



Chapter 4: Strategy 2C—Safe and Supportive Environments (SSE)



SSE Rationale

Sexual health education (SHE) and sexual health services (SHS) address adolescents' knowledge and skills directly related to sexual health. In contrast, the safe and supportive environments (SSE) strategy focuses on factors within school and family environments that act as protective factors and reduce risk for HIV, other STDs, and unintended pregnancy.¹ Addressing these factors often involves system-level changes that yield substantial and sustained impact.²

School connectedness; parental monitoring; and parent-adolescent communication, both general and specifically about sex (see definitions in glossary),^{3,4} are three specific factors known to promote behaviors that reduce HIV and other STDs among young people (e.g., delayed sexual initiation and/or condom use). Promoting these protective factors has resulted in positive, long-term sexual health outcomes.^{5,6} Moreover, these factors have been linked to reductions in substance use, violence victimization and perpetration, and behaviors and experiences associated with adolescent sexual risk.⁷ They have also been linked to academic achievement, an outcome particularly salient for schools. We also have evidence-informed strategies that schools can feasibly implement to address these factors.⁸⁻¹⁰ Four of the five required SSE activities address school connectedness, and one activity focuses on promoting both parental monitoring and parent-adolescent communication.

In addition to directly contributing to HIV and other STD prevention, creating SSEs establishes a context necessary for the other approaches (SHE and SHS) to be effective. Students who do not feel safe and connected to school may be more likely to be absent and thus less likely to receive SHE and school-based support accessing SHS. Even for students in school, SHE delivered in the context of a poorly managed classroom will likely be ineffective. Moreover, specific SSE-related activities can potentially be leveraged to support SHE and SHS activities. As an example (discussed further in this chapter), gay-straight alliances or genders and sexualities alliances (GSAs) can be used to connect students to health services.

Although activities to support LGBT youth cut across the three Component 2 strategies, SSE in particular addresses this population of adolescents. Two of the five required SSE activities involve practices to support LGBT youth, because these youth are disproportionately likely to experience a negative school environment and report negative health behaviors and experiences. For example, LGBT students are more likely to be bullied at school than their heterosexual and cisgender peers.^{11,12} LGBT youth may also experience rejection and/or lack of family support at home,¹³ making a supportive school environment all the more important. There is growing attention to the variety of ways that school-related protective factors can help LGBT youth thrive,¹⁴ suggesting that promoting a safe and supportive school environment is a promising approach to support the health of this population.



SSE Overview

Table 4.1 provides a bulleted list of required and additional SSE activities that funded local education agencies (LEA) are expected to implement. Activities are organized according to the three overarching Component 2 domains: strengthen staff capacity, increase student access to programs and services, and engage parents and community partners.

Specific activities relevant to each domain were selected based on evidence of effectiveness, feasibility considerations, and potential reach. In addition to required activities, LEA may choose to implement two additional activities related to supporting efforts to engage parents. These activities have been designated as additional activities because they are particularly targeted and/or resource intensive efforts that complement the required activity of disseminating resources to parents. LEA should ensure that all required activities are implemented to scale before undertaking additional activities. Required and additional activities are described in more detail in the section that follows.

Table 4.1. SSE Required and Additional Activities Organized by Domains

| Domains | Required SSE Activities | Additional SSE Activities |
|---|---|--|
| Strengthen staff capacity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide professional development to teachers on classroom management annually. ■ Provide professional development to all school staff on supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth annually. | |
| Increase student access to programs and services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implement mentoring, service learning, and/or other positive youth development programs for students, and/or connect students to such community-based programs. ■ Establish or enhance student-led clubs that support LGBT youth (often known as Gay-Straight Alliances or Genders and Sexualities Alliances). | |
| Engage parent and community partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Disseminate resources to parents/caregivers on parental monitoring and parent-adolescent communication (generally and specifically about sex). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Disseminate resources specifically relevant to parents of LGBT students. ■ Implement and/or connect parents to skill-building parenting programs. |

Organizations funded under Component 3C are expected to provide capacity-building assistance to LEA to support implementation of each required activity. Boxes throughout this chapter highlight the unique role that Component 3C recipients can play in supporting Component 2 recipients for each activity. Component 3 recipients cannot choose to support only select activities.

Timing of Required Activities

SSE activities do not need to be implemented in a particular order. LEA are expected to implement SSE professional development (PD) activities annually and disseminate information to parents semi-annually. Timing for implementing positive youth development programs and student-led clubs that support LGBT youth will vary based on LEA capacity and experience in these areas. However, progress related to these activities is expected each year.

