Critical Role of Family Support in Reducing Risk & Promoting Support for LGBTQ Children & Youth

Overview

- Social emergence of LGBTQ children and youth and support needs for LGBTQ children, youth, and families

- Brief overview of some of the Family Acceptance Project’s (FAP) research & resources – first research on LGBTQ youth & families and first family intervention model for prevention, wellness and care for LGBTQ children and youth

- Need for family education & guidance, especially in schools where lack of training and support for families with LGBTQ students is a significant gap in addressing students’ health & developmental needs

Social Emergence

LGBTQ Children & Adolescents

- Wide access to information about sexual orientation & gender identity has enabled children and adolescents to learn about and self-identify as LGBTQ in childhood & adolescence

- Significant drop in ages of self-identifying as LGBTQ compared with earlier generations of LGBTQ adults

- Research on sexual orientation and gender identity is grounded in decades of research

- But major gaps in education, services & support for families of LGBTQ children & youth persist – and this increase risk for LGBTQ children & youth
Historical Experiences Related to Families

- Long standing perception that parents, families and caregivers are unable and unwilling to support their LGBTQ children
- Historically, all families were seen as rejecting and as an adversary
- Lack of accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity
  - For parents, providers and religious leaders
  - For families and others from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds
- Lack of family-oriented services & support for LGBTQ children and youth

When FAP Started...

- When we started the Family Acceptance Project (FAP), families of LGBTQ youth had not been studied
- Their families were seen as incapable of learning to support their LGBTQ children
- LGBTQ youth were served as individuals alone or through peer support - not in the context of their families
- There were no services for parents and caregivers with LGBTQ children to provide guidance and access to support
- Providers did not believe – and many still don’t – that families who are seen as rejecting can learn to support their LGBTQ children

Normative Child Development

We are finally seeing normative development of sexual orientation & gender identity – as an aspect of child development – but without a comparable increase in family education, guidance & support
LACK OF FAMILY SERVICES for LGBTQ Children & Youth

Decreasing Stigma – Persistent Risk
Risk for LGBTQ youth has not decreased over several decades
Hostile social climate is increasing risk
Critical need for family support

Family Acceptance Project® Goals & Aims

- Strengthen and help ethnically, racially and religiously diverse families to support their LGBTQ children
  - Align with underlying values, use strengths-based and harm reduction framework
- Prevent / decrease risk & promote well-being for LGBTQ children and youth
- Help families maintain LGBTQ children in their homes
- Reconnect families and promote permanency
- Provide training & implement family intervention model across systems to support LGBTQ young people in the context of their families, cultures and faith communities
- Empower families to advocate for their LGBTQ children
Family Research Process

- **In-depth Interview Study** – LGBTQ Youth & Families
  (ages 13-18)  
  100+ family accepting & rejecting behaviors

- **Young Adult Survey** – LGBTQ Young Adults
  (ages 21-25)  
  How family behaviors contribute to risk & well-being

- **Family & Youth Briefing Sessions** – Diverse Families & LGBTQ Youth
  What helps families change their behavior
  What messaging & resources are needed for culturally diverse families

- **Family Support Model** – Family Intervention
  Reducing risk & promoting well-being for LGBTQ children & youth
  Strengthening & engaging families as allies & advocates

  100+ family accepting & rejecting behaviors

  How family behaviors contribute to risk & well-being

  What helps families change their behavior

  What messaging & resources are needed for culturally diverse families

  Reducing risk & promoting well-being for LGBTQ children & youth

  Strengthening & engaging families as allies & advocates

Examples of Family REJECTING Behaviors

From More than 50 Identified & Measured in FAP’s Research

- Deny that youth are LGBTQ ("It’s just a phase," "They’re confused")
- Prevent youth from learning about their LGBTQ identity, from having an LGBTQ friend or from participating in LGBTQ youth groups, services
- Blame youth when others mistreat them because they are LGBTQ
- Use religion to condemn / deny / minimize; make them pray, attend religious services to change / prevent / minimize their LGBTQ identity
- Take youth to therapist / religious leader to try change LGBTQ identity
- Don’t talk – or let youth talk – about youth’s LGBTQ identity
- Ridicule, verbally demean, call LGBTQ youth slurs, speak about LGBTQ people in negative and derogatory ways; beat, hit, physically hurt youth because of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression

Examples of SUPPORTIVE Family Behaviors

From More than 50 Identified & Measured in FAP’s Research

- Express affection and caring for LGBTQ youth
- Get accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity – self-educate
- Talk with youth about their sexual orientation and gender identity, and listen respectfully
- Support gender expression
- Require that other family members treat LGBTQ youth with respect
- Advocate for youth when they are mistreated because of LGBTQ identity in families, schools, congregations & communities
- Believe LGBTQ youth can have a happy future
- Talk with religious leaders and congregations about supporting LGBTQ people and welcoming them to services and activities
Family Rejecting Behaviors Have Been Normalized

