The Critical Role of Families in Reducing Risk & Promoting Well-Being for LGBT Youth

September 6, 2012

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Webinar sponsored by NASMHPD’s Prevention Center with support from SAMHSA's National Technical Assistance Center for State Mental Health Agencies
Critical Role of Family Support in Reducing Risk & Promoting Well-Being for LGBT Children & Youth

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Family Acceptance Project™ (FAP)
San Francisco State University
Key Points
Family Acceptance Project™

- FAP is generating a paradigm shift to serve LGBT young people in the context of their families
- Families have a compelling impact on their LGBT children’s health & mental health
- FAP’s approach resonates with families from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds – faith and family connections are strengths
  - Gives families a reason to decrease rejecting behavior & strengthen relationships
- FAP is developing the first evidence-based family model of wellness, prevention & care for LGBTQ and gender variant children & adolescents
Family Acceptance Project™
Goals & Aims

• Strengthen and help ethnically and religiously diverse families to support their LGBT children

• Decrease health-related and other risks for LGBT children and youth and promote their well-being by helping families and caregivers decrease rejection & increase acceptance and support

• Help families maintain LGBT children in their homes; reconnect families and foster permanency

• Develop a new evidence-based, family model of wellness, prevention, and care to promote well-being for LGBT youth in families, schools, faith-based institutions and communities

• Change the paradigm of care across disciplines and systems of care to serve LGBT young people in the context of their families

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Lack of Understanding of Role of Families

- LGBT youth are served as *individuals alone* or through *peer* support across disciplines, mainstream & LGBT services and systems of care
- Providers are reluctant & uncertain about engaging families in an LGBT adolescent’s care
  - don’t ask LGBT youth about family relationships
  - don’t have a rationale for involving families – had *no reason* to ask prior to release of FAP research
  - see families of LGBT youth as unsupportive, unpredictable, volatile, rejecting
- LGBT youth programs are youth-focused and specific; families have not been included; reunification has not been seen as an option for LGBT youth
Family Acceptance Project
Core Principles & Conceptual Shifts

- All families are potential allies for their LGBT children
  - Need to approach families and other members of the youth’s extended system as allies, not adversaries
- Families want the best for their LGBT children
- Diverse parents, families & caregivers have the capacity to support their LGBT children
- Family “rejecting” behaviors are motivated by care & concern to help their LGBT children
LGB Adolescents: Average Ages

- First awareness of attraction: 10
  Range of studies – late 1980s on

- LGB identity – adolescents: 14-16
  Range of studies – 1990s

- LGB identity – adolescents: 13.4
  Family Acceptance Project

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Social Emergence of LGBT Children & Youth Coming Out at Younger Ages

Widespread social changes:

- Internet & media -- wide dissemination of information about previously hidden identities
- Changes in public perceptions and increase in positive media images and coverage of LGBT people & youth
- Expansion of community support groups for LGBT youth since 1978 and GSAs since early 1990s

Have enabled children and adolescents to learn about and identify as LGBT at younger ages

- Informational barriers have also been removed for socially and religiously conservatives families

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Family Acceptance Project™
Primary Institutions that Socialize & Support Children & Youth

FAP Research & Practice

- Families
- Schools
- Faith Communities
Family Acceptance Project

- Research
- Education & Professional Training
- Family Interventions
  - New evidence-based family intervention model to promote well-being and decrease family rejection & risk for LGBT children & youth
- Public Policy
Impact of Family Acceptance & Rejection on Health/Mental Heath

Family Responses:
- Acceptance
- Rejection

100+ Family Behaviors

Depression
Suicidal Behavior & Attempts
Substance Abuse
HIV Risk & STDs
Self-Esteem
Social Support
Life Satisfaction
Sense of the Future
Ejection from the Home
Process

- **Qualitative Study** – LGBT Youth & Families (Interview Study) (ages 13-18) 100+ family reactions

- **Young Adult Survey** – LGBT Young Adults (ages 21-25)

- **Family Briefing Sessions** – Ethnically Diverse Families with LGBT Children; Youth; Providers

- **Family Interventions** – Ethnically Diverse Families with LGBT, questioning & gender variant children

