

Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Supplemental Activities

SUPPLEMENT OVERVIEW

The *Best Practices in STI/HIV and Pregnancy Prevention* curriculum contains 10 lessons including essential knowledge and skill-based activities related to sexual health. This Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Supplement includes additional information that allows for a deeper understanding of the range of identities, orientations and expressions people experience, and the ways to affirm, respect and support all people regardless of their identity. These activities go beyond the foundational sexual health information provided in *Best Practices* and is important for allowing all youth to feel included and supported in their sexual health education and beyond.

These supplemental activities can be delivered individually, in the order that best meets your needs. Review the material first, to determine what is developmentally appropriate for your students, based on your curriculum needs and the culture of your classroom, school or community. Include the content where it fits best as you deliver *Best Practices* or any other sexual health curriculum. This Supplement addresses a basic understanding of the diverse range of LGBTQ+ identities, and explores attitudes and strategies for increasing inclusion of all people.

PURPOSE

Many young people are curious about, and receive many messages from peers and the media, about sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. There are many reasons why it is important to educate young people about these topics as you teach sexual health.

1. Data shows that youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) are at higher risk of being bullied and harassed and engaging in risky and self-harming behaviors. Having supportive, inclusive school and community environments with trusted adults has a significant impact in reducing these risk factors.
2. Addressing the diversity of all sexualities and genders allows all students, regardless of their gender and sexual identity, to feel represented and included in sex education and creates a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students.
3. Knowing LGBTQ+ affirming and supportive terms and definitions can help students understand and respect the various ways that people identify.
4. Inclusive education can reverse and provide positive alternatives to harmful messages, misinformation and stereotypes that young people receive about gender and identity.
5. Discussing strategies for supporting and affirming all sexual and gender identities can reduce harm and make everyone feel respected and safe.
6. Understanding the realities of LGBTQ+ people helps to validate all lives and reduce shame and stigma.
7. By including activities on gender identity and sexual orientation, we are normalizing these aspects of every person's life while acknowledging and celebrating the range of diversity that exists in the world.

USING THIS SUPPLEMENT WITHIN *BEST PRACTICES*

This supplement can be delivered in its entirety or integrated into the delivery of the other lessons in the *Best Practices in STI/HIV and Pregnancy Prevention* curriculum. Options for using the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Supplemental Activities include:

1. Delivering this information before or after completing the *Best Practices* curriculum, or other lessons in a sexual health unit.
2. Reviewing the *Before You Get Started* section can help facilitators identify specific strategies for creating an inclusive environment that benefits a sexual health unit as well as the delivery of other health education topics.
3. The activities *What's the Difference* and *Exploring Sexual Orientation and Identity* can be incorporated into the *Best Practices, Lesson 1 activity: Understanding Sexuality*.
4. The *Gender Boxes* activity may fit within the *Best Practices, Lesson 2 activity: Messages We Hear about Sex*.
5. Incorporating the activities *Communicating Respect* and *Growing Supportive Environments* may be an extension of *Best Practices, Lesson 8: Healthy Relationships*.
6. The *Supportive LGBTQ+ Resources* activity can be integrated with or follow the *Best Practices, Lesson 9 activity: Where Can I Go?*

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The activities in this Supplement cover the following learning objectives.

Participants will:

1. Identify myths and facts related to sexual orientation and gender identity.
2. Identify terms and definitions related to sexual orientation and gender identity.
3. Differentiate between sex assigned at birth, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.
4. Understand that each individual has a sexual identity, and differentiate between sexual orientation, behavior and identity.
5. Discuss gender expression and gender role stereotypes and their potential impact on individuals.
6. Identify harmful statements and other microaggressions and their effect on LGBTQ+ youth.
7. Demonstrate ways to communicate respectfully with and about people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.
8. Explain how support from peers, families, schools and communities can improve a person's health and well-being as it relates to gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.
9. Identify and access credible sources of information about sexual orientation and gender identity.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION & GENDER IDENTITY SUPPLEMENT OVERVIEW

Before You Get Started

Visit and review this introduction as you prepare to deliver these supplemental activities on sexual orientation and gender identity. You will find helpful information, data, resources and strategies for creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for LGBTQ+ students.

Activities	Student Learning Objectives	Minutes	Materials and Preparation Checklist
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify myths and facts related to sexual orientation and gender identity. 	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notecards or online polling option (such as Google Forms, pollevywhere.com, mentimeter.com, etc.) Computer and projector if using an online polling program.
What's the Difference?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify terms and definitions related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Differentiate between sex assigned at birth, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. 	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review videos and decide if you will use any of them in class. Review the terms and definitions related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Write each term on a separate piece of easel paper for students to use in the carousel or small group brainstorm.
Exploring Sexual Orientation and Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand that each individual has a sexual identity and differentiate between sexual orientation, behavior and identity. 	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review videos and slides and decide if you will use them in class. Cut out Exploring Sexual Orientation and Identity - Character Profiles for students to work on in small groups.
Gender Boxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss gender expression and gender role stereotypes and their potential impact on individuals. 	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Markers and easel paper or whiteboard.
Communicating Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify harmful statements and other microaggressions and their effect on LGBTQ+ people. Demonstrate ways to communicate respectfully with and about people of all gender identities and sexual orientations. 	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preview and choose a video to share on microaggressions. Prepare a computer and projector to screen the video. Copy the Microaggressions Handout, one for each student. Copy and cut out the Communicating Respect Statements, one statement for each small group.
Growing Supportive Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain how support from peers, families, schools and communities can improve a person's health and well-being as it relates to gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. 	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a computer and projector to screen the Growing Supportive Environments Slides and review the Facilitator Guide. Copy the Growing Supportive Environments Scenario Cards, one scenario card for each small group.
Supportive LGBTQ+ Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and access credible sources of information that support LGBTQ+ people. 	45*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copy the Supportive LGBTQ+ Resources Worksheet, one for each student.

*Students may need additional time to complete this activity.

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

Students may have values and beliefs around sexual and gender diversity based on their experiences, culture or religious beliefs. It's important to take the time to create a safe learning environment before beginning these supplemental activities. This section provides resources, tips and tools to create a safe space for everyone.

These resources can be helpful for educators in creating a safe learning environment.

- *Maine Website of LGBTQ+ and Gender Expansive Resources.* The Maine Department of Education's website includes a comprehensive list of data and resources devoted to improving school climate and support of LGBTQ+ students in Maine.
<https://www.maine.gov/doe/lgbtq>
- *The Safe Space Kit: Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students.* This kit provides an overview of what it means to be an ally, understanding your own personal beliefs, LGBTQ+ language, ways to support LGBTQ+ students and how to respond to anti-LGBTQ+ language and behavior.
<https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/GLSEN%20Safe%20Space%20Kit.pdf>
- *Creating a Safe Learning Environment.* This tip sheet includes ways to set group agreements and considerations for LGBTQ+ inclusivity, trauma informed practices and how to inform students about your disclosure policy. Click on Tip Sheets for Educators.
<https://mainefamilyplanning.org/for-educators/teaching-materials/>
- *Gender, Sexuality & Inclusive Sex Education Tip Sheet.* This tip sheet reviews terminology, teaching tips, avoiding assumptions, using inclusive language, creating a respectful space and common educator questions.
<https://www.healthyteennetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/Gender-Sexuality-Inclusive-Sex-Ed.pdf>

FACILITATOR NOTE

Throughout this supplement we will be using the acronym LGBTQ+ which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and "+" which represents the various identities of sexual and gender minorities not included in the acronym. There are many versions of the acronym that you may see or hear. For example, some people add an I for Intersex, A for Asexual and Aromantic, 2S for Two-Spirit or P for Pansexual.

Throughout this document, we use LGBT or LGBTQ when referring to specific sources, such as the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) or GLSEN data, since those are the acronyms that those organizations use in their surveys, resources and documents.

Creating a Safe Space for LGBTQ+ Youth

As educators, we can influence the climate in our schools and make sure our classrooms are places where all students feel welcome. What and how we teach can send important messages to our students about whether or not they are seen and valued. These steps can make a positive impact on students' mental health, their safety, their academic success and their overall quality of life. It just takes one person to start tipping the scales, to move a school culture towards inclusion.

Here are tips and tools to assist you in creating a safe space for LGBTQ+ people.