Activity-specific Guidance

For each required and additional activity, we indicate the purpose of the activity in relation to intermediate program outcomes and summarize the rationale for implementing the activity as part of school-based HIV and other STD prevention. We describe activities and outline key considerations for implementation based on existing science and practice. For each activity, we cite specific resources to facilitate implementation. Where relevant, we highlight connections to SHE and SHS activities and identify these with the “opportunities for efficiency” icon.

Strengthen Staff Capacity



Required activity: Provide professional development to teachers on classroom management annually.

Rationale

The purpose of this activity is to **increase school connectedness**. Research suggests that effective classroom management is associated with higher levels of school connectedness.^{15,16} Drawing on this

evidence, CDC’s strategy guide for promoting school connectedness includes “effective classroom management” as a recommended strategy.⁸ The benefits of effective classroom management extend to academic-related outcomes, including decreasing disruptive behaviors and increasing academic learning and engagement.¹⁷ Research indicates that classroom management skills for teachers are fundamental to teacher effectiveness.¹⁷ However, teachers have expressed a need for PD on implementing classroom management strategies,¹⁸ underscoring the importance of this activity.

Activity description

Classroom management is “the process by which teachers and schools create and maintain appropriate behavior of students in classroom settings.”¹⁹ Best practices for classroom management include^{20,21}

- establishing rules, routines, and expectations.
- reinforcing positive behavior through praise.
- consistently enforcing consequences for misbehavior.
- maximizing structure.
- fostering student engagement by including opportunities for active student participation.

PD on classroom management should focus on knowledge and skills related to best practices. Teachers should receive specific suggested actions and resources (e.g., student behavior case study examples) for implementing best practices and have opportunities to practice strategies and receive feedback. As feasible, LEA should implement PD using active learning strategies, including classroom observations and feedback, as well as professional coaching to build classroom management skills. These intensive strategies can be complemented with more traditional, didactic approaches that outline best practices and provide teachers with tools and resources.

Key consideration: Consequences vs. punishment

Although appropriate discipline is a component of classroom management, it is important to note that enforcing consequences for misbehavior is distinct from punishment. Consequences are a logical outcome for inappropriate action that help students learn from poor behavior. In contrast, punishment is an unpleasant outcome that is not necessarily connected to the inappropriate action and does not facilitate learning.²² Effective classroom management is about promoting pro-social behavior, which is accomplished in part by responding to inappropriate behavior in a positive, non-punitive way. For example, responses to student name-calling may involve immediate verbal or written apology to peers and reinforcement of classroom expectations rather than detention or a behavioral citation. “Zero tolerance” approaches to discipline have not been shown to be effective.²³

Key consideration: Classroom management in sexual health education

Practices and strategies for effective classroom management are relevant to teachers of all subject areas. However, SHE teachers may need to pay particular attention to establishing and enforcing classroom rules and expectations given the potential for inappropriate behavior associated with discussing sensitive topics. SHE teachers also need to be prepared to appropriately address difficult or sensitive questions from students. Doing so may involve²⁴

- using clear, concise language.
- acknowledging and promoting use of correct vocabulary.
- using non-judgmental body language.
- avoiding personal opinion.
- checking for understanding among students.

It is also important that teachers not disclose personal information or sexual behaviors with students and maintain clear boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate topics.²⁴



Key consideration: Leveraging related efforts

LEA can implement classroom management PD as part of related initiatives. For example, classroom management is one component of a school-wide approach to promoting pro-social behavior, referred to as Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS). Likewise, social-emotional learning (SEL) is a complementary approach to a curriculum and school climate focused on fostering appropriate social and emotional development. LEA should assess current activities (and funding) related to PBIS and SEL and identify opportunities for integrating PD on classroom management. All PD should be implemented in accordance with CDC's guidance on professional development practices (See Chapter 5).

Component 3C recipients can

- Identify assessment processes and tools and lead LEA working with SBHCs in efforts to identify areas for improving quality care. These processes would be done with health systems running SBHCs; thus 3B recipients will need to facilitate quality partnerships between organizations.

Resources

Specific resources to support classroom management PD include

- **Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. *Classroom Management Resources.*** This landing page includes links to articles, books, webinars, and online learning modules on classroom management. <http://www.ascd.org/research-a-topic/classroom-management-resources.aspx> (\$)
- **American Psychological Association. *Classroom Management: Teacher Modules.*** This resource provides brief articles for teachers on topics relevant to classroom management (e.g., positive feedback), as well as practical implementation tools. <http://www.apa.org/education/k12/classroom-management.aspx>
- **Fred Jones. *Tools for Teaching.*** This well-respected professional development group offers a variety of resources on classroom management, some available for free (e.g., 12-week self-guided professional development course) and others for a fee. <http://www.fredjones.com/resources> (\$)
- **Advocates for Youth. *Rights, Respect, Responsibility. A K-12 Sexuality Education Curriculum. Classroom Management: Answering Students' Questions.*** This specific module discusses classroom management within the context of SHE. <https://advocatesforyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/3rscurric/teachers-guide.pdf>
- **Wong HK, Wong RT. *The First Days of School.*** This book provides a guide for teachers on classroom management and designing lessons for academic success. <https://www.amazon.com/First-Days-School-Effective-Teacher/dp/0962936022>



Required activity: Provide professional development to all school staff on supporting LGBT youth.