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Examples of Family Reactions

Supportive Behaviors

- Express affection & caring for LGBT youth
- Talk with youth about their LGBT identity
- Advocate for youth when they are discriminated against or mistreated by others
- Welcome LGBT friends & partners to family activities
- Support youth’s gender expression

Rejecting Behaviors

- Call youth derogatory names or physically hurt them because of their LGBT identity
- Not talk about their LGBT identity or keep it a secret
- Restrict access to LGBT information, including friends & community resources
- Tell LGBT youth that the way they look, act or behave is shameful to the family
- Try to change sexual orientation

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Family Acceptance Project™
Illegal Drug Use

Low Rejection
Moderate Rejection
High Rejection

(n = 245)

LEVEL OF FAMILY REJECTION

p < .001

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Risk for HIV Infection

Low Rejection
(n = 245)

Moderate Rejection

High Rejection
p < .001

LEVEL OF FAMILY REJECTION

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Family Acceptance Project™
Lifetime Suicide Attempts

(1 or more times)

Low Rejection
Moderate Rejection

p < .10

High Rejection

p < .001

(n = 245)

LEVEL OF FAMILY REJECTION

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Family Acceptance Project™
Family Acceptance

- Family accepting behaviors during adolescence:
  - protect against suicidal behavior, depression and substance abuse in LGBT young adults

- High levels of family acceptance during adolescence:
  - significantly higher levels of self-esteem, social support and general health — compared to peers with low levels of family acceptance

- Low levels of family acceptance during adolescence:
  - over 3 times more likely to report suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts — compared to peers with high levels of family acceptance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health - Mental Health Concern</th>
<th>Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Depression</td>
<td>5.01 times or 501%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted Suicide</td>
<td>3.90 times or 390%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Drug Use</td>
<td>3.82 times or 382%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk for HIV</td>
<td>2.12 times or 212%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
See a Future as Happy LGBT Adult

(n = 245) Level of Family Acceptance

- Extremely Accepting: 92%
- Very Accepting: 77%
- A Little Accepting: 59%
- Not at All Accepting: 35%

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FAP - Key Family-Related Findings

- *Family rejection* is linked with serious health & mental health problems for LGBT young people
- *Family acceptance* is a protective factor for LGBT young people
- *Family acceptance* helps promote well-being for LGBT young people
FAP Work with Faith Communities

- Research on religious practices & reactions
- Consultation & training with diverse faith communities, including religiously conservative groups
  - Training for religious leaders
  - Training in congregations
  - Using FAP findings, materials & approach with families & youth
  - Developing specific faith-related materials
Work in Process

- **Family education materials** – basic guidance in English, Spanish & Chinese
  - *Family video stories* of ethnically & religiously diverse families with LGBT children

- **Policy & practice related materials** – assessment materials; policy & practice guidelines; consultation on legal cases

- **Training** in school systems, faith communities, health & mental health services, child welfare, juvenile justice & homeless programs to *teach providers how to engage families & to increase support*

- **Research publications** – building an empirical foundation through peer-reviewed publications

- **Evidence-based family interventions** – help families decrease risk & promote support for LGBT children
Parent and Provider Education/Support Materials

Supportive Families, Healthy Children

Helping Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Children

Niños saludables con el apoyo familiar

Ayuda para familias con hijos e hijas lesbianas, gays, bisexuales y transgénero

Family Education Booklet Series - Can be downloaded online & obtained in print copies. Lower literacy levels and versions for families from specific faith traditions in development.

http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/publications
Family Responses to Learning How Their Behavior Affects Their Child’s Risk

We found that families from all ethnic groups were shocked to learn that reactions they thought would help or would protect their children from being gay or transgender—instead put their children at very high risk for health and mental health problems.

These behaviors—such as trying to change their children's identity or trying to keep them away from gay friends to protect them—instead isolated their children and made them feel alone and unwared. Many youth who are rejected actually feel like their parents and family members hate them.