1. Use Inclusive Language.

This means adopting gender neutral language in your classroom and avoiding common gendered phrases such as *you guys*, *ladies and gentlemen*, or *boyfriend* and *girlfriend*. Instead, use language such as *you all*, *partner* or *significant other*. Also, it is important to remember that sex assigned at birth and gender identity are separate. Not all women have a vulva and not all men have a penis. Use gender neutral terms when talking about anatomy, such as *person with a penis* or *person with a vulva*. You may trip over unfamiliar terms, but that's okay! You will reach LGBTQ+ students with your efforts and create a safer classroom just by showing students that you're trying.

2. Introduce and Use Students' Correct Pronouns.

One of the first steps in creating a safe learning environment for all students is sharing your pronouns and inviting students to share their pronouns if they would like to. This will help you refer to each student in a way that makes them feel comfortable and respected and will set a clear example in your classroom of using respectful language, practicing empathy and employing effective communication skills. Some examples of common pronouns are *he/him/his*, *she/her/hers*, *she/they*, *he/they*, or *they/them/theirs*. Avoid making assumptions about a student's identity or pronouns. If in doubt, ask a student to clarify their pronouns and respect what they say. Even if you do not fully understand their identity, you can be respectful by mirroring the language they are using. Self-identification is an important way to empower and validate students, making your classroom a safe and accepting place to learn.

Please note that students' pronouns may change, or they may be unsure about which pronouns to use in front of the class. Let students know that it's okay to pass when being asked to share pronouns. You may want to show one of these videos to reinforce the importance of using someone's correct pronouns, from the viewpoint of transgender and non-binary people.

- *Pronouns - One Word* (2015, 3:36 min)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nn1TC7VEpf4>
- *Why Gender Pronouns Matter* (2017, 4:20 min)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iKHjI5xAaA>
- *Sharing Your Pronouns* (2017, 3:06 min)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fb_We13_QTA

3. Create or Revisit Group Agreements.

If your classroom has an existing list of group agreements, it may be helpful to revisit them to ensure that they outline the universal value of respecting one another's opinions and life experiences. Even when there are different feelings or opinions on this topic, set a foundation for using respectful language, zero tolerance for harassment and bullying and respecting students' identities. If you don't already have group agreements for your class, now would be a perfect time to create them!

4. Disrupt Harmful Language and Harassment in Your Classroom.

According to national data from the GLSEN National School Climate Survey (2019), an overwhelming majority of students reported hearing negative language around gender and sexual orientation in school (such as *no homo*, *faggot*, *dyke*, *that's so gay*, *don't be a pussy*, etc.) Over half of LGBTQ students in the survey reported also hearing **teachers or staff** use negative language and comments. This language has significant effects on LGBTQ youth, with large numbers of the surveyed youth reporting that they feel unsafe at school or miss school because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

Students are listening and need your help:

- Only 13.7% of LGBTQ students reported that school staff intervened most of the time or always when overhearing homophobic remarks at school.
- Of the 86.3% of LGBTQ students who experienced harassment or assault based on personal characteristics, over half did not report the incident to school staff in fear that the situation would worsen if reported or no effective action or intervention would be taken.
- 60.5% of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response or told the student to ignore it.

What can you do? If you see bullying, intervene. Responding to homophobia and transphobia sends the message that such behavior is unacceptable in your classroom; while letting it slide could send a message of acceptance or approval. Bullying and homophobic or transphobic behavior can often come in the form of language or teasing that may not seem overtly harmful, but if unaddressed, can promote harmful stereotypes. Educator intervention and support can make a difference.

In the GLSEN survey, nearly all LGBTQ students could identify at least one staff member supportive of LGBTQ students at their school. *That could be you!* The greater number of supportive staff members LGBTQ students identified, the more likely they reported going to school, feeling safe and comfortable at school, planning on pursuing post-secondary education and feeling a sense of belonging to their school community.

For more statistics and information on school climate check out the GLSEN report (which generally collects new data every two years).

<https://www.glsen.org/research/>

Learn more from the resources below about **how to respond to harmful language and harassment**.

- http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/guide_educator_interveneharass2005NAT.pdf
- <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/GLSEN%20Safe%20Space%20Kit.pdf>
(Pages 16 and 17)

If you or your school/organization would like training on creating a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth, email education@mainefamilyplanning.org or contact one of the following Maine-based organizations that can provide LGBTQ+ training and resources for your school or community:

<https://www.equalitymaine.org/trainings-consultations>

<https://outmaine.org/programs/professional-development/>

<https://www.mainetrans.net/trainings>

FACILITATOR NOTE

In addition to the ways that people may identify, there are other terms and definitions that are used to describe the experiences of LGBTQ+ people. To be inclusive and respectful, it helps to have a common understanding of additional terms you may hear.

As language around LGBTQ+ identities grows and evolves, familiarize yourself with terms and definitions ahead of time and consider sharing additional terms with your students and colleagues.

- The following handout, *Terms You May Hear*, can be:
 - discussed with students,
 - shared as a handout for each student,
 - cut into matching cards for small groups to identify, match and discuss, or
 - copied into a slide presentation.
- **Up-to-date terms and definitions** can be found on the PFLAG website:
<https://pflag.org/glossary>
- **Review and avoid using terms that may be offensive** by visiting the GLAAD website:
<https://www.glaad.org/reference/offensive>



HANDOUT - TERMS YOU MAY HEAR

TERM	DEFINITION
Ally	Someone who is supportive of LGBTQ+ individuals and the community. Allies include heterosexual and cisgender people who advocate for equality <i>in partnership</i> with LGBTQ+ people. Allies are also LGBTQ+ people who advocate for others in the community.
Cis- or Hetero-Normative	The assumption that everyone is cisgender or heterosexual and that these identities are <i>normal</i> while all other identities are <i>different</i> or <i>abnormal</i> .
Coming Out	The process of identifying and accepting one's sexual orientation or gender identity and sharing this with others. Coming out is an individual, and sometimes, lifelong process. It's up to each person to decide, if, when and to whom to come out or share their identity.
Deadnaming	When an individual, intentionally or not, refers to the name that a transgender or gender non-binary person used at a different time in their life. Other terms for this include birth name, given name or old name.
Gender-Affirming	Actions that individuals take, or how they are treated by others, that affirm their true identity. Examples include the way someone expresses themselves to others, treatments or procedures, such as hormone therapies or gender- affirming surgeries and using someone's correct name and pronouns.
Gender Dysphoria	A feeling of discomfort or distress that can occur when a person's assigned sex at birth, or sex-related physical traits, do not align with their gender identity. It can also be experienced when someone is addressed with the wrong name or pronouns by others.
Misgendering	Referring to someone using a pronoun or address (Mr., Sir, Miss, Ma'am) which does not correctly reflect their gender. Regardless of intent, misgendering has a harmful impact on the person who is misgendered.
Outing	Sharing another person's sexual orientation or gender identity, on purpose or accidentally, without their consent. Outing is disrespectful and presents a danger for many LGBTQ+ individuals.
Transitioning	A general term for the process someone goes through to affirm one's gender identity. This process is individual to each person and may, but does not always, include changing names or pronouns, taking hormones, having surgeries, changing identification documents, etc.



INTRODUCTION



Say,

An important part of sexual health is how people identify and express their gender and sexual orientation. In order to create a common understanding and respect for people's diverse identities and create a safe space for everyone to learn and grow, it's important to understand and discuss the range of gender and sexual identities. Many people have questions and interest around this topic. There is also a lot of misinformation and harmful stereotypes that exist and can create unsafe spaces. Let's explore some of the myths and facts around gender identity, expression and sexual orientation.

Instructions

- Choose one of the following options for having students respond to these myth and fact statements. Add other myth and fact statements you think should be addressed in this activity.

Below are options for delivering the myth and fact activity.

- Provide students with notecards and have them write **Myth** on one side and **Fact** on the other side. Students can hold up the respective side of their card to give their responses to each myth and fact statement.
- Read aloud each statement and ask students to move to one side of the room or the other based on their response of **Myth** or **Fact**.
- Use an online polling option (such as Google Forms, polleverywhere.com or mentimeter.com, etc.) to share the statements and have students respond anonymously on their devices, sharing and discussing the results with the large group.
- After sharing the responses, identify the information students already know and the information you'll be covering about gender identity and sexual orientation.

Say,

I'm going to read some Myth and Fact statements about gender identity and sexual orientation. It is okay if you don't know the answers since we're all here to learn together.