Rationale

The purpose of this activity is to **increase school connectedness**, particularly for LGBT youth. LGBT youth are disproportionately likely to experience violence at school and have lower levels of school connectedness.^{25,26} Many organizations, including CDC, GLSEN, the American Psychological Association (APA), and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) have identified PD with school staff as a best practice for improving safety and school connectedness overall for LGBT youth. In fact, research suggests that PD is one of the most impactful school-based practices to support the health and well-being of LGBT youth.²⁷

Activity description

PD delivered to teachers and school staff annually should address fundamental knowledge about

- the concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity, including appropriate language.
- health risks faced by LGBT youth.
- effects of the school environment on the health of LGBT youth.
- supportive school policies and practices (e.g., GSAs, safe spaces, inclusive curricula).
- the unique needs of transgender and gender diverse students.

Awareness alone may not result in implementation of policies and practices that support LGBT youth.²⁸ In addition to increasing knowledge, PD should enhance relevant skills. For example, given that LGBT youth are more likely to experience bullying, harassment, and violence compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers,¹¹ it is imperative that school staff have bystander intervention skills combined with a willingness to act on them. PD should thus involve critical reflection that helps school staff recognize and challenge both individually held and broader normative beliefs about sexuality and gender identity that can contribute to a negative school environment for LGBT youth.²⁹

In terms of implementation, evidence suggests that brief trainings can be effective in changing school professionals' beliefs and self-efficacy related to supporting LGBT youth.^{30,31} LEA may want to consider innovative PD delivery approaches, including online modules that can be completed in multiple, short sessions. All PD should be implemented in accordance with CDC's guidance on PD practices (See Chapter 5).

Key consideration: Leveraging other PD events

There are opportunities to integrate PD relevant to meeting the needs of LGBT youth in other PD events. For example, PD on SHE should address strategies for ensuring that information is relevant to LGBT youth (See Chapter 2). Likewise, PD on implementing anti-bullying policies should address bullying victimization based on perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. PD related to SHS should help school nurses and other school staff connect LGBT students to other youth-friendly providers with experience serving this population.



Component 3C recipients can

- Develop a process for assessing PD needs.
- Identify existing PD materials.
- Adapt existing PD materials, as needed.
- Develop PD materials, as needed.
- Implement a train-the-trainer model to develop a cadre of trainers.

Resources

PD curricula for teachers and other school staff on best practices for supporting LGBT youth have been developed. Examples include

- **American Psychological Association. *RESPECT Workshop*.** This workshop provides pre-service and in-service education for middle and high school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, school social workers, and other specialized instructional support professionals. <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/training/respect-workshop.aspx>
- **Los Angeles LGBT Center. *Out for Safe School Campaign*.** In addition to offering badges to identify allies, this campaign also includes a PD program to facilitate the creation of safe spaces for LGBT youth. <https://lalgbtcenter.org/out-for-safe-schools/training-coaching>
- **GLSEN. *Professional Development*.** These materials include toolkits, webinars, and workshops for educators. <https://www.glsen.org/educate/professional-development>
- **The Trevor Project. *Step In, Speak Up!*** This collaborative program between the Trevor Project and Kognito Interactive is a 30-minute online interactive training. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/about/programs-services/broken-step-in-speak-up/#sm.000ri4hby1dypepywz62l4lacj85k> (\$)

Other resources exist that may inform PD content and help facilitate implementation of practices discussed in PD events. The following examples can be distributed during PD events:

- **Gender Spectrum. *Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools*.** A resource guide for supporting transgender students. <https://www.genderspectrum.org/staging/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Schools-in-Transition-2015.pdf>
- **GLSEN. *Safe Spaces Kit*.** An implementation resource on establishing safe spaces. <https://www.glsen.org/participate/programs/safe-space>
- **GLSEN. *Changing the Game: For Adults*.** An implementation resource on making sports more inclusive for students; there is an educator-specific version. <https://www.glsen.org/sports/adults>

Increase Student Access to Programs and Services



Required activity: Implement mentoring, service learning, and/or other positive youth development programs for students, and/or connect students to such community-based programs.

