



AnytownArizona
Developing Leaders. Embracing Diversity.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION EXERCISE

GOALS: To reduce homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation and create straight allies for GLBT people.

KEY LEARNINGS:

- ◆ Raised awareness of the experiences of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and questioning youth
- ◆ Understand homophobia as an unrealistic fear of or generalized negative attitude based on sexual orientation or gender identity
- ◆ Increase ability to distinguish between myths and reality in sexual orientation

MATERIALS NEEDED: None except chairs as props.

TIME: 1 ½- 2 hours.

INFORMATION FOR PRESENTORS:

One-third (33%) of adolescent suicide attempts are made due to an individual's dealing with issues surrounding his or her sexuality.

GLBT students are:

- 2-5 times more likely to skip school for fear of their safety.
- Twice as likely to binge drink alcohol.
- Three times more likely to have been threatened with a weapon at school.

The youth that is struggling with "coming out": generally has no one to turn to that has that experience in his or her lives (other family members, for example). Loneliness, depression, homelessness (as high as 30-40% of the homeless youth population in large cities) and substance abuse are prevalent factors that endanger the lives of this population. Often youth that do acknowledge their sexuality are asked to leave home (26%), shunned by friends, ridiculed in school and can be made the target of discrimination, abuse and prejudice.

Typically, students hear the terms faggot, dyke, queer, homo, flamer and gay used as put-downs or as a means to insult and debase individuals. According to recent polls:

- 90% of GLBT students report hearing homophobic remarks in their schools
- 37% reported hearing homophobic statements made by faculty and staff.
- 69% reported experiencing some form of harassment or violence
- 47% reported experiences of sexual harassment
- 28% reported experiences of physical harassment
- 42% did not feel safe in their schools

In the state of Arizona, individuals may be denied housing or employment solely based on sexual orientation. It is illegal for a teacher to discuss homosexuality in any way that endorses the lifestyle or portrays it as anything other than contrary to heterosexuality.

PRESENTATIONS: - include BOTH skits in the presentation.

Skit #1- Day-time Talk Show (10-15 minutes)

(This exercise was developed using the "Heterosexual Questionnaire" written by Martin Rochlin)

Premise: Invite delegates to imagine that they live in a world where homosexuality is the predominate sexual orientation in society. Guys have pictures of Brad Pitt and Matt Damon on their walls, for girls it's Angelina Jolie and Beyonce. It is a world in which people expect to see same gender couples walking hand-in-hand or talking over a candlelit dinner at a fancy restaurant (be sure to remind them that this is just a visualization. Buying into it helps in the processing...). Heterosexuality is thought to be wrong, and people who are straight fear for their jobs and safety.

Set-up: Six chairs for the guests

1. Counselors should prepare the following roles for skit presentation.
 - a. Talk-show host (no Jerry Springer...think Ricki Lake, Montel Williams, Oprah Winfrey)
 - b. One male/female couple
 - c. Gay couple and one Lesbian couple. *(It is very important that through the "show" these characters are not stereotypes such as effeminate, limp-wristed, lisping men or hyper masculine, truck driving women.)*

2. The host of the talk show will introduce the topic of the show after introducing him/herself by saying that our guests today are two individuals that are brave enough to come out of the closet, they are a heterosexual couple, coming out for the first time. The host then addresses the couple and asks a few questions from the list below. The couple should discuss growing up feeling isolated, alone, looking up "heterosexual" in the school dictionary. They should note feeling "different" about themselves at an early age. The Gay and Lesbian couple should be "appalled" by the straight couple. They should bring up the following points about the couple: it is unnatural; it is sick, unacceptable in society, etc. They could use slang terms such as "breeders" and "Heteros" as a derogatory way to address the couple. Brainstorm with the counselors as to what would be effective.

QUESTIONS (Choose several at least 8-10 from the list. See list of questions attached)

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
2. When and how did you first decide that you were a heterosexual?
3. Is it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase that you may just grow out of?
4. Is it possible that your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of others of the same sex?
5. If you've never slept with a person of the same sex, is it possible that all you need is a good gay/lesbian lover?
6. To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies?
7. Why do you heterosexuals feel compelled to seduce others into your lifestyle?
8. Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality? Can't you just be who you are and keep quiet?
9. Would you want your children to be heterosexual, knowing all the problems they'd face?
10. A disproportionate majority (*side note: the actual figure is 98%*) of child molesters are heterosexuals. Do you consider it safe to expose ~~you~~^{our} children to heterosexual teachers?
11. Even with all the societal support marriage receives, the divorce rate is spiraling. Why are there so few stable relationships among heterosexuals?
12. Why do heterosexuals place so much emphasis on sex?
13. Considering the menace of overpopulation, how could the human race survive if everyone were heterosexual?
14. Could you trust a heterosexual therapist to be objective? Don't you fear that the therapist might be inclined to influence you in the direction of his/her own learnings?
15. How can you become a whole person if you limit yourself to compulsive exclusive heterosexuality and fail to develop your natural, healthy homosexual potential?
16. There seem to be very few happy heterosexuals. Techniques have been developed that might enable you to change if you really want to. Have you considered electro-shock therapy?