1. **It's easy to tell someone's sexual orientation or gender identity by the way they look or act.**

MYTH: While there are many stereotypes, someone's gender or sexual orientation cannot be determined by how a person looks or acts.

2. **After the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision granting the right for all people to marry, LGBTQ+ people now have the same rights as heterosexual people.**

MYTH: There are many ways that people are discriminated against because of their gender identity and sexual orientation and laws and practices can differ from one state to another. Even with marriage equality, many LGBTQ+ people continue to experience discrimination on many fronts, including in school, the workplace and in health care settings.

3. It is common for many teens to question their gender identity and sexual orientation from an early age.

FACT: While some people may feel very certain about their gender identity or sexual orientation at an early age, it is common for many people to question or be unsure about their sexual orientation, which may become clearer as they get older.

4. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not something that a person chooses for themselves.

FACT: Although the science is not clear on how sexual orientation and gender identity is determined, most people agree that it is not a preference, lifestyle or something that they choose for themselves. It's just part of who they are.

DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

Debrief the activity by asking the following questions.

1. What are other common myths you have heard around the identities or experiences of LGBTQ+ people?

Possible answers may vary.

2. What are some ways we can address myths and stereotypes and get factual information about the experiences of LGBTQ+ people?

Possible answers:

- *Look up the information on line.*
- *Read about or watch shows that portray the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people.*
- *Talk to people who are LGBTQ+.*

SUMMARIZE

In summarizing this introduction, include these key points.

- When discussing health topics, we want to be inclusive and respectful of all people and avoid making assumptions about people's experiences, behaviors and identities.
- We can start by recognizing and challenging myths and stereotypes and remember that there is a range of diversity in how people identify themselves.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



Say,

It's important that we have a common understanding of the difference between gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation and terms people may use to identify themselves. In this activity, we will explore some of the vocabulary used to describe the diverse range of gender identities, expressions and sexual orientations. For many of you, these terms may be familiar and for others they may be new.

There are several ways to meet the objective of this activity. You may choose to use one or any combination of the options below, depending on the time and resources available.

Option 1: Videos

Use a combination of the amaze.org video recommendations below, or other videos you prefer.

- *Range of Gender Identities* (2019, 2:55 min)
This video explains the ways gender identity is defined, differentiating between sex assigned at birth, gender identity and how it is different from sexual orientation.
<https://amaze.org/video/gender-identity-range-gender-identities/>
- *Gender Identity: Being Female, Male, Transgender or Genderfluid* (2016, 2:10 min)
This video explains gender expression and gender identity and distinguishes these terms from sexual orientation.
<https://amaze.org/video/female-male-transgender-fluid/>
- *Sex Assigned at Birth and Gender Identity: What is the Difference?* (2019, 3:45 min)
This video explains how sex assigned at birth depends on how others perceive a person's gender vs. one's internal sense of their own gender identity. It includes more information on intersex, transgender, cisgender and gender fluidity.
<https://amaze.org/video/gender-identity-sex-at-birth/>
- *What is Sexual Orientation? LGBTQ+* (2018, 1:59 min)
This video focuses on the different ways people identify and terms they use for their sexual orientation.
<https://amaze.org/video/what-is-sexual-orientation/>

Option 2: Review Terms and Definitions

Review the gender identity and sexual orientation terms and definitions from **Best Practices Lesson 1: Talking about Sexual Health, Understanding Sexuality**. This can be done as a full class by dividing up the term and definition cards among students and having them match the terms to the definitions. Alternatively, you can make sets of the cards for small groups of students to match. When finished, allow time for students to share any additional terms they know or have heard of and to ask questions.

Option 3: Carousel or Small Group Brainstorm

Use a carousel activity to have students brainstorm, in small groups, terms they have heard for each category listed in the table below.

- Use the following terms and their definitions from the table below, placing one term/definition per piece of easel paper. Post the four pieces of paper around the room.
- Have small groups of students start at an easel paper and spend a few minutes brainstorming examples of identities that fit under that term and definition.
- After a few minutes, have the small groups move to the next easel paper, *reviewing* what the previous group has written and adding to the list.
- Have the small groups continue to each piece of easel paper until they are back to where they started.

The carousel activity can also be done in small groups, giving each group a piece of easel paper with a single term/definition. Ask each small group to brainstorm terms that fit under that category that they will then report out to the rest of the class, asking the other students to add to the list or ask questions as you go over each term.

You can also do a virtual option of this brainstorm activity using a virtual whiteboard, having students post the words they know related to each term/definition.

TERM	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE ANSWERS
Sexual Orientation	Who a person is emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to.	heterosexual/straight; homosexual/gay or lesbian; bisexual (bi); asexual (ace); pansexual; demi-sexual; gray-sexual; queer
Gender Identity	A person’s internal sense of their gender (which may or may not relate to the sex a person was assigned at birth) and the roles, behaviors and expectations that go along with that.	man/boy, woman/girl, cisgender, transgender, agender, non-binary gender fluid, genderqueer, gender non-conforming; demigirl, demiboy
Sex Assigned at Birth	The label (male or female) most babies are given when they are born.	male, female, intersex, assigned male at birth (amab); assigned female at birth (afab)
Gender Expression	The way a person expresses their gender to the world (what they wear, how they look, how they talk, their interests and activities, etc.)	feminine, masculine, butch, femme, androgynous, hyper-masculine, hyper-feminine; bear/otter/twink; tomboy

- Regardless of the option you use to define and differentiate between the LGBTQ+ terms, after the activity, ask students if there were some terms that were more familiar to them than others, and if they still have questions about any of the terms or definitions.
- After the activity, you can also provide a handout of the terms/definitions list from the *Best Practices Lesson 1C: Understanding Sexuality* activity, or another list of terms you have found from an up-to-date online source, such as <https://pflag.org/glossary>.

DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

Debrief the activity by asking the following questions.

1. Were these different categories and terms easy to identify? Why or why not?

Answers will vary depending on the knowledge base of your students.

2. Were there some terms that you'd never heard before?

Answers will vary depending on the knowledge base of your students.

3. Why do you think there are so many different ways that people might identify?

Possible answers:

- *Because all people are different.*
- *There are many ways to express oneself.*
- *People and communities are finding new terms to describe themselves and their true identities.*
- *Different cultures may have specific terms for understanding gender and sexuality.*
- *People may change their identities or the terms they use for themselves over time.*

SUMMARIZE

Summarize the activity by including these key points.

- Language is evolving and new terms and definitions for sexual and gender identities keep growing and changing.
- While some people may not have thought much about these terms, others feel very strongly about the words they use to describe themselves.
- While we're all learning together, let's agree to listen and try to understand each other and the different ways people identify.



EXPLORING SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND IDENTITY



Say,

We each have our own unique set of identities that are important to us and make our school/community diverse and something to celebrate. What are some ways that people identify who they are?

Possible answers:

- *Race or ethnicity, nationality, religion or spirituality, gender, sexual orientation, family membership, etc.*
- *They may also identify as part of a group at school – for example, member of a sports team, club, academic group, student council member, musician, member of the theater, etc.*

Say,

In this activity we will explore the difference between sexual orientation, behavior and identity. When you think of the word sexual orientation, how would you define it*?

*If you already explored terms and definitions and defined sexual orientation in class, refer to the definition and sexual orientation terms here.

Possible answers:

- *Who you like or who you're attracted to.*
- *Who you are in a relationship with (or imagine to be with).*
- *Who you have sex with (or fantasize being with).*

Watch for terms like sexual preference or lifestyle, since these terms imply that sexual orientation is something a person can choose, or change at will. Generally people feel that sexual orientation is not something they choose, but rather a natural part of who they are. A person's sexual identity is something they can define for themselves and may change over time.

Say,

It's important to understand the difference between sexual orientation, behaviors and identity. We're going to look at some definitions for each of these terms.

Share or write the following terms and definitions on the board.

TERM	DEFINITION
Sexual Orientation	Who a person is emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to. This may include more than one gender. People do not choose who they feel attracted to, though feelings of attraction may evolve over time.
Sexual Behavior	What a person does sexually to express or enact their sexuality. This can include sexual acts such as kissing, touching, oral sex, anal sex, vaginal sex, etc. The types of sexual behaviors someone engages in, alone or with other people, doesn't define their sexual orientation.
Sexual Identity	How a person self-identifies and the words they decide to use to express their identity to others. Understanding one's sexual identity is a process that often evolves over time and is not determined by others. Only the individual can decide what identity is right for them.