Rationale

The purpose of this activity is to **increase school connectedness**. Positive youth development (PYD) programs strengthen young people's sense of identity; belief in future; self-regulation; self-efficacy; and social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competence. They also provide youth with networks of supportive adults.³² Like school connectedness, these factors are considered to be "protective factors" because they are assets (internal to individuals) and resources (external to individuals) that counteract, reduce, or eliminate the adverse effects of risk factors.³³ Unlike many prevention programs that focus solely on risk behaviors, PYD programs aim to develop and enhance positive characteristics of individuals and their surrounding context. By increasing protective factors rather than focusing on risk behaviors related to a single adverse outcome, PYD programs have benefits across a range of health and academic outcomes. Most salient to the current funding, these programs have been found to be effective in reducing sexual risk behaviors, HIV, other STDs, and unintended pregnancy.^{32,34} PYD programs also have the potential to prevent substance use and violence behaviors that contribute to HIV and other STD risk.^{35,36} Finally, PYD programs are associated with improvements in academic performance, which strengthens the rationale for school-based implementation.³⁷

Activity description

Although definitions of PYD vary, a collaboration of 20 federal departments and agencies that support youth has defined this concept as

"an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths."³⁸

LEA are expected to implement PYD programs in schools or connect students to programs in the community through linkage and referral. We recommend that LEA choose either a school-based approach or a linkage and referral approach rather than trying to implement both models. The school-based approach involves identifying and, if necessary, adapting effective PYD programs. Developing a new program is discouraged considering existing programs and limited time and resources. Implementation will involve training facilitators/program leadership, advertising the program to students, and conducting program activities with fidelity. Given that implementing PYD programs can be resource intensive, LEA may want to consider facilitating school-community partnerships to connect students to community

partners implementing PYD programs instead of leading PYD programs (see key consideration below on community partnerships). Doing so will require establishing or utilizing existing partnerships with community resources and developing or adapting a process for linkage and referral to trusted organizations. The process is then implemented through staff training and identification of and/or advertisement to students.

Key consideration: Type of PYD program(s)

A recent review of school-based PYD programs suggests three main implementation approaches:³⁹

- Curriculum-based methods
- Mentorship programs
- Youth leadership/service learning programs

Some school-based SHE curricula are considered to be PYD programs. Therefore, SSE implementation of PYD focuses on mentoring and service learning programs.

CDC's strategy guide for promoting school connectedness specifically identifies mentoring and service learning as student-level programs that can increase school connectedness.⁸ Mentoring and service learning programs have also both been associated with reductions in adolescent sexual risk.^{40,41} Below we describe specific characteristics for both types of programs. Across these approaches, effective programs are long-lasting (e.g., lasting throughout the course of the academic year) and adhere closely to the original program design.^{36,39} In fact, even when not implemented in the context of SHE, principles of effective programs align with CDC's characteristics of effective curricula (see Chapter 2). Evidence is mixed regarding targeting youth at "high risk" versus including youth with different levels of risk.^{39,42} Regardless of the approach, decisions about students' risk should take into account environmental risk factors (e.g., low levels of family support) in addition to individual risk behavior.⁴²



Key consideration: Characteristics of effective mentorship programs

Mentoring has been defined as "formal relationships in which the mentor models positive behaviors to the benefit of the mentee and provides guidance, support, and skills through regular meetings to overcome health, social, and economic challenges."⁴⁰ The focus here is on adult-adolescent mentoring rather than peer mentoring that occurs between adolescents only. Mentoring programs can be group-based or one-on-one, although group-based mentoring programs have shown more effectiveness in reducing sexual risk.⁴⁰ Infrastructure to support the mentor-mentee relationship is a key feature of effective mentoring programs. Three specific elements are particularly important:⁴³

- Screening of potential mentors (e.g., interviews, review of personal references, etc.).
- Orientation and training of mentors (e.g., setting realistic expectations and/or building awareness and skill to build differences).
- Ongoing support and supervision (e.g., mentor support groups and/or check-ins from program leadership).

Other important characteristics include ongoing training, organized activities for mentors and mentees, clear and consistently reinforced expectations about frequency of contact, mechanisms for involving parents, and monitoring implementation.⁴²

Of course, the mentor plays a central role in the effectiveness of mentoring programs. Effective mentors⁴³

- act consistently and dependably.
- initiate contact.
- respect young people's viewpoints.
- involve youth in decision-making.
- interact with parents/other family members.
- seek and use advice of program leadership.

Key consideration: Characteristics of effective service learning programs

Service learning refers generally to “a teaching and learning strategy that connects academic curricula to community problem-solving.”⁴⁴ This concept has been specifically defined in federal legislation (Box 4.2).⁴⁴ Service learning is distinct from volunteer work and community service in that it is linked to school curricula.⁴⁵ The National Youth Leadership Council has outlined standards for effective service learning programs. These include⁴⁶

- active engagement of student participants.
- intentional linkages to curricula.
- reflection activities.
- promoting understanding of diversity.
- strong partnerships with the community.
- program monitoring.
- sufficient duration and intensity.