Some Family Behaviors that Increase Your LGBT Child's Risk for Health & Mental Health Problems

**Behaviors to Avoid**
- Telling, coercing, or physically hurting your child because of their LGBT identity
- Verbal harassment or name-calling because of your child’s LGBT identity
- Excluding LGBT youth from family and family activities
- Blocking access to LGBT friends, events, & resources
- Blaming your child when they are discriminated against because of their LGBT identity
- Presuming your child to be more (or less) masculine or feminine
- Telling your child that God will punish them because they are gay
- Telling your child that you are ashamed of them or that how they look or act will shame the family
- Making your child keep their LGBT identity a secret in the family and not letting them talk about it

Parents may react with anger, fear, sadness or disgust when they learn that their child is gay or transgender. Some parents or family members may call their children names or get into physical fights with them. Others may prevent their children from attending support groups for gay and transgender youth, or from learning about their gay or transgender identity. Or parents and foster parents may prevent them from attending family events because how the gay or transgender youth looks or behaves is harmful and embarrassing to them.

Our research identified many behaviors that parents and caregivers use to reject their child’s gay or transgender identity. We found that some of these rejecting behaviors—such as blocking access to gay friends and resources or preventing a gay youth from attending family events—were just as harmful as physically beating a gay or transgender child.

Instead, these behaviors that parents and caregivers may use to try to protect their children from harm put them at very high risk for suicide, depression and other health problems.

A list of harmful behaviors that increase your gay or transgender child's risk for health and mental health problems in adulthood is included in the box on page 8. These behaviors should always be avoided.

Uncertainty and Concern

Many parents feel conflicted when they learn that their child is gay. They are unsure how to react. They may feel disappointed, concerned and don’t know how to help their gay or transgender child. They may respond cautiously since they don’t want to encourage their child’s gay or transgender identity, but they also don’t want to push their child away.

Parents often fear that others may try to hurt their gay or transgender children. And fear motivates many parents to react negatively to their children’s LGBT identity—to try to protect their children. Fear motivates many parents, foster parents and caregivers to try to discourage or change their child’s gay or transgender identity.

The most important way that parents, families and foster families can help their gay or transgender children is to support that child. This helps their LGBT child develop a deep sense of self-worth and self-esteem. For many families, this may not seem possible—at first. But building a child’s inner strength by helping them learn to value themselves can help your gay or transgender child deal with discrimination and rejection from others. How you react to your gay or transgender children has a deep and lasting impact on their lives. It affects your relationship with your child and your family. And our research shows that your reactions affect your child’s health and well-being.

Our research has identified many ways to express support that can help your gay or transgender child and show them that you love them, even if...
Faith-based Family Education Materials

- Developing materials for families from a wide range of religious backgrounds
  - Mormon, Catholic, Jewish, evangelical, etc.
- Present findings in the context of religious beliefs and values
- Help families address perception that they need to choose between their child and their faith

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FAP Family Video Series – series in development

Always My Son – A family’s journey to support their gay son

One of a series of short documentaries to help diverse families support their LGBT children.

Premiere Screening at Frameline's San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival:
Friday, June 18, 2010 – 7pm, Victoria Theater
2961-16th Street, San Francisco

“Always My Son” – will be disseminated later in 2012 with discussion materials. We’re raising funds for 6 other short documentaries, based on FAP research, that show the journey of ethnically and religiously diverse families to support their LGBT children.

http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/family-videos
FAPrisk Screener

Provider’s Guide for Using the FAPrisk Screener
For Family Rejection & Related Health Risks in LGBT Youth
Family Acceptance Project
San Francisco State University

Provider Toolbox for Assessing Risk for Family Rejection & Related Health Risks in LGBT Youth

Contents

- FAPrisk Screener for Family Rejection & Related Health Risks in LGBT Youth - a research-grounded screening instrument based on findings from the Family Acceptance Project. This tool identifies and assesses family and provider behaviors that are highly predictive of negative health and mental health outcomes for LGBT youth. These include family rejection, family separation, problems related to substance use, and other factors associated with a history of mental health problems.

- FAPrisk Scoring & Follow Up Care - a guide for using the FAPrisk Screener in clinical settings. This guide provides instructions for administering and scoring the screener, assessing findings with youth, and developing a family-based follow-up plan.

