

Introduction

Thank you for volunteering with our youth programming. This training will cover some key topics that will inform and improve your ability to provide quality programming to teenagers.

This training will cover:

1. LGBTQ+ Youth Culture
2. Adolescent (Teen) Development
3. Volunteer and Participant Boundaries

Queer Youth Culture

Language is important, and sometimes it is hard to know what to say. So, first, what does LGBTQ+ community mean? The acronym stands for **L**esbian **G**ay **B**isexual **T**ransgender **Q**ueer/**Q**uestioning + All the other gender identities and sexual orientations that are not covered by LGBTQ. Members of the LGBTQ+ community sometimes identify as “Queer”, or “of the Queer Community”. This is especially true of younger generations. It is a reclaiming of a word that was once used to do harm and embracing a life of liberation. “Queer” Is a term that’s use is reserved for people who identify as LGBTQ+, it is generally safer for allies to use “LBGTQ+”.

Pronouns are a means of gender expression. Participants may use pronouns that you don't expect, or haven't heard of before. And that's okay. It is important to use and respect whatever pronouns a participant uses. As we are working with LGBTQ+ youth, this is a time of experimentation and exploration in their lives. Names and pronouns may change over time in our program. And we adjust accordingly. It is important to make sure we acknowledge and respect the identities our participants present as. If you don't understand what a person's identity is, this is not the time or place to ask about that. This is a space for participants to be themselves, not spokespeople for other members of the LGBTQ+ community. At the end of this training there are resources about LGBTQ+ communities.

Important aspects of current LGBTQ+ experience to note include:

- Politics/legislation that affect or target the LGBTQ+ community
- Lack of representation of healthy identity and relationships in the media
- Anti-LGBTQ+ stigma and bullying Members of the LGBTQ+

Adolescent Development

Adolescent development is the developmental transition to adulthood including social, emotional, and intellectual skills. At this point in their lives and development, socializing and forming connections are the natural priorities for teens. It is important to remember that those priorities are not the same as an adults, and that’s okay. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic’s isolation period and other disturbances to

routine, the participants that we serve may not have developed their social and emotional skills at the same rate as teens before the pandemic.

In addition to this, we need to keep in mind the neurodivergent community. The term “neurodivergent” describes people whose brain differences affect how their brain works. This includes conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, anxiety, depression, and more. These differences can cause neurodivergent individuals to behave differently in social situations and interpersonal relationships than we may expect. For example, some neurodivergent individuals may have difficulty picking up on social cues and responding appropriately. Neurodivergent individuals may also struggle with emotional regulation, i.e. having disproportionate emotional reaction to events, as well as poor impulse control that can result in rash or disruptive behavior.

In short, there are a lot of things going on in our participants brains! They are still learning and growing, and sometimes it’s hard to remember that these humans aren’t adults yet. It is our role to practice patience, redirect, and show best behavior practices. At this stage in development, teens are still learning how to navigate social situations and what appropriate boundaries are.

Volunteer/Participant Boundaries

The participants are future adults and it is our responsibility to show them what appropriate boundaries and behaviors are. A boundary is an imaginary line that separates us from each other to keep us healthy. We have boundaries to protect our physical space and boundaries to protect our emotions. As adults and authority figures there is a power imbalance in the relationship with the participants. That is natural and also something to be recognized because it means that our actions have more meaning, are more memorable, and set even more of an example. We are role models when we show up for these teens and everything we do we have to lead by an example of appropriate behavior.

Volunteers should not have contact with the participants outside program events and activities. That is unless you have a designated role from Leadership to be the contact person of the program. You should never be one-on-one with a participant. Ideally, there should be at least two adults with at least one participant. In general, there should be 8 participants for every adult in the room.

Adults should not be initiating physical contact with participants. If a participant initiate’s contact, keep it short, keep it simple, and keep it safe. Safe touches can include hugs that last no longer than five seconds, pats on the back, and an arm around the shoulder. The following are absolutely not permitted:

- Kissing
- Touching beneath the shoulders
- Continuing to do something a participant says makes them uncomfortable.

If a participant tells you that a different adult volunteer did something that made them feel uncomfortable, tell the leader in charge.

Emotional boundaries are just as important as physical boundaries. It is okay, encouraged even, to empathize with a participant if they have a problem. However, it is not our problem to solve. The participant should be encouraged to talk to the proper adult. We are not trained therapists- and even if you are a trained therapist, this is not your practice. Not only are we not therapists, but neither are the participants. They do not need to know our problems because at the end of the day, we're there for them. Not the other way around. If a participant tells you about abuse, neglect, etc, you must tell the leader of the program. They are mandated reporters and will take the appropriate actions to keep our participants safe.

Finally, as we've mentioned before in this training, what we say matters. We strive to use affirming language at all times. That doesn't just mean using someone's correct pronouns. It means that we only use language that lifts people up. Demeaning and derogatory words do not lift people up and are not acceptable in our programming. Participants may have different beliefs than yours. At times it may be appropriate to end the conversation based on relevance, but we shouldn't be shutting down participants with regards to their belief.

Closing

Now that you have completed this training please complete the questionnaire and give it to your leader. If you would like to learn more about the topics we have covered today please see the provided resources.

Resources

LGBTQ+ Resources

[Glossary of Terms: LGBTQ \(Glaad\)](#)

[Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity \(youth.gov\)](#)

[Understanding Pronouns \(LGBT Life Center\)](#)

[A Guide to Gender Identity Terms \(NPR\)](#)

[What does LGBTQ+ Mean \(Very Well Mind\)](#)

Boundaries Resource

[What Teens Need to Know about Boundaries \(Very Well Family\)](#)

Adolescent Development Resource

[Adolescent Development \(youth.gov\)](#)

Adult Volunteer Training Reflection Questions

Your name _____

1. What is something that stuck out to you in the training?
2. What is the significance of addressing someone with the pronouns that someone uses?
3. You're playing a game and one of the teenage participants keeps excitedly interrupting what others are saying and doing. How do you practice patience, redirect, and show best behavior practices for that teen, and all of the participants at your table?
4. When is it okay for an adult volunteer to be one-on-one with a participant?

You can fill out this reflection sheet or just jot down your answers. You can give your reflections to Dixie in person or send it to fumcyandf@gmail.com.