Strategies for feasibly implementing these requirements include leveraging existing state and district requirements related to service learning, as well as focusing on service learning within the context of SHE.

Box 4.2. Service Learning Definition*

In the context of this funded program, the term “service-learning” means a method

1. under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that
 - is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;
 - is coordinated with a secondary school or community service program, and with the community; and
 - helps foster civic responsibility; and
2. that
 - is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students or the educational components of the community service program in which the students are enrolled; and
 - provides structured time for the students to reflect on the service experience.

*Adapted from the Edward M. Kennedy Service America Act of 2009

Key consideration: Connecting students to community-based programs

If LEA choose to focus on connecting students to community-based programs, they will need to identify community organizations that can serve as partners in this effort. Organizations such as Boys and Girls Club or 4-H may be potential partners given their long-standing focus on PYD. PYD programs can also be implemented in clinic settings, so LEA could consider partnering with community-based health care providers or working with school-based health centers to implement PYD programs.⁴⁷ LEA should consider best practices for establishing school-community partnerships with trusted partners (see resources below).

In addition to establishing or strengthening existing community partnerships, LEA should have a systematic process in place to connect or refer students to programs led by community-based organizations. Depending on the scope of the partnerships, LEA may choose to develop a resource guide that outlines multiple programs, or they may focus on connecting students to a single community program. Protocols for communication and marketing should be established, and staff who will link students to the organizations should be identified and trained.

Component 3C recipients can

- Assess the capacity of LEA and community partners to inform decisions about implementing school-based programs or connecting students to community-based programs.
- Identify PYD programs for implementation.
- Implement train-the-trainer models to develop a cadre of PYD program facilitators.
- Partner with 3A and 3B organizations to identify cross-cutting opportunities for PYD implementation (e.g., in the context of SHE).



Resources

For information on specific school-based PYD programs, please refer to these resources:

- **Office of Adolescent Health. *Evidence-Based Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs.*** This list of evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs includes positive youth development programs that can be implemented in school or community settings. <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/grant-programs/teen-pregnancy-prevention-program-tpp/evidence-based-programs/index.html>
- **Youth.gov. *Positive Youth Development.*** This site compiles resources across federal agencies, including select programs and links to additional tools. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development>
- **National Mentoring Resource Center. *Mentoring Program Reviews.*** This resource synthesizes evidence of effectiveness for specific mentoring programs in relation to a range of different outcomes. <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/what-works-in-mentoring/reviews-of-mentoring-programs.html>

Additional resources to support implementation of mentoring and service learning programs include

- **National Youth Leadership Council. *K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice.*** This resource explains each of the standards for quality service learning programs. https://nylcweb.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/standards_document_mar2015update.pdf
- **National Mentoring Resource Center. *Resources for Mentoring Programs.*** This site provides resources for mentor training, program management, and recruitment and marketing, among other topics. <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/what-works-in-mentoring/resources-for-mentoring-programs.html>
- **Act for Youth. *Service-Learning and Adolescent Sexual Health.*** This resource provides an overview of service learning and its association with adolescent sexual health. <http://www.actforyouth.net/sexual-health/community/service-learning.cfm>
- **Youth.gov. *Service Learning.*** This site compiles resources across federal agencies on service learning programs. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/civic-engagement-and-volunteering/service-learning>
- **Youth.gov. *Mentoring.*** This site compiles resources across federal agencies on mentoring programs. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/mentoring>

Resources to support school-community partnerships include

- **Coalition for Community Schools. *Strengthening Partnerships: Community School Assessment Checklist.*** This checklist outlines considerations for establishing strong community-school partnerships. http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/strength_part_assessment.pdf#xml=http://pr-dtsearch001.americanagle.com/service/search.asp?cmd=pdfhits&DocId=410&index=F%3a%5cdtSearch%5ccommunityschools&HitCount=9&hits=6+c+d7+e5+101+150+160+272+2ad+&hc=97&req=checklist
- **National Education Association. *Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0 Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning.*** This strategy document outlines practices for establishing strong community-school partnerships. <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Family-School-Community-Partnerships-2.0.pdf>



Required activity: Implement student-led clubs to support LGBT youth (often known as Gay-Straight Alliances or Genders and Sexualities Alliances).