17. How do you feel knowing that the attacks Sept. 11th were caused by the acceptance of the heterosexual lifestyle in our country? (Based on comments made by Jerry Falwell on Sept. 13th, 2001 claiming that the attacks were retribution for gays, feminists and the ACLU.)

3. as the interview progresses, it is interesting to have audience members (including delegates) ask questions. (**A word of caution:** Select delegate participants prior to the program, giving them questions from the list. If that is not done, you may have to process other issues that the counselors may not be willing or able to handle at that point. An experienced advisor or counselor is the best choice for the host, because they can control the questioning.)

4. The interview ends with the host going to commercial break. At that point, briefly **ORID** the skit:
OBSERVATIONAL:
What did you notice about the questions posed to the straight couple?
How did the straight couple answer the concerns raised by the audience?
REFLECTIVE:
Have you ever heard similar statements or questions stated toward Gays or Lesbians?
INTERPRETIVE:
How would you respond if the same questions were asked of you?

Skit # 2 – Who Am I? Or “HERMAN’S HEAD” (5 minutes)

Premise: The delegates will “peek-in” on the thought process of one individual, male or female struggling with his/her sexuality. This skit will show the confusion, isolation despair and helplessness that may lead a person to unhealthy ways of dealing with their sexuality.

Set-up: One chair for lead character.

1. Counselors should prepare the following roles for skit presentation:
 - A. Lead character
 - B. Five representatives of their society:
 - Parents
 - Church/religion
 - Best Friend
 - Current opposite gender relationship

Potential same gender relationship

2. Begin skit with lead character talking to self, addressing the following concerns: What is wrong with them: Why am I so confused? What is going on? What are these feelings that I am having?
3. The five representatives stand in a semi-circle behind the lead character. One by one, the representatives of society give their opinions (remember, these are the lead character's impression of each response, so extreme reactions are not unfounded. Each character should include a way to introduce themselves, i.e. – we are your parents, how could you do this to us?)

Parents: concern for their happiness, not knowing who the lead character is anymore, not recognizing them as their son/daughter, sad that they won't have grandchildren...etc..

Church/religion: distaste for "choice". Unwelcome in the church, condemned as a sinner...etc..

Best friend: concerned about whether or not they are attracted to them, if that means that they couldn't be friends anymore, being disgusted by the potential relationships

Current opposite gender relationship: confused by sudden disinterest, angry that lead character has lied" to them all this time; sad that they won't be together as a couple.

Potential same gender relationship: eager to get to know lead character, arrogant about other character's responses, thinks they know what is best for the lead character

4. After each aspect of society speaks, they all begin to bombard the lead character with their points of view. The noise reached a crescendo and the lead character yells "I can't take it anymore" or something dramatic that expresses confusion, frustration and anger. Lights out at that moment of silence following character's "eruption". (*Note: it has been powerful to include a toy gun as a prop at the end that the character takes out. No actual indication of suicide is given, but the potential is there to raise awareness. This may not be appropriate for all populations, however. Another group that may be represented is a fellow gang member, which brings a different perspective to the Best Friend character*)

5. When the lights come back up, begin processing the activity.

OBSERVATIONAL:

What did you see happening in this skit?

How did the straight couple answer the concerns raised by the audience?

REFLECTIVE:

Are there similarities between this skit and the previous one?

INTERPRETIVE:

What choices do you think the lead character has open to him/her?

CLOSURE:

INTERPRETIVE:

What have you learned?

DECISIONAL:

What can you do with your learnings when you return home?

PANEL DISCUSSION: (45-60 Minutes)

Invite "out" staff and delegates to participate in a panel discussion about their experiences as a member of the GLBT community. Remind delegates of the norms for camp and set guidelines for type of questions that can be asked. Panel members should be given an opportunity to make an opening statement about the issues that affect them most in terms of being a member of the GLBT community.

Thank delegates for their respect and participation during the activity.

Final Thoughts – points that may be made by panel.

1. Share the facts listed in the beginning of this paper with the delegates.
2. Refer to previous activities, i.e. Words that Hurt, Five Levels, Violence Continuum and how the panel interprets those activities.
3. Elicit thoughts and feelings from the delegates in regard to prejudice and discrimination as it relates to this population.
4. Share with the delegates a poem by Walt Whitman or Rita Mae Browne.
5. Share with the delegates the song "Everything Possible" by the Flirtations. (This makes a nice conclusion/closure for this segment)
6. Encourage delegates to take offensive terms out of their vocabulary (explain the origin of the term "faggot").