- Family rejecting behaviors / responses to LGBTQ identity and gender expression are traumatic
  - Minimizing, trying to prevent, discourage or change LGBTQ identities has been the default position

- Rejecting behaviors are normalized
  - Many LGBTQ youth expect rejecting experiences & don’t know that these behaviors impact self-esteem, risk behaviors, relationships, capacity for self-care and sense of the future
  - These behaviors are culturally transmitted & enforced and are expressed in cultural and religious beliefs
  - Parents & caregivers learn these behaviors intergenerationally
  - Parents & caregivers that are struggling see these behaviors as caring for their LGBTQ child, helping them fit in and having a good life

Family Rejection & Health Risks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Family Rejecting Behaviors</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Illegal Drug Use</th>
<th>Lifetime Suicide Attempts</th>
<th>Risk for HIV Infection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO / LOW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODERATE</td>
<td>3 x depression</td>
<td>3 x illegal drug use</td>
<td>2 x suicidal thoughts</td>
<td>1.5 x HIV / STD risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>6 x depression</td>
<td>5.5 x suicidal thoughts</td>
<td>5 x suicide attempts</td>
<td>3 x illegal drug use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family Rejecting Behaviors Contribute to Health Risks for LGBTQ Young People

- 6 x depression
- 5.5 x suicidal thoughts
- 5 x suicide attempts
- 3 x illegal drug use
- 3 x HIV / STD risk
What Does Family Rejection Feel Like?

Silence & Secrecy

Ridicule / Call Your LGBTQ Child Harmful Names

Family Accepting Behaviors Protect Against Risk & Promote Well-Being for LGBTQ Young People

- Better overall health
- Less likely to be depressed
- 3 x less likely to think about suicide
- 3 x less likely to attempt suicide
- Less likely to have substance abuse problems
- Higher self-esteem
- More social support
- Better family relationships
What Does Family Acceptance Feel Like?

Believe That Your Child Will be a Happy LGBTQ Adult

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Use Your Child’s Names & Pronouns

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Family Acceptance Project Components

New Research-Based FAMILY Approach to Wellness, Prevention & Care for LGBTQ Children & Adolescents

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**Family Acceptance Project**

**Scope of Intervention Approach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Childhood</th>
<th>Range of Ages</th>
<th>Range of Ages</th>
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<tr>
<td>Core Education &amp; Guidance</td>
<td>Increasing Family Conflict</td>
<td>Family Disruption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Risks</td>
<td>Permanency</td>
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**FAP Family Video Series**

Short research-informed documentary films that show the journey of diverse families from struggle to support of their LGBTQ children

AIMS

- Give youth & families hope
- Show family accepting & rejecting behaviors
- Show the journey of diverse families from struggle to support of their LGBTQ children
- Humanize LGBTQ young people & their families

**FAP Family Education Booklets**

Multilingual family education booklets available in print and online

Lower literacy and versions for families from specific faith traditions in development

http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/publications

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New FAP Publications

How should school professionals engage and provide guidance and access to accurate information and support for parents and caregivers of LGBTQ students?

Rejecting Families Can Learn to Support & Affirm Their LGBTQ Children

• Rejecting parents & caregivers can learn to affirm their LGBTQ children when guidance is presented in ways that are culturally relevant for them
  - 76% of families have decreased rejecting behaviors and 74% have increased accepting behaviors towards their LGBTQ children as a result of seeing FAP’s posters
  - Many other parents and caregivers have learned to change rejecting behaviors and to affirm their LGBTQ children as a result of receiving family support services
FAP Online Resources

- **FAP Online Resource for LGBTQ Youth & Families** – shares resources for LGBTQ youth and families to access services and support to increase well-being, help decrease mental health risks, provides state-by-state listings, affirming faith-based and culture-based resources - https://lgbtqfamilyacceptance.org/

- **FAP Healthy Futures Posters** – guidance on family rejecting behaviors that increase risk and family supportive behaviors that protect against risk and increase well-being for LGBTQ children & youth (11 versions) - https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/poster

- **FAP Family Education Booklets** – “Best Practice” resource for suicide prevention for LGBTQ youth (English, Spanish & Chinese; developing faith-based versions) - https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/publications

- **Family Acceptance Project website** – research, information for family guidance & support, program development & training - https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/

Online Resource for LGBTQ Youth & Families

Direct Access to Support Services

- Crisis Support
- Culture-Based Resources
- Faith-Based Resources
- Evidence-Based Resources
- National Resources

https://lgbtqfamilyacceptance.org/

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FAP Intervention Model – Systems Level

Family Acceptance Project®
Diverse Families Can Learn to Support Their LGBTQ Children

Parents Talk About FAP's Family Support Framework

http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/

Family Acceptance Project

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http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/