Rationale

This activity is intended to **increase school connectedness** for all students, including LGBT students. Gay-Straight Alliances or Genders and Sexualities Alliances (GSAs) have been associated with improvements in school safety, a key component of school connectedness, for all students.⁴⁸⁻⁵⁰ Research specifically links the presence of a GSA to greater feelings of school connectedness among LGBT students.⁵¹ GSAs are also linked to positive youth development and increasing young people's sense of purpose, self-esteem, and agency.^{52,53} These positive effects likely explain observed relationships between GSAs and reduced risk across outcomes related to HIV and other STDs, including violence victimization,⁴⁸ illicit drug use and prescription drug misuse,⁵⁴ and suicidal ideation.⁴⁹ Prevention benefits have been documented for heterosexual youth in addition to LGBT youth.^{49,55}

Activity description

A GSA is a student-led club, typically run in a middle or high school, which creates a safe space for students to socialize, support each other, discuss issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and work to end homophobia and transphobia in their school and/or broader community.⁵⁶ GSAs align with models of positive youth development in that they are structured to foster youth empowerment, with student members at the center of decision-making, while also connecting youth to adult support, usually in the form of a faculty advisor. Typical implementation involves regular group meetings as well as supplemental events and activities. These clubs function broadly in several ways, including⁵²

- providing opportunities for socialization and group support.
- delivering information and resources.
- facilitating student advocacy.

Each function serves to increase school connectedness and positive youth development.⁵³ Across these functions, organizational structure (e.g., check-in at the start of meetings, follow-up on prior meetings, agendas, and meeting facilitation) combined with flexibility to address emergent or urgent issues may optimize positive effects.^{52,53}

To implement this activity, LEA will first need to determine which schools have GSAs. LEA can then create and implement a plan for establishing GSAs in schools that do not already have them and strengthening GSAs in schools that do (see key consideration below on enhancing existing GSAs).

Key consideration: GSA programming

Although GSAs share common features, there is no standard GSA programming. Activities related to each function should be balanced to meet specific needs and interests of members.⁵⁷ For example, social events may include dances, movie nights, talent shows, or poetry slams.

Information and resource sharing provides an opportunity to complement activities related to SHE and SHS. Group meetings can be used to discuss health topics that disproportionately affect LGBT youth, such as mental health, substance use, and sexual health, drawing on experiences and insights from peers.^{50,58} Likewise, members can receive information about health clinics, hotlines, and community-based organizations that provide support to LGBT youth.⁵⁰ GSAs may even be an appropriate setting for faculty advisors to make referrals to health, social, and psychological services.



Student advocacy activities generally center on promoting inclusion for LGBT youth in the school more broadly. For example, GSAs may use materials from GLSEN to support implementation of a variety of awareness days/weeks, such as Ally Week, Day of Silence, or No Name-Calling Week. Other advocacy-related activities may include tabling at open houses, presenting in classrooms, or decorating school bulletin boards.⁵⁷ Using these activities to establish partnerships between GSA members and school administrators can further serve to connect LGBT students to supportive adults.⁵⁰ Advocacy efforts can also extend beyond the school setting. For example, GSA members can partner with LGBT community organizations, strengthening connections between GSA members and community resources.

Key consideration: GSA inclusivity

A defining characteristic of GSAs is their aim to connect LGBT youth with supportive heterosexual and/or cisgender allies. An inclusive, respectful environment is thus essential.⁵⁹ GSAs should include both boys and girls of varying sexual orientations and should be welcoming to transgender and gender non-conforming students as well as racial/ethnic minorities.⁵³ Concerted programmatic efforts are warranted in this regard given outstanding questions about the extent to which GSAs meet the needs of multiple groups.⁶⁰

Key consideration: GSA faculty advisors

The role of the faculty advisor(s) and the relationship between advisors and student GSA members is critical. Following principles of positive youth development, faculty advisors should allow for group-level decision-making and empower student members to achieve their goals. Encouraging students to express their opinions and allowing respectful disagreement and discussion so that students feel their voice is being heard can help increase engagement in GSAs.⁶¹ Facilitators can help provide an appropriate organizational structure that allows GSA members to lead decision-making processes. Structure is associated with increased student engagement up to a point. Too much structure, however, can have the opposite effect.⁶¹ Research has demonstrated that students with GSA faculty advisors who have held the position for longer are more likely to have positive outcomes related to youth development, and PD specifically for faculty facilitators may be useful.⁵³ In particular, advisors should receive in-depth training related to best practices for fostering a broadly inclusive school environment for LGBT youth (see section on PD to support LGBT youth).

Key consideration: Enhancing existing GSAs

Component 2 recipients that already have established GSAs across the district should engage in additional activities to strengthen the clubs. Such activities may include

- increasing membership and participation.
- implementing specific positive youth development programs within the GSA.
- conducting enhanced PD with GSA faculty advisors.
- integrating GSAs into other school-based activities.
- fostering collaboration between GSAs across schools.
- fostering collaboration between GSAs and LGBT-youth-serving organizations in the community.