- FAP Family Education Workbooks - a family education materials to help providers and families identify and address family rejection and related health risks.

- FAP Family Education Workshops - a series of workshops for providers and families to learn about family rejection and related health risks.

Scores & Risk Indicators

Agency & on-site training to implement screening tool across disciplines and systems of care

Screening tool to quickly identify LGBT youth who are experiencing family rejection & related health risks to provide immediate intervention & care
FAP Family Intervention Development Components

Strategic interventions to help families decrease rejection & promote support for their LGBT children & adolescents:

1. **Education, engagement & community awareness** to help providers and agencies shift from exclusively youth-focused to family-related approaches

2. **Psycho-educational, cognitive-behavioral and peer support strategies** to help ethnically and religiously diverse families support their LGBT children

3. **Test, evaluate and pilot** these strategies for use in multiple settings (e.g., primary care, mental health, school settings, family service agencies, child welfare, community programs, etc.)

4. **Consultation & training** for agencies, institutions & providers across the U.S. & other countries
FAP Research & Work with Schools

- Training for school-based providers & educators
- Consultation & training with superintendents, administrators & school boards
- Parent / family education & engagement
  - Link research with practice & student well-being
  - Long term impact; gender expression; GSAs
  - Emerging policy issues – e.g., parent notification & bullying
## LGBT School Victimization & Young Adult Health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Level of Victimization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>2.6 times</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide attempt</td>
<td>5.6 times</td>
<td>p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide attempt required medical care</td>
<td>5.6 times</td>
<td>p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD diagnosis</td>
<td>2.5 times</td>
<td>p &lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV risk (past 6 mos.)</td>
<td>2.3 times</td>
<td>p &lt; .05</td>
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Family Support

Parental, family and caregiver commitment to stand up for LGBT youth in schools, families & communities – is an important protective factor
Key Messages for Families

- A little change in how families respond to their LGBT children can make a difference in their children’s health, mental health & well-being, and can help decrease family conflict.

- Families and caregivers’ words, actions & behaviors have a physical & emotional impact on their LGBT children.
Connect Youth & Families to Community Resources

- Parents and caregivers need access to positive family role models to help learn ways to support and care for their LGBT and gender-variant children.

- Identify community and online resources & make referrals for LGBT youth and families to provide support & education.
Immediate Steps to Open Dialogue & Promote Family Engagement

- Ask Adolescents about their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression
- Ask LGBTQ Adolescents about how their family reacts to their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression
- Encourage LGBTQ Youth to Talk about their families; share info about FAP research findings and the ability of diverse families to learn to support their LGBTQ children
- FAPrisk Screener can quickly identify LGBTQ youth who are experiencing high levels of family rejection for immediate intervention & follow up
- Provide FAP Educational Materials & Info for families with LGBTQ youth
- Tell Parents about Negative Reactions that are linked with serious health & mental health problems for their LGBT children
- Help Families Increase Supportive Behaviors that help protect against risk and promote their LGBT children’s well-being
- Take an Inventory of local services for families with LGBT and gender variant youth & for LGBT adolescents
- Refer Families for peer support and counselling
FAP Research & Family Support Approach Offers Multiple Opportunities for Reducing Risk & Promoting Well-Being

- Shifts focus from only preventing harm for LGBT youth to promoting well-being
- Structural intervention approach – impacts multiple outcomes with one low-cost, low-tech, culturally competent approach
- Strengthens families; keeps youth connected; increases family & community engagement across systems, including schools and faith communities; helps build civil society

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MULTI-SYSTEM INTERVENTIONS

Family Intervention Approach Can Prevent & Address Multiple Adverse Health & Social Outcomes for LGBT Children & Youth Across Systems
Policy Implications

Some of the impact of FAP findings:

- Investing in promoting wellness & positive development of LGBT and gender variant children & youth

- Changing approach to:
  - prevention, services & care for LGBTQ and gender variant adolescents in health, mental health & social service settings
    - introducing a family-related approach to engage & empower families & caregivers
  - working with LGBT and gender variant youth in custodial care – foster care & juvenile justice (pre, during & post)
  - Re-framing services for homeless & out-of-home youth to include families
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http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/