Ask,

Does someone need to have engaged in sexual behavior to know their sexual orientation or identity?

Possible answers:

- *Some people know without having any sexual experiences.*
- *For some people, sexual experiences can help inform how they identify.*
- *Sexual behaviors (or dreams or fantasies) may not always align with how someone identifies.*
- *Someone's sense of their sexual identity may be something they understand and define for themselves over time.*

Say,

To give you some concrete examples of the difference between orientation, behavior and identity, let's look at and discuss some personal profiles.

- These character profiles can be copied onto slides and reviewed together as a group, or you can cut out each profile, and in small groups students can read and discuss, then share with the large group.
- There is also a Google slide deck available at <https://bit.ly/3hjkPUR>
- The slide deck includes the individual character profiles, including a slide where the profile states their identity with a brief explanation.



EXPLORING SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND IDENTITY - CHARACTER PROFILES

Profile 1: JESS

- Jess is a girl who uses she/her pronouns.
- She has been attracted to mostly boys since middle school.
- She had a boyfriend for a few months, and they made out (kissing, etc.) but never had sex.
- She has recently been attracted to another girl in her school, and isn't sure what those feelings mean yet.

Based on this profile, how might Jess identify?

Profile 2: Amir

- Amir is a boy and uses he/him pronouns.
- He has only been in relationships with girls, mostly since it went along with what others were doing in school. He had sex in one of these relationships.
- He's had fantasies of kissing boys, but isn't sure he'd ever want to do that in real life.
- His culture is not very open to same-gender relationships, so he's hoping when he goes to college, he can have more freedom to explore relationships with guys.

Based on this profile, how might Amir identify?

Profile 3: Trevor

- Trevor is non-binary and uses they/them pronouns.
- They are attracted to people based on their looks and personality, not their gender.
- Trevor has had several close relationships, but nothing sexual. In fact, they aren't sure they want to be sexual with someone at all.

Based on this profile, how might Trevor identify?

Profile 4: Kira

- Kira is a girl who uses she/her and they/them pronouns.
- Kira is attracted to all genders and identities.
- They haven't really wanted to be in a committed relationship yet, but they've done some 'sexual exploration' with both girls and boys.

Based on this profile, how might Kira identify?

Profile 1: JESS

Now let's hear from Jess. How does Jess identify?

Hi! I'm Jess! I am not exactly sure how I identify right now.

I have always thought of myself as straight, but a lot of my friends are bisexual, and recently I have felt some pressure to define my sexuality in a different way.

Right now, I'm not ready to put a label on my feelings.

Profile 2: Amir

Now let's hear from Amir. How does Amir identify?

Hi! I'm Amir, and I'm bisexual.

It's taken me time to figure it out, because my family is not very open to discussing sexuality. In college I can be more open about my identity and maybe have different kinds of relationships, which will allow me to explore my feelings more.

So, who knows? My identity may or may not change as I learn more about myself.

Profile 3: Trevor

Now let's hear from Trevor. How does Trevor identify?

Hi! I'm Trevor. I am not sure what my sexual orientation is.

I've heard about being asexual but I'm not sure if that defines how I feel. When I came out as non-binary, a lot of people made assumptions about who I should or shouldn't be dating, but I still need to figure out what I want for myself.

Profile 4: Kira

Now let's hear from Kira. How does Kira identify?

Hi, I'm Kira. I identify as pansexual.

As a person with a disability, I get asked a lot of strange questions about my disability and sexual activity, and a lot of people assume I don't have sexual thoughts and feelings, or they have trouble seeing me that way. But I have experiences and feelings just like everyone else, and I know I'm attracted to all genders!

DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

Debrief the activity by asking the following questions:

1. From the profiles, what did you learn about sexual orientation, behaviors and identity?

Possible answers:

- *It can be complicated.*
- *You can't assume someone's identity based on their behaviors.*
- *Past sexual experiences and attractions do not always indicate someone's current (or future) sexual identity.*
- *People can take time to figure it out and explore before deciding to label themselves, or not.*
- *Just because someone feels attraction, doesn't mean they want to act on it.*
- *Sexual experiences, thoughts or fantasies and sexual identity do not always align.*

2. What assumptions and expectations are made about someone's sexual behaviors based on their sexual orientation or sexual identity?

Possible answers:

- *Straight people only have vaginal sex.*
- *Only gay men have anal sex.*
- *Bisexual people always want to switch up their sexual experiences with people of different genders.*
- *Asexual people aren't interested in sex at all, or just need to have sex to realize what sexual orientation they 'really' are.*

3. What are the advantages of people being able to self-identify their sexual orientation?

Possible answers:

- *It can take time to figure out your identity, and it may change over time.*
- *When you are 'labeled' by others, it can be difficult to change or explore what's best for you.*
- *Finding a label that fits you can feel empowering and affirming when you understand who you are.*

SUMMARIZE

Summarize the activity by including these key points.

- **We should not make assumptions about someone's sexual orientation or identity, based on who they are attracted to, the relationships they are in or their sexual behaviors.**
- **Regardless of your sexual orientation, it's important to engage in sexual behaviors that are consensual and feel good for both partners. There is no "correct" sexual behavior to engage in based on your sexual orientation or identity.** (For example, straight people don't always have to have vaginal sex, gay men don't always have to have anal sex, lesbians don't have to always have oral sex and bisexuals don't always have to have sex with people of different genders.)
- **While some people are sure of their identity, others are less sure and continue to explore who they are. This is true of many of the identities someone has, including their sexual identity.**
- **Figuring out your sexual identity can take time, and may change over time. Only you can know the identity that feels right to you.**



GENDER BOXES



Say,

When someone is pregnant many people want to know, “is it a boy or a girl?” Even before we are born many people are curious which box to put us in, the boy box or the girl box. This decision is usually made by a medical provider, based on a baby’s genitals. Based on their anatomy, they are assigned a sex – male or female – and then adults start to make decisions based on this gender box. For example, adults decide a child’s name or the type of clothes and toys to buy. There may also be expectations for how the child should behave and what they should do in their life based on their ‘boy or girl’ gender box.

Instructions

- Write BOY and GIRL on the board or on chart paper in large letters with space underneath and around to write the messages and expectations the students brainstorm for boys and girls. Possible answers are included below.
- After you finish the brainstorm, draw a box around the “BOY” messages and another box around the “GIRL” messages.

Brainstorm

Say,

Gender expression is the way we communicate our gender through our hair, clothes, accessories and the way we walk, talk or act.

1. How are boys expected to express their gender?

Possible answers:

- *Wearing clothes that are blue or muted colors like brown/grey, etc.*
- *Wearing their hair short.*
- *Having (or aspire to have) big muscles.*
- *Wearing pants, athletic clothes, t-shirts or button down, colored shirts or flannel.*
- *Walking with a swagger, sitting with legs apart, talking loud and with confidence.*

2. How are girls expected to express their gender?

Possible answers:

- *Wearing light or bright colored, floral printed clothes, etc.*
- *Keeping their hair long, using hair ties, bows or styled (straightened, curled, etc.)*
- *Wearing makeup and jewelry.*
- *Shaving legs, arm pits and other hair on their body, having brows done, etc.*
- *Wearing styles that accentuate their breasts/butt.*
- *Wearing dresses, skirts, shorts or pants.*
- *Sitting with legs crossed.*
- *Talking with a lot of expression or using hand gestures.*

Say,

Gender roles are the behaviors and activities that people are expected to participate in based on their assigned sex.

1. What are some expected gender roles for boys?

Possible answers:

- *Play with toys marketed to boys, like trucks, cars, superheroes, etc.*
- *Play and be good at sports and video games.*
- *Told things like “don’t cry,” “toughen up,” “be a man.”*
- *Make money, be confident and be strong.*
- *Do chores like yard work, take out the trash, fix things rather than chores like cooking or cleaning.*

2. What are some expected gender roles for girls?

Possible answers:

- *Play with toys marketed for girls, like princesses, dolls, makeup, arts/crafts.*
- *Told to “be sweet,” “be kind,” “be polite,” “smile.”*
- *Make other people comfortable and cared for.*
- *Share emotions.*
- *Do kitchen and household chores, like cooking and caring for children.*

Say,

Everything that is put in the gender box helps inform a person’s gender identity, their sense of being a boy or a girl. People who don’t identify with the box they are given may identify as gender non-conforming or transgender. People who identify with the box they are given are considered cisgender. Regardless of your gender identity, you can choose for yourself how to express your gender and the roles you want to take on.

DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

Debrief the activity with some or all of following questions.

1. How can you tell if something in your gender box doesn’t fit you?

Possible answers:

- *You may feel like you need to make yourself smaller in some way.*
- *It may feel claustrophobic or confining.*
- *It makes you uncomfortable and unable to share your authentic self.*
- *You may not like who you’re pretending to be or act like someone you aren’t.*

2. How can you tell if something in your gender box is right for you?

Possible answers:

- *It feels comfortable/easy*
- *It makes you happy or brings you joy.*
- *You like how you feel when you do those things that fit for you.*
- *It makes you feel free to be your authentic self.*

3. Have you ever seen someone step out of their gender box in some way? How were they treated?

Possible answers:

- *People notice because it is not what is expected based on stereotypes and assumptions.*
- *People may be treated as different or abnormal.*
- *Other people may comment about it, or might get comments or be teased or harassed.*
- *Sometimes comments are seemingly positive, such as, “It is so great that you are such a sensitive guy.” or “I am so glad to have a girl on the math team.”*
- *Other times the comments are more negative, such as, “Wow dude, don’t be so sensitive.” or “She should stop being so bossy.”*

4. Why might some people want to either keep or get rid of the boxes?

Possible answers:

- *Keeping the boxes might feel safe or be an easy way to categorize people based on stereotypes.*
- *They might want to get rid of the boxes because they create confining expectations based on stereotypes.*
- *The boxes might seem too restrictive or outdated.*
- *They may be comfortable with the boxes but want to add more options to make space for intersex, transgender, nonbinary and other people’s experiences.*
- *Expanding the boxes may fit more expressions and experiences and they don’t want to fit people into just two gender boxes.*

SUMMARIZE

Summarize the activity by making the following points.

- **People often feel pressure and expectations throughout their life based on their gender. Sometimes people may be comfortable with those expectations, sometimes they make people feel uncomfortable.**
- **As we grow, we learn and decide what we want to keep in our gender boxes, what we want to get rid of and what we want to add or change.**
- **It is important for everyone to be able to express their gender in a way that makes them feel happy and for us to respect each other’s gender expression.**



COMMUNICATING RESPECT



Say,

In our school and communities we want everyone to feel supported and included. When people aren't familiar with a certain identity, they may say things that are insensitive or hurtful, intentionally or unintentionally. All students here have a right to feel safe. Today we are going to talk about ways we can support others who may be different from us, and to respect the diversity that exists within our school and community. We will also talk about what can happen when identities are not respected or affirmed.

Instructions

- Start with a brainstorm. Invite students to share statements they've heard that were insensitive or hurtful related to their gender or sexual orientation. You can give an example such as "Don't be so sensitive." "Man up!" or "You should really shave your legs."
- You can gather these statements either through a shout out, having students come up and write the statements on the board or through an online polling platform.
- After the brainstorm, ask a few debrief questions, such as:

1. Even if these statements weren't meant to be hurtful, how could they impact the way someone might feel?

Possible answers:

- *It may still feel uncomfortable or upsetting to hear.*
- *The person may feel unsure whether to say something or not.*
- *The person may bring it up, then feel hurt, tired or dismissed if the other person responds defensively and says they "didn't mean it" or "you're being too sensitive."*

2. What is the best way to respond when someone says something hurtful or insensitive?

Possible answers:

- *Ask them what they meant by what they said.*
- *Tell them that what they said is hurtful and explain why.*
- *Rephrase what they said in a way so they can see how it could be hurtful, "so what you are saying is..."*

- Preview and choose a video to share on Microaggressions:
 - *Microaggressions (2018, 1:56 min)*
This short video compares microaggressions to mosquito bites and shows how even small mosquito bites can add up and cause significant pain to people who are regularly bit.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ9I7y4UuxY>
 - *On Your Sex and Gender (2014, 2:11 min)*
This video made by Connecticut College students displays statements said to students on whiteboards, many sharing microaggressions they experienced for being LGBTQ+ or gender-nonconforming.
<https://www.glaad.org/blog/you-dont-look-queer-students-challenge-stereotypes-viral-campaign-photos-video>

- Share the **Microaggressions Handout**, one for each student. Tell students they can use the strategies on the handout for responding to the Communicating Respect Statements given to them.
- Break the students into small groups and give each group a statement to discuss. You may decide to use some of the brainstormed statements from students, or use one of the **Communicating Respect Statements** given below. Have them answer the corresponding questions.
- Give the groups 5 minutes to discuss their statement and answer the questions. Then bring them back as a large group to discuss the activity using the debrief questions below.

DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

Debrief the activity by asking the following questions.

1. What can individuals or friends do to prevent microaggressions?

Possible answers:

- *Educate themselves.*
- *Say something to the person who said the microaggression like “that is not cool/funny” or “what do you mean by that?”*
- *Tell the person who was affected that you are there to support them.*

2. How can people educate themselves about people who are different from themselves?

Possible answers:

- *Read books, articles or watch videos with different people’s stories.*
- *Notice and observe the many ways to be gay/trans/black/disabled, etc.*
- *Think about how your words may impact someone before you speak.*

3. What do you think our school could do to prevent microaggressions?

Possible answers:

- *Provide education to students, teachers and staff through PSAs or during school events.*
- *Have information posters about microaggressions in classrooms.*
- *Have teachers model how to respond to microaggressions and respond when they happen.*

SUMMARIZE

In summarizing the activity, include these key points:

- We each have the power to communicate either respect or disrespect to others.
- It may not seem like individual comments made about or to LGBTQ+ people should be a big deal, but over time, these negative messages can cause people to feel ashamed, stigmatized, ignored, disrespected or devalued.
- If someone tells you that you have said or done something hurtful, it is important to hear their concerns, and not be defensive. Tell them you appreciate that they told you, learn why your actions were hurtful and find ways to be supportive and respectful of others.
- It's exhausting for people who experience microaggressions to always correct or educate people about the effects of their words. That's why it's important for all of us to educate ourselves about the best way to treat others, by reading about and talking to people who are different from us so we can learn how they think and feel.



MICROAGGRESSIONS HANDOUT

Microaggressions: *Everyday small insults, negative messages or stereotypical assumptions that can be unintentional or intentional, often hurting people and creating a harmful environment for folks who are from a minority group or who stray from the norm.*



When a microaggression happens, be an ally who C.A.R.E.S*.

- **Consider** how what you said was harmful.
- Be **Accountable** for your actions and willing to apologize.
- **Rethink** harmful assumptions or stereotypes.
- **Empathize** with those on the receiving end of microaggressions.
- **Support** by offering resources and asking how you can help.

**C.A.R.E.S. is designed by Aliyah Mansur for University of Toronto’s faculty of Medicine and is used here with permission.
<https://medicine.utoronto.ca/microaggressions-and-allyship>*

Strategies for Responding to Microaggressions

Ask a Question: Have the person explain what they mean, so you can both better understand why they believe that.

- *“Why do you think that?”*
- *“What do you mean by that?”*

Rephrase What They Said: Summarize what the person said so they can hear the stereotype or assumption.

- *“So it sounds like you think...”*
- *“It seems like you are saying that...”*

Provide a New Perspective: Show the person another way of thinking about the situation.

- *“We could look at this another way...”*
- *“Or we could say...”*

Share your Feelings, Use “I” Statements: Let the person know that their words can hurt or negatively affect you or others.

- *“I feel uncomfortable when you say...”*
- *“I feel hurt by that statement...”*

Return to the Statement later: Take time to think about what you want to say and tell them later.

- *“I want to talk about the other day when you said...”*
- *“Is it okay if we talk about what was said the other day...”*

“Why do you always dress so butch? Don’t you feel like wearing dresses sometimes?”

“It sounds like you think all girls need to want to wear dresses.”

“You’re gay, right? What do you think of that last season of Queer Eye?”

“Do you think all gay people watch the same shows?”

“You’re transgender? What kind of surgeries have you had so far?”

“I feel uncomfortable when you ask me about my personal medical history.”

“I know you changed your name to Dane, but you’ll always be Dori to me!”

“The other day, when you said I would always be Dori to you, it makes me feel like you don’t support who I am.”



COMMUNICATING RESPECT STATEMENTS



Instructions: Read the following microaggression statement and respond to the questions.

“Wow, you throw really well for a girl.”