GSAs should ideally be one practice within a system of school-based supports for LGBT youth, including safe spaces, effective implementation of anti-bullying policies, and PD for school staff. Such broader policies and practices may affect the implementation of GSAs. LEA can consider working with existing clubs to contribute to the development of a broad supportive climate.⁵³

Component 3C recipients can

- Implement train-the-trainer models for GSA faculty advisors.
- Establish processes for LEA to select appropriate strategies for enhancing existing clubs.

Resources

GLSEN and the Genders and Sexualities Alliance Network (GSAN) provide specific resources for establishing and enhancing GSAs:

- **GSAN. *Building Your GSA*.** This organization has a number of different resources for establishing and strengthening GSAs, including this resource on creating GSAs. <https://gsanetwork.org/resources/building-your-gsa>
- **GLSEN. *Gay-Straight Alliances*.** This organization has a number of different resources for establishing and strengthening GSAs. <https://www.glsen.org/gsa>

Engage Parent and Community Partners



Required activity: Disseminate resources to parents/caregivers on parental monitoring and parent-adolescent communication (both general and specifically about sex).

Rationale

The purpose of this activity is to **increase parental monitoring and parent-adolescent communication**. These parenting practices are considered to be protective factors because they are associated with reductions in adolescent sexual risk as well as reductions in related health risks (e.g., substance use and/or violence).^{4,62} This activity aligns with CDC's strategy guide for parent engagement in schools, which identifies supporting positive parenting practices and communicating with parents as two specific types of engagement.⁶³ CDC's rationale for parent engagement in schools as a strategy related to school-based HIV and other STD prevention characterizes this type of activity as one in which staff help parents address parental factors related to sexual risk behaviors.⁶⁴ Distribution of materials is a low-cost activity that has been associated with improvements in parenting practices.¹⁰

Activity description

For this activity, LEA will disseminate resources to parents to address each of these three parenting practices:

1. Parental monitoring
2. General parent-adolescent communication
3. Parent-adolescent communication about sex

Parental monitoring refers to parental knowledge of adolescents' companions, whereabouts, and activities and enforcement of rules, particularly about friends and dating.⁶⁵ Research has shown that adolescent disclosure is the primary source of parental knowledge,^{66,67} suggesting that parental monitoring requires parents' active participation and communication between parents and adolescents. Parental monitoring is also influenced by the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship.⁶⁸ In this context, parental monitoring is specifically about adolescents' social processes. It does not refer to monitoring of academic performance.

Parent-adolescent communication is a distinct but related concept. Six process dimensions have been identified as particularly relevant:⁶⁹

- Frequency/duration
- Self-disclosure
- Initiation
- Recognition
- Style
- Satisfaction

Regardless of topic, communication should be ongoing and substantial, open and honest, equally initiated by both parents and adolescents, acknowledging of individual attitudes and values, reflective of an authoritative parenting style (i.e., provide emotional support while also enforcing high standards),⁷⁰ and mutually satisfying. See the key consideration below on general communication vs. communication specifically about sex.

LEA may choose to disseminate resources about each topic separately or together. Regardless of the approach, the connections between these parenting practices should be made clear to parents. The goal of this activity is not to promote one practice over another, but rather to support a constellation of parenting practices known to reduce sexual risk. Resources about these topics should address both knowledge and skills. Specifically, information should include

- key definitions and explanations of the concept(s).
- a brief summary of its benefits as well as challenges to implementation and potential solutions.
- key action steps for parents to strengthen the practice.

LEA are encouraged to identify and, if necessary, adapt existing resources from credible sources rather than develop new resources. LEA should carefully consider the most appropriate and feasible channels for dissemination (e.g., social media, email, newsletters, handouts at parent-teacher conferences/open houses/health fairs) and if/how these resources can be integrated into existing processes for communicating with parents. At a minimum, resources should be disseminated semi-annually.

Key consideration: General communication vs. communication about sex

Funded partners are expected to address parent-adolescent communication, both general and specifically about sex. The six process dimensions noted above apply to both types of communication. The primary distinction is that the type of content discussed varies. Content areas to be addressed in general parent-adolescent communication may include social/relationship issues, academic and extracurricular interests, politics, future plans/goals, and general problems. Content to be addressed in parent-adolescent communication about sex includes but is not limited to expectations about dating/relationships; consent; behavioral strategies for preventing unintended pregnancy, HIV, and other STDs (e.g., condom use or delaying the onset of sexual activity); and SHS. This communication should prepare students for and reinforce information from school-based SHE. There are some unique barriers to communicating about these topics that parents may need help overcoming, such as embarrassment or inadequate parental knowledge.⁶⁹

Key consideration: Leverage other communication with parents

Because parent engagement activities cut across SHE, SHS, and SSE, LEA can consider leveraging other activities to facilitate dissemination of resources. For example, parent engagement in SHE through homework assignments may offer an opportunity for dissemination. LEA should also consider if and how relevant information from other domains should be incorporated into dissemination materials. For example, information about parental monitoring may note that it is developmentally appropriate for adolescents to have time alone with a medical provider and increasingly be able to access care independently.



