



Promising Practices:

Mental health promotion programming with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, Queer/Questioning (LGBT2Q+) youth

Fourth R Overview

The Fourth R includes a range of healthy relationships programs that have been shown to promote positive peer interactions and reduce dating and peer violence. There are different components for different grades, as well as community-based versions. Some of the recent program components have a particular emphasis on promoting positive mental health. In addition, we have developed strengths-based programming that is uniquely designed to meet the needs of Indigenous youth, LGBT2Q+ youth, and vulnerable youth. Between 2010 and 2018 we were funded through the Innovation Strategy of the Public Health Agency of Canada. Across three project phases we developed new programming components, evaluated programs, made regional adaptations, and scaled up nationally. By 2018 Fourth R programs were implemented in more than 5000 schools and community organizations nationally.

HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth

The Healthy Relationships Program (HRP) for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, Queering/Questioning (LGBT2Q+) Youth is a small group positive mental health promotion program for gender, sexual, and romantic minority youth. This program includes 18 sessions, each lasting 45 minutes. It can be delivered in Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSA) or community agencies that house LGBT2Q+ youth groups. The *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth* helps build resiliency and promote well-being among LGBT2Q+ youth. It affirms, validates, and celebrates sexual and gender diversity, cultivates a caring and supportive community, and helps youth develop skills and strategies that promote healthy relationships. This trauma-informed, strengths-focused program explores stressors unique to LGBT2Q+ youth, including identity and expression invalidation, stigma, prejudice and discrimination, internalized oppression, coming out, safety, and micro-aggressions (see page 2 for outline of session topics).

The *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth* was developed and piloted between 2015 and 2018 in partnership with two school boards (including the educators, nurse practitioners, and youth within them), and one community agency. These partners helped guide program development, implementation, refinement, and evaluation. We worked directly with LGBT2Q+ students and privileged their voices during the revision and evaluation process. We also consulted with program facilitators to enhance program training and delivery.

The purpose of this summary is to share promising practices for developing and implementing strengths-based mental health promotion programming for LGBT2Q+ youth. It is one of eight issue-specific summaries designed to share actionable, positive strategies to improve effectiveness of mental health promotion and violence prevention efforts.



Session Topics

Although there are 18 sessions in the manual, there is flexibility to select fewer sessions, or to deliver the entire program in fewer sessions that last longer (i.e., 9- 90 minute sessions instead of 18- 45 minute sessions). Sessions in the HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth include:

SESSION 1: I HAVE A VOICE: Introduction to the Program

SESSION 2: MINE TO NAME: Identities/Ways of Being

SESSION 3: RECOGNIZE AND RESPECT: Values and Boundaries

SESSION 4: MY JOURNEY: Coming Out

SESSION 5: MY MIND MATTERS: Mental Health and Well-Being (Part 1)

SESSION 6: MY MIND MATTERS: Mental Health and Well-Being (Part 2)

SESSION 7: THINKING AHEAD: Making Safer Choices About Substance Use

SESSION 8: I BELONG: Communities and Connections

SESSION 9: MY SUPER-POWER: Coping with Challenges

SESSION 10: WE ALL HAVE A SAY: Rights/Responsibilities/Consent

SESSION 11: MY VOICE, YOUR VOICE: Active Listening and Communication

SESSION 12: RIGHT AND TRUE: Communication Styles

SESSION 13: WORDS AND ACTIONS: Communicating Through Conflict

SESSION 14: SHIPS: Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships

SESSION 15: (RE)BUILDING TIES: Addressing Relationship Violence

SESSION 16: MY SAFETY: Exits and Safety Plans

SESSION 17: ALLIES: Being There for Others

SESSION 18: CONCLUDING CIRCLE: Share and Celebrate

Promising Practices

Balance strengths-based and trauma-informed content.

Mental health promotion and violence prevention programs must recognize the strengths of marginalized youth and ensure that programming is emotionally safe. To be strengths-based, content needs to affirm youth's interconnected identities (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.); facilitate self-compassion; connect participants to others; and help youth develop coping strategies to manage minority stressors. Many LGBTQ2Q+ youth experience mental health challenges, oppression, and discrimination. Being trauma-informed includes informing students of potentially stressful topics in advance so they may self-regulate their participation.

