sensitive toward, responsive to, and do not exclude the diverse experiences and needs of LGBTQ youth and families. Inclusivity is best envisioned on a spectrum. On one end, at the most fundamental level is an inclusive program, one that has made efforts to include LGBTQ youth. On the other end is an affirming program, which validates, supports, respects, and values the identities of all youth.

LGBTQ inclusivity strategies for adolescent programs can help build tolerance, understanding, and acceptance to help all youth succeed. In many TPP programs, LGBTQ stories and experiences are not included and information is not tailored to their needs. A first step toward inclusivity is developing a fundamental understanding of LGBTQ concepts, key terms, and the differences between gender and sexual orientation. Inclusivity is particularly important because we do not always know which youth are LGBTQ; many youth choose not to publicly disclose their identity for personal or safety reasons. It is critical that we model respect and value for all youth to ensure safe and supportive environments. Figure 1 below provides some tips for ensuring your TPP program is inclusive and responsive to LGBTQ youth.

The Office of Adolescent Health has developed **A Guide for Assessing LGBTQ Inclusivity of Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs** to assist organizations in assessing TPP programs for LGBTQ inclusivity. Additional resources for ensuring your TPP program is inclusive and responsive to LGBTQ youth are available on the next page.

Figure 1: Tips for Inclusivity

Ensure anti-bullying and harassment policies include sexual orientation and general identity or expression

Include positive images of LGBTQ individuals in marketing and outreach materials

Include topics related to gender identity and sexual orientation in staff development plans

Use gender neutral terms when discussing body parts (i.e. "penis" rather than "man's penis") in program materials

Discuss pregnancy risk for all youth and help youth assess risk based on their behaviors opposed to their gender identities and sexual orientations

Resources

Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Resource Center, Engaging Select Populations: LGBTQ
Office of Adolescent Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
Website: http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah-initiatives/teen_pregnancy/training/engaging-select-populations.html#lgbtq

A Guide for Assessing LGBTQ Inclusivity of Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs
Office of Adolescent Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2015
Website: http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/assets/tpp-grantee-orientation/lgbt_inclusivity_guide.pdf

A Practical Guide for Creating Safe and Supportive Environments in Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs
Office of Adolescent Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2015
Website: http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/assets/ta_9_safe_and_supportive_environments.pdf

LGBTQ and Youth.gov
A federal collaboration of agencies designed to support youth.
Website: http://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth

Creating a Safe Space for LGBTQ Teens: An Online Training Module
National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY), the Family & Youth Services Bureau, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014
Website: http://ncfy-learn.jbsinternational.com/course/category.php?id=12

A Guide for Understanding, Supporting, and Affirming LGBTQI2-S Children, Youth, and Families
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014
Website: http://homeless.samhsa.gov/Resource/A-Guide-for-Understanding-Supporting-and-Affirming-LGBTQI-2--S-Children-Youth-and-Families-56476.aspx

CDC Webpage for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health: Youth
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Website: http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm

The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding
Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies
Website: http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/The-Health-of-Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-and-Transgender-People.aspx