

2017

Research Snapshot: GSA members' experiences with a structured program to promote well-being

Centre for School Mental Health

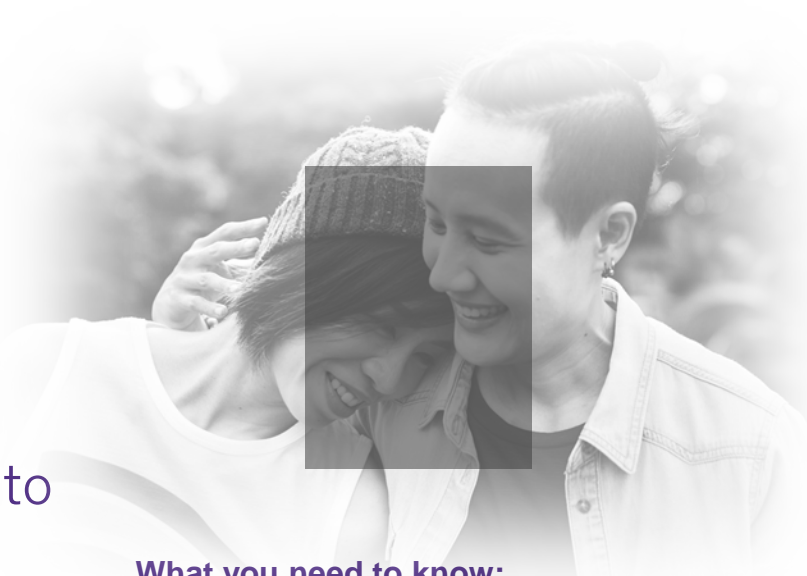
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Research Snapshot

GSA members' experiences with a structured program to promote well-being

What is this research about?

This study describes youth's experiences with a mental health promotion program, the [*Healthy Relationships Program for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, Queer/Questioning \(LGBT2Q+\) Youth*](#). This program complements standard Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSA) programming, and may also be delivered in community youth groups. Since LGBT2Q+ youth often experience hetero/cissexism and other forms of oppression in school and beyond, the program validates and affirms their identities, expressions, and experiences. It provides structured opportunities for LGBT2Q+ youth to discuss and process minority stressors, and develop essential coping strategies that promote well-being and help manage toxic relationships.

What you need to know:

The Fourth R's *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth* helps bolster positive mental wellness and encourage skill development among queer, trans, and gender diverse youth. It was adapted from the *Healthy Relationships Plus Program (HRPP)* - an evidence-informed, small group universal prevention program for youth that promotes positive mental health and well-being, and prevents risky behaviours. The *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth* was developed in consultation with academics, educators, and youth, and consists of 17 sessions, each lasting 45 minutes.

HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth Sessions

Session Number	Session Topic
Session 1	I Have a Voice: Introduction to the Program
Session 2	Mine to Name: Identities/Ways of Being
Session 2	Recognize and Respect: Values and Boundaries
Session 4	My Journey: Coming Out
Session 5	My Mind Matters: Mental Health and Well-Being
Session 6	In The Know: Impacts of Substance Use and Abuse
Session 7	I Belong: Communities and Connections
Session 8	My Super-Power: Coping with Challenges
Session 9	We All Have a Say: Rights / Responsibilities / Consent
Session 10	My Voice, Your Voice: Active Listening and Communication
Session 11	Right and True: Communication Styles
Session 12	Words and Actions: Communicating Through Conflict
Session 13	Ships: Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships
Session 14	(Re)Building Ties: Addressing Relationship Violence
Session 15	My Safety: Exits and Safety Plans
Session 16	Allies: Being There for Others
Session 17	The Concluding Circle: Share and Celebrate

What did the researchers do?

Approximately 65 youth from seven urban and one rural school located across two public secular school districts participated in the program over the course of the 2016-2017 academic year. Of the 65 program participants, 15 students from six urban secondary schools participated in focus groups in June 2017 to provide feedback on the *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth*. Focus groups took place during regularly-scheduled GSA meetings and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Sample questions included: What sessions, topics, or activities did you like the most? Why did you enjoy them? What sessions, topics, or activities did you like the least? Why did you dislike them?

What did the researchers find?

By participating in the *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth*, GSA members had a vital outlet to discuss sexual and gender diversity in-depth; reflect on and take pride in their identities/ways of being and expressions; share and learn from their peers; and build supportive networks with those who experience similar minority stress.

"...I liked session two, the mine to name one, because I like having, like, a space where I could describe my own identity, and it would be valid and people wouldn't be like, 'that's not real.'"

"...I liked the coming out...session...everyone kind of shared some...stories or their plans for coming out...Because, like, I haven't officially, like, kind of to like friend groups, but not really to parents. And I was kind of listening to stories saying, 'oh, this is something I could do, or I could wait.' Like, kind of getting ideas for that...And I really liked that...everyone just kind of talked like, a plan, yeah, plans or stories...both negative and positive. And then I was kind of like, 'oh, I understand that. I get that or, like, that's a good thing to know...I liked hearing...everyone else's experiences and I'm like, 'I might use that.'"

"I mean some of [the sessions] got heated 'cause we'd get talking about our family and then the rage would appear...But we did...get to talk about like, 'oh, how should I handle my peers doing this'? 'How should I handle my family doing this'? How should I handle my partner doing this?'"

How can you use this research?

Study results reveal that the *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth* was well-received by participants, further substantiating the acceptability of delivering mental health promotion programs in GSAs. Since the program was designed to complement standard GSA programming, club members should be consulted to determine their interest in participating in a formalized program. Our research indicates that youth would ideally participate in the *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth* during half of their regularly-scheduled group meetings. This way, club members could still lead student-directed discussions, and spearhead educational and activist initiatives, if they desired to.

Original Research Article:

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Lapointe, A., & Crooks, C. V. (2018). GSA members' experiences with a structured program to promote well-being. *Journal of LGBT Youth*. doi:
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