Include diverse youth perspectives.

It is imperative to include youth's insights when developing programs that aim to serve them. Consult with a diverse group of LGBTQ2Q+ youth, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour when creating and refining programs designed to bolster their mental health and well-being. By doing so, program developers will better meet the needs, desires, and experiences of youth who are members of multiple and varying equity-seeking groups.

Apply an intersectional approach to understanding and coping with oppression.

Youth programming should acknowledge and address compounding oppression (i.e., intersectionality), and assist participants, who may be members of various equity-seeking groups, manage their unique and multifaceted experiences with marginalization. Program training should prompt facilitators to engage in in-depth discussions about intersectionality to prepare them to spearhead nuanced anti-oppressive conversations with youth.

Offer extended program training.

Our early experience identified a need for extended training. There was a need for foundational training in mental health and wellness, and LGBTQ2Q+ topics and issues, prior to exploring the actual program. Beyond incorporating practice facilitation, there was also a need to address participant recruitment. A thorough training is vital because educators rarely receive pre/in/service training and professional development with respect to LGBTQ2Q+ matters. GSA advisors, particularly those who are less experienced, may not feel comfortable, qualified or confident in spearheading in-depth conversations or leading activities that involve mental health, intersectionality, consent, and harm reduction.

Provide ongoing support for facilitators.

Program facilitators benefit from ongoing coaching to support their role in delivering youth programs. This can involve regular check-ins via email, phone calls, or face-to-face. During check-ins, facilitators can share program implementation updates and receive feedback from supervising staff members, ask clarifying questions, and receive individualized support as needed. Building in mentorship opportunities for new or less experienced facilitators is another effective support strategy. Facilitators can also benefit from meeting with their peers to share experiences and explore alternative programmatic strategies.

HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth: Research and Resources

Over the course of this project, we have developed numerous resources that include information about the *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth* and provide guidance on its delivery. We have presented information on the program's development and evaluation at various inter/national conferences and have written several journal articles and chapters in edited books.

HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth Program Resources

Lapointe, A., Kassen, K., Snooks, S., Townsley, D., Crooks, C. V., Dale, S., & Hughes, R. (2017). *Healthy Relationships Program for LGBT2Q+ Youth (2nd ed.)*. London, ON: Centre for School Mental Health.

- Program Flyer: https://youthrelationships.org/uploads/hrp_lgbt2q+_flyer.pdf
- Program Overview: https://youthrelationships.org/uploads/hrp_lgbt2q+_overview.pdf
- Frequently Asked Questions: https://youthrelationships.org/uploads/hrp_lgbt2q+_faq.pdf

Conference Presentations (available online)

Lapointe, A., & Crooks, C. V. (2018). [*The Healthy Relationships Program \(HRP\) for LGBT2Q+ Youth: GSA members' experiences with a structured program to promote wellbeing*](#). Paper presented at the IDENTITY: Canadian Perspectives on LGBTQI2S Inclusion conference, Toronto, ON, May 23-25, 2018.

Lapointe, A., & Dale, S. (2017). [*Youth's experiences with the Healthy Relationships Program for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning \(LGBTQ+\) Youth*](#). Paper presented at Faculty Research Partners Day: Growing, Learning and Changing in the 21st Century, Western University, London, ON, October 20, 2017.

Lapointe, A. (2017). [*Teen relationship violence and wellbeing among LGBTQ+ youth*](#). Paper presented at the Canadian Conference on Promoting Healthy Relationships for Youth: Breaking Down the Silos in Addressing Mental Health & Violence, London, ON, February 15-February 17, 2017.

Journal Articles and Chapters

Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., Dunlop, C., Lapointe, A., & Kerry, A. (in press). *The Fourth R: Considerations for implementing evidence-based healthy relationships and mental health promotion programming in diverse contexts*. In A. W. Leschied, D. Saklofske, & G. Flett (Eds.) (2018). *The Handbook of Implementation of School Based Mental Programs*. Springer Publishing, New York, NY.

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

Lapointe, A., Dunlop, C., Crooks, C. V. (accepted). Feasibility and fit of a mental health promotion program for LGBTQ+ youth. *Journal of Youth Development*.