1. What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?
2. How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?
3. How could you respond to this statement?
4. What would be a more supportive statement?



Instructions: Read the following microaggression statement and respond to the questions.

“Isn’t using they/them pronouns grammatically incorrect?”

1. What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?
2. How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?
3. How could you respond to this statement?
4. What would be a more supportive statement?



COMMUNICATING RESPECT STATEMENTS



Instructions: Read the following microaggression statement and respond to the questions.

“You are so feminine, you don’t look like a lesbian.”

1. What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?
2. How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?
3. How could you respond to this statement?
4. What would be a more supportive statement?



Instructions: Read the following microaggression statement and respond to the questions.

“I met a gay guy at camp, Rob, I should set you two up.”

1. What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?
2. How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?
3. How could you respond to this statement?
4. What would be a more supportive statement?



COMMUNICATING RESPECT STATEMENTS



Instructions: Read the following microaggression statement and respond to the questions..

“I think asexual people probably just haven’t had good sex yet.”

1. What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?
2. How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?
3. How could you respond to this statement?
4. What would be a more supportive statement?



Instructions: Read the following microaggression statement and respond to the questions..

“Pansexual, what is that? There are just so many words now.”

1. What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?
2. How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?
3. How could you respond to this statement?
4. What would be a more supportive statement?



COMMUNICATING RESPECT STATEMENTS



Instructions: Read the following microaggression statement and respond to the questions.

“ _____ ”

Write your own statement

1. What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?
2. How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?
3. How could you respond to this statement?
4. What would be a more supportive statement?



Instructions: Read the following microaggression statement and respond to the questions.

“ _____ ”

Write your own statement

1. What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?
2. How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?
3. How could you respond to this statement?
4. What would be a more supportive statement?

“Wow, you throw really well for a girl.”

What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?

Possible answers: that girls are not good at sports; that girls are not strong; that being good at sports makes a girl unusual or atypical.

How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?

Possible answers: It might make someone feel like they are weird or not acting like a ‘normal’ girl; it might make someone mad because people assume that girls aren’t good at sports.

How could you respond to this statement?

Possible answers: “What do you mean when you say ‘you throw really well for a girl’?; “You know girls can be good at sports too, that is kind of a sexist statement.”

What would be a more supportive statement?

Possible answers: “You throw really well!; “I wish I could throw as well as you, can you show me how you do it?; “Great throw!”

“Isn’t using they/them pronouns grammatically incorrect?”

What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?

Possible answers: that the person’s identity is invalid; that the person saying the statement is more concerned with grammar rules than understanding or respecting the person in front of them.

How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?

Possible answers: it might make the person feel invalidated, unseen, misunderstood, or a burden; it may feel frustrating or exhausting to explain singular ‘they’ as a pronoun.

How could you respond to this statement?

Possible answers: “Actually, singular ‘they’ is grammatically correct, here are some resources that explain that.”; “You don’t need to always understand something to respect it.”; “If you have a hard time using these pronouns just use the person’s name.”

What would be a more supportive statement?

Possible answers: “Thank you for telling me your pronouns.”; “These are new to me so I will practice using them on my own.”; “I will look up some more information since I am not familiar with these pronouns.”

“You are so feminine, you don’t look like a lesbian.”

What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?

Possible answers: that all lesbians are more masculine or butch; that there is only one right way to look like a lesbian.

How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?

Possible answers: it might make someone feel pressured to express themselves another way in order to be “visible” as a lesbian; it might make someone feel inadequate; it might make someone feel frustrated for being stereotyped.

How could you respond to this statement?

Possible answers: “Why do you think lesbians are not feminine?”; “That sounds like a stereotype that lesbians can’t be feminine.”

What would be a more supportive statement?

Possible answers: “You look radiant.”; “I love that (shirt/hairstyle/etc.)”; “Thanks for being out, it is great to be around people who are their authentic selves.”

“I met a gay guy at camp, Rob, I should set you two up.”

What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?

Possible answers: that any two gay people would be interested in dating each other; that the only compatibility that matters is that they are both gay; that maybe there are not very many dating options for gay people.

How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?

Possible answers: it might feel uncomfortable to have someone want to set you up with a seemingly random person; it might feel frustrating, like they only see you as a gay person.

How could you respond to this statement?

Possible answers: “Why do you think we would be compatible?”; “Just because two people are gay doesn’t mean they want to date each other.”

What would be a more supportive statement?

Possible answers: not setting them up unless the friend says he wants to be set up. Just sharing their experience at camp, for example, “I had a great time at camp and met a cool new friend, Rob.”

“I think asexual people probably just haven’t had good sex yet.”

What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?

Possible answers: that asexuality is not a valid identity; that asexuality is abnormal or about a lack of experience.

How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?

Possible answers: it might make someone feel inadequate or abnormal; it might make someone feel pressured to be in a relationship or to have sex.

How could you respond to this statement?

Possible answers: “Why do you think that?”; “Where did you learn that?”; “It sounds like you feel like you understand asexual people more than they understand themselves.” “Isn’t it possible that asexual people just aren’t interested in sex?”

What would be a more supportive statement?

Possible answers: “I don’t know very much about asexuality, I want to learn more about that identity.”; “Sometimes it is hard for me to understand things I don’t experience myself, I am glad to get to learn from others though.”

“Pansexual, what is that? There are just so many words now.”

What is the assumption or stereotype behind this statement?

Possible answers: that having a less common identity is burdensome or “too much” for other people to handle or understand; that it is the responsibility of people with an identity to educate others on that identity.

How might hearing this statement negatively affect someone?

Possible answers: it might feel tiresome to have to explain your identity to someone, especially someone who doesn’t sound supportive; it might feel invalidating.

How could you respond to this statement?

Possible answers: “Why do you think there are so many words now?”; “It sounds like you feel overwhelmed by having to learn new terminology, however it is so important to respect other people’s experiences and identities.”; “Isn’t the diversity of ways to experience sexuality liberating?!”

What would be a more supportive statement?

Possible answers: “I have never heard that term before, I will have to look that one up.”; “Thank you for sharing your identity with me.”; “I feel like I am always learning as language and culture continues to evolve.”



GROWING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS



FACILITATOR NOTE

The **Growing Supportive Environments** activity is designed to help build empathy and a common understanding that an individual's health is impacted by their environment, not just an individual's behaviors or choices. Below are resources for more information about how to be an ally and an advocate for the LGBTQ+ community.

- **The Safe Space Kit: Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students**
<https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/GLSEN%20Safe%20Space%20Kit.pdf>
- **Amplify Your Voice Resource Kit**
<https://www.glaad.org/resources/amplifyyourvoice/resourcekit>

Maine's LGBTQ+ students experience higher rates of bullying, violence and adverse childhood experiences. Due to the trauma of their hostile environments, they also experience worse health outcomes. The Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey collects data on adverse experiences and risk factors for LGBT students. Go to <https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/> for the most up-to-date data and fact sheets.

Say,

While our health is affected by our individual behaviors and choices, it is also influenced by our environment and interactions with other people.

Instructions

- Use this short slide deck to brainstorm how environments can affect LGBTQ+ students and to share some Maine data on LGBTQ+ high school students. The data included is from the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey which is updated every two years. Add or delete slides to fit your classroom and lesson plan needs: <https://bit.ly/3oqjZJ9>
- Use the **Facilitator Guide – Growing Supportive Environments Slides** for guidance on what to say for each slide.

FACILITATOR GUIDE- GROWING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS SLIDES

Slide 1: Introduction

In this slide deck, we are going to explore healthy and unhealthy environments and how these environments can affect LGBTQ+ students.

Slide 2: Images of healthy and stressed plants

Let's think of two plants, one that is healthy and one that is stressed. What elements in an environment do you think make one plant healthy and the other stressed?

Possible answers:

- *Not enough water or light.*
- *Neglect from the plant owner.*
- *Not enough nutrients in the soil.*
- *Wrong pot size (not big enough or too big).*

Slide 3: Images of healthy and stressed people

When it comes to people, what in their environment can make them either healthy or stressed?

Possible answers:

- *How much support or connection they have.*
- *Being around people who either kind or mean or hurtful.*
- *Being loved or not loved.*
- *Having (or not having) basic needs met like food or shelter.*

Humans and plants are similar, if they are put in environments that do not support them, they will often have worse health outcomes. If they are put in nurturing environments, they will have better health outcomes. Today we are talking about how our environments can affect LGBTQ+ people.

Slide 4: Brainstorm

Let's brainstorm how supportive or unsupportive environments affect LGBTQ+ youth.

1. What messages or conditions would make an environment unsupportive to LGBTQ+ youth?

Possible answers:

- *Negative messages about LGBTQ+ people like being gay is wrong.*
- *Trying to control people's gender expression.*
- *Not using people's name or pronouns.*
- *Not having a GSA.*

2. How do you think an unsupportive environment would affect LGBTQ+ youth?

Possible answers:

- *It may feel lonely and isolating, like you don't belong.*
- *It may feel like no one supports or cares about you.*
- *You might feel unwanted or start feeling like something is wrong with you.*
- *You might lose your self-confidence and self-acceptance.*

3. What messages or conditions would make an environment supportive to LGBTQ+ youth?

Possible answers:

- Positive messages that support trans and LGBT people being their authentic selves.
- Saying that LGBTQ+ people are fun, vibrant and loving.
- Letting students wear and express themselves how they want.
- Having LGBTQ+ people represented in history, English/, health classes, etc.

4. How do you think a supportive environment affects LGBTQ+ youth?

Possible answers:

- They might feel more confident about themselves.
- They might feel a sense of pride or feel happier with who they are.
- They might be more connected and supported.
- They might feel welcome and want to participate more in class or in school activities.

Slide 5: Maine's data on LGBT High School Students

(Use the most up-to-date Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey data if possible.)

Over the next four slides, we are going to look at the numbers of LGBT youth in Maine and how supportive environments can positively affect one's health.

Slide 6: Numbers of LGBT youth in Maine and their sexual identity and sexual orientation

In 2019, about 13.6% of Maine's high school youth identified themselves as LGBT, which figures out to be 7,500 youth or 1 in 7.

What do you notice about this data?

Answers may vary, but possible answers may include:

- *Some people are not sure of their identity or they don't understand the words.*
- *The largest identity group in the LGBT community is people who identify as bisexual.*
- *There are many LGBT students in Maine.*

Slide 7: Why Supportive Environments Matter

We know that LGBT students are twice as likely to feel unsafe at school as their non-LGBT counterparts. LGBT students face many challenges, such as homelessness, bullying and fear of being outed. Many have fewer support systems in place and this can lead to poor mental health outcomes and behaviors that may put them at risk, such as drug and alcohol use, self-harm, etc.

Slide 8: How Environments Can Effect Health

In schools where inclusive policies and norms are in place, students feel included and safe. When being inclusive is the expected norm, respectful interactions between students and teachers take place and there is a feeling of support. This support helps build positive self-esteem and helps people feel like they matter. When people have less stress and take care of themselves, their overall health improves.

Slide 9: 5 Ways to Make Schools Safer for LGBTQ+ Students

On the slide, go through each of the 5 ways schools can be safer, more inclusive and supportive.

Slide 10: Let's analyze some scenarios

Instructions

- After going through the slides, divide students into small groups of 3-5 students to work on the scenarios.
- Give each group a copy of one of the **Growing Supportive Environments Scenario Cards**.
- Give the students 10 minutes to read and discuss the scenarios and identify how the environment in their scenario is helpful or harmful.
- When finished, if you have time, have students share their scenarios and responses with the large class, using the debrief questions below.

DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

Debrief the activity by asking the following questions:

1. **What did your group come up with as helpful or supportive actions that people could take to support the character(s) in your scenario?**

Possible answers: Refer to the Facilitator Key for each scenario.

2. **What could schools do to be supportive environments?**

Possible answers: have GSAs; use students' correct pronouns or names; prevent and respond to bullying, provide education, etc.

SUMMARIZE

In summarizing the activity, include these key points.

- **Just like a growing plant, our environment, which includes other people and how they treat us, can impact our health.**
- **Bullying and discrimination are unhealthy conditions that result in unhealthy outcomes for LGBTQ+ students.**
- **Even small comments or actions can have a big impact on people. Before you speak, it's important to ask yourself how your words might be hurtful or supportive.**
- **Saying kind words and being supportive of each other can help build a supportive environment so even in the face of challenges people know that they are not alone and there are people who care.**



GROWING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

SCENARIO 5 – RAY

Instructions: *Read the following scenario and respond to the questions.*

Ray is a junior in high school and identifies as gay. Living in a small town where everyone knows everyone's business, Ray has decided not to tell anyone. A lot of people in town belong to conservative churches that are outwardly judgmental and not accepting of gay people. He hears a lot of comments like "that's so gay" or "no homo" at school, which stresses him out. Ray could attend the school's Gay-Straight Alliance group (GSA), but would rather keep a low profile so people don't think he is gay. He doesn't want to become a target. He has attended a few online LGBTQ+ youth groups and even though they are supposed to be confidential, he is afraid he might get outed. Ray feels the only way to explore who he is will be to go to college far away from his home town where he won't be afraid of being judged.

1. What messages did Ray receive that created a supportive environment?

2. What messages did Ray receive that created an unsupportive environment?

3. What is one action that someone could take to make the environment more supportive?

SCENARIO 1 - TYLER

Tyler is a freshman in high school. As early as puberty, Tyler felt uncomfortable in his body and didn't like the way people saw him. In middle school, Tyler came out to his family as transgender and started taking medication to delay puberty changes. Though Tyler has the support of his parents and siblings, he has struggled in school. Students started to harass him when he used the boys' bathroom, and said if he was a real boy he would stand up to pee. He feels the bathroom isn't a safe place for him and doesn't use it during the school day. Tyler overheard a few teachers saying that they think identifying as transgender is a fad among young people, so he doesn't feel that he can go to them for support. Tyler has an older brother who has mentioned to Tyler that he seems depressed and wants to talk him about it. He knows his brother cares about him, but isn't sure if he should tell him what is happening at school.

1. What messages did Tyler receive that created a supportive environment?

Possible answers:

- *A family that accepted him and got him the healthcare he needed.*
- *A brother that wants to support him.*

2. What messages did Tyler receive that created an unsupportive environment?

Possible answers:

- *Students that harass him in the bathroom and say he is not a "real boy."*
- *Teachers saying they think being trans is a fad.*

3. What is one action that someone could take to make the environment more supportive?

Possible answers:

- *Teachers could educate themselves on trans history and issues so they are better informed and don't make hurtful comments.*
- *The school could have trans inclusive bathrooms and other LGBTQ+ supportive policies.*
- *The school could talk more about inclusivity and diversity and have speakers and awareness campaigns to educate students*
- *The school could start a Gay-Straight Alliance group (GSA).*

SCENARIO 2 - CASSIE AND KATE

Cassie and Kate are juniors in high school. They came out around the same time and have been dating for a year. Their families are very supportive and always treat them as a couple at family events. They are both popular at school and there was even support for them to be junior homecoming Queen and Queen, rather than the usual King and Queen. For the most part, they feel supported by their friends, but feel frustration when they are asked a lot of invasive questions. Even in health class, some guy asked, “How do lesbians have sex?” The latest thing that happened was they were disinvited to a friend’s weekend party, because the parents didn’t think it was appropriate to have lesbians at an all-girl sleepover. They are so over things like this happening and just want people to see them as Cassie and Kate, and not the ‘lesbian couple’.

1. What messages did Cassie and Kate receive that created a supportive environment?

Possible answers:

- *Families that treat them with respect as a couple.*
- *They have each other.*
- *School peers who support them.*

2. What messages did Cassie and Kate receive that created an unsupportive environment?

Possible answers:

- *Peers that say insensitive/invasive comments like “How do lesbians have sex?”*
- *Other parents who do not understand or support LGBTQ+ people.*

3. What is one action that someone could take to make the environment more supportive?

Possible answers:

- *The friend could stand up to her parents and tell Cassie and Kate that she supports them.*
- *The health teacher could educate and interrupt students when they make hurtful comments intentionally or unintentionally.*

SCENARIO 3 - HILLARY

Hillary is a sophomore in high school and recently came out as bisexual. She found a great online queer community that felt affirming and validating. She felt so supported from those connections, it gave her the courage to come out to her friends at school. Unfortunately, she has not received the same support at school. She was harassed by some people who believed she would have sex with anyone because she's bisexual. She was even confronted by a few people in the school's Gay-Straight Alliance group (GSA), who told her that bisexuals can't make up their minds on who they want to be with. Hillary feels like she doesn't belong anywhere. She's not queer enough to be part of the queer community and not straight enough to be part of the straight community. She is so tired of hearing all the hurtful stereotypes and spends more time online where she finds support and acceptance.

1. What messages did Hillary receive that created a supportive environment?

Possible answers:

- *A supportive online queer community.*

2. What messages did Hillary receive that created an unsupportive environment?

Possible answers:

- *Students who said bisexuals would have sex with anyone.*
- *GSA members who thought bisexuals just haven't made up their minds.*

3. What is one action that someone could take to make the environment more supportive?

Possible answers:

- *Teachers could educate students and interrupt and address hurtful comments students make.*
- *The GSA could affirm that bisexuality is a valid identity.*
- *Students could speak up when they hear their peers say hurtful comments.*

SCENARIO 4 - BLAIR

Blair is a junior in high school and identifies as asexual. Blair joined their school's Gay-Straight Alliance group (GSA) and felt a huge sense of relief when they learned about asexual identities. Finally having a name for what they were experiencing was a huge relief for Blair. They could never relate when their friends talked about crushes, dating or who was hooking up with who at school. When Blair told their parents they were asexual, it was difficult and stressful for everyone. Blair's parents didn't understand and were afraid Blair had some mental issue or had had a negative experience. Blair is still interested in having romantic relationships, but isn't sure what those romantic relationships will look like in the future. Blair wants to have time to figure out what this all means to them and is so grateful that they have supportive, caring LGBTQ+ friends to talk to as they are on this journey.

1. What messages did Blair receive that created a supportive environment?

Possible answers:

- *Having a school GSA where she could learn about asexual identities.*
- *Caring and supportive LGBTQ+ friends.*

2. What messages did Blair receive that created an unsupportive environment?

Possible answers:

- *A culture that talks about sex a lot and assumes everyone is interested in sex, so Blair feels left out.*
- *Parents that don't understand what being asexual means.*

3. What is one action that someone could take to make the environment more supportive?

Possible answers:

- *The parents could be more aware of their reactions and take time to educate themselves and be more accepting of Blair.*
- *The school could celebrate asexual/aromatic awareness days let students know that not everyone is sexually motivated.*

SCENARIO 5 – RAY

Ray is a junior in high school and identifies as gay. Living in a small town where everyone knows everyone's business, Ray has decided not to tell anyone. A lot of people in town belong to conservative churches that are outwardly judgmental and not accepting of gay people. He hears a lot of comments like "that's so gay" or "no homo" at school, which stresses him out. Ray could attend the school's Gay-Straight Alliance group (GSA), but would rather keep a low profile so people don't think he is gay. He doesn't want to become a target. He has attended a few online LGBTQ+ youth groups and even though they are supposed to be confidential, he is afraid he might get outed. Ray feels the only way to explore who he is will be to go to college far away from his home town where he won't be afraid of being judged.

1. What messages did Ray receive that created a supportive environment?

Possible answers:

- *Having a school GSA.*
- *Online LGBTQ+ support groups.*

2. What messages did Ray receive that created an unsupportive environment?

Possible answers:

- *Faith communities that do not support LGBTQ+ people*
- *Feeling unsafe and judged for being gay.*
- *Students making harmful comments like "that's so gay" or "no homo."*

3. What is one action that someone could take to make the environment more supportive?

Possible answers:

- *Teachers and staff who are LGBTQ+ or support LGBTQ+ people could be an example to young people.*
- *The school could bring in people for an LGBTQ+ panel or have visible signs like a rainbow flag to show that they support LGBTQ+ students.*



SUPPORTIVE LGBTQ+ RESOURCES



Say,

When looking for information on sexual health topics, it is important to visit credible and supportive websites. In this activity, you will choose from a list of websites that support the LGBTQ+ community. You will create a poster [or other format as you choose] that may be displayed in your school that promotes and showcases a website where students can find accurate and credible information that is supportive of LGBTQ+ people.

Instructions

- This activity can be completed individually, in pairs or in small groups.
- Students may need additional time out of class to do research for this activity, or the activity can be divided in two class periods—for research/design and presentations.
- You can chose different mediums for the students to use to present the information. We have suggested a poster, but students could create a video or use other ideas you suggest for your students.
- Refer to the handout or say:

To aid you in researching and creating your poster, answer these questions:

1. What are the messages presented on this site?
2. What types of information and support does the site offer? (hotline, chat)
3. How does the site show the diversity of people in the LGBTQ+ community?
4. What makes this site standout as a supportive resource for LGBTQ+ issues?

Use the information you gathered to come up with key points you want to share on your poster. Be creative and use colorful graphics or pictures to make the poster stand out. Think of yourself as a person looking for LGBTQ+ information and support as you design your poster. You will be asked to share your poster with your classmates. Familiarize yourself with the website and be prepared to answer questions.

- After students have had time to view the website, answer the questions and prepare their poster, bring everyone together in the large group.
- Ask a student, pair or group to share their website and present their poster. Before moving onto the next person or group, ask if anyone in the class has questions.
- After all individuals/groups have presented, debrief the activity.

Students may choose from the websites listed on the **Supportive LGBTQ+ Resources Handout**. Websites and organizations can change over time, so you may want to add additional sites or change this list, as needed. If students have another website they'd like to research for their project, ask them to share it with you ahead of time to make sure it is a good fit for this activity.

DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

Ask the following debrief questions.

1. Why is it important to know you are using a credible website when seeking information and support for LGBTQ+ people?

Possible answers:

- *If not using a credible website, people could get misinformation and make decisions that could negatively affect them.*
- *Using a credible website offers factual, up-to date information that is helpful when looking for support and affirmation.*

2. How can an organization's website show its support of LGBTQ+ people?

Possible answers:

- *By using inclusive language that is non-judgmental and relatable.*
- *If using pictures of people, the website includes a variety of ways people outwardly express themselves.*
- *Providing opportunities where a person can connect with the organization for resources and support.*

3. When doing future website searches, what are key elements you will look for to know an organization is credible and supportive of LGBTQ+ people?

Possible answers:

- *The organization's mission is to provide safe, inclusive and accurate information and resources.*
- *There is a large representation of diversity that acknowledges and shows acceptance of all identities.*

SUMMARIZE

In summarizing the activity, include these key points.

- In general, finding credible resources online is an important life skill.
- There a lot of supportive organizations and websites that support LGBTQ+ people and provide education on LGBTQ+ issues.
- Regardless of your gender or sexual identity, it's important to know where to go for credible information.



SUPPORTIVE LGBTQ+ RESOURCES

Instructions: *Design a poster to help people find accurate sources of LGBTQ+ information.*

Answer the questions on the next page when doing your research to help identify what you'll include on the poster. Include these key elements – organization name and website address, logo or images, essential content or messages, catch phrases and other information you gather.

1. Choose a website from the following list:

- **MaineTransNet** is a Maine-based organization that provides support groups, social and community events and transgender cultural competency trainings.
<https://www.mainetrans.net/>
- **OUTMaine** is a Maine-based organization that provides LGBTQ+ youth programs as well as training and support for educators and community service providers, parents and families.
<https://outmaine.org/>
- **Equality Maine** is a Maine-based organization that provides education and outreach for the LGBTQ+ community through advocacy, programming, trainings and collaborations.
<https://www.equalitymaine.org/>
- **PFLAG** is a national organization with several chapters in Maine that provides support to LGBTQ+ individuals, parents, families and friends through support groups, education and advocacy.
<https://pflag.org/>
- **The Trevor Project** is a national organization that provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention resources for LGBTQ+ young people, training and resources for educators and community members who support LGBTQ+ youth.
<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>
- **GLSEN** is a state and national organization that provides support and resources for student Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) groups, educators and community members. They also help create LGBTQ+ policies and offer curriculum and resources for schools and community organizations.
<https://www.glsen.org/>
- **GLAAD** is a national organization that provides a number of networking resources to bring awareness to LGBTQ+ issues and cultural change through media, entertainment, stories and publications.
<https://www.glaad.org/>

2. Complete the questions on the reverse side of the handout.

Answering the questions will be helpful as you design your poster.



SUPPORTIVE LGBTQ+ RESOURCES

Name of the Website selected: _____

1. What are the messages presented on this site?

2. What types of information and support does the site offer? (hotline, chat, etc.)

3. How does the site show support for the diversity of people in the LGBTQ+ community?

4. What makes this site stand out as a supportive resource for someone to go to for support or to learn more about LGBTQ+ issues?