Key consideration: Communication best practices

Dissemination of resources should follow communication best practices. Materials should use plain language and avoid jargon. All resources should reflect principles for effective communication. Specifically, they should be available, actionable, from credible and trusted sources, relevant to a parental audience, timely, and understandable.⁷¹

Component 3C recipients can

- Assess parents' preferences for communication channels and formats.
- Identify existing resources for schools to disseminate (e.g., create a repository of resources).
- Adapt existing resources as needed.
- Partner with Component 3A and 3B recipients to identify cross-cutting opportunities for dissemination of resources.
- Assess capacity of the LEA to implement additional activities.



Resources

LEA may develop their own resources but are encouraged to use existing resources that align with the content described above. Some examples include

- **CDC. *Monitoring Your Teen's Activities: What Parents and Families Should Know*.** This infobrief outlines action steps for parents to monitor their teens. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/pdf/parental_monitoring_factsheet.pdf
- **CDC. *Talking with Your Teens about Sex: Going Beyond "the Talk"*.** This infobrief outlines action steps for parents to talk with their teens about sex. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/pdf/talking_teens.pdf
- **CDC. *Ways to Influence Your Teen's Sexual Risk Behavior: What Fathers Can Do*.** This infobrief outlines action steps for fathers related to positive parenting practices. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/pdf/fathers_influence.pdf
- **Office of Adolescent Health. *Resources for Families*.** This site compiles resources for parents, including those related to monitoring and communication. <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-training-for-families/index.html>

Resources related to communication best practices include

- **CDC. *Gateway to Health Communication & Social Marketing Practice*.** This resource outlines best practices for health communication materials. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/>
- **CDC. *Everyday Words for Public Health Communication*.** This resource outlines plain language considerations for health communication materials. <https://www.cdc.gov/other/pdf/everydaywords-060216-final.pdf>
- **World Health Organization. *Framework for Effective Communications*.** This resource outlines best practices for health communication materials. <http://www.who.int/communicating-for-health/en/>



Additional activity: Disseminate resources specifically relevant to parents of LGBT students

Rationale

LEA may also consider disseminating resources specifically relevant to parents of LGBT students. Although evidence is limited and somewhat mixed, parental monitoring and parent-adolescent communication may not always be protective for LGBT, depending on how parents implement these practices.^{72,73} In fact, in some cases they could have risks (e.g., a parent rejects an adolescent's sexual identity). Parents of LGBT youth may benefit from resources about how best to support their LGBT youth, including using appropriate parental monitoring and respectful parent-adolescent communication.

Activity description

LEA can incorporate specific considerations for LGBT youth in dissemination materials about parental monitoring or parent-adolescent communication. They can also develop materials specifically about parental support of LGBT youth. Schools should disseminate such resources in a way that avoids targeting LGBT students and families and potentially disclosing students' sexual orientation or gender identity. For example, schools can post materials online and advertise to all families that these materials are available.

Resources

Resources have been developed to help give parents fundamental knowledge and skills related to supporting the health and well-being of their LGBT teen. These include

- **CDC. *Parents' Influence on the Health of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Teens: What Parents and Families Should Know*.** This infobrief outlines action steps parents can take to support their LGBT teens. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/pdf/parents_influence_lgb.pdf
- **PFLAG. *Our Children: Questions and Answers for Families of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Gender-Expansive and Queer Youth and Adults*.** This resource for parents provides answers to common questions about sexual orientation and gender identity to support parents of LGBT youth. https://www.pflag.org/sites/default/files/OUR%20CHILDREN_PFLAGNational_FINAL.pdf



Additional activity: Implement and/or connect parents to skill-building parenting programs

Rationale

LEA can consider implementing skill-building programs for parents/caregivers to **increase parent-adolescent communication and parental monitoring**. Numerous parenting programs have been developed to build parents' skills to effectively communicate with their adolescents and reduce sexual risk;^{9,74} fewer interventions address parental monitoring, but there are some that show promise.^{75,76} Programs for parents have also been developed to increase parenting practices that support the health and well-being of LGBT youth.

Activity description

Implementing this activity will involve steps that are similar to the steps for implementing a PYD program for students; LEA will first need to decide whether they will lead programs in the school setting or connect parents to community programs through linkage and referral. Again, we recommend that LEA choose either a school-based approach or a linkage and referral approach rather than trying to implement both models. The school-based approach will involve identifying and, if necessary, adapting effective parenting programs. Developing a new program is discouraged considering existing programs and limited time and resources. Implementation will involve training facilitators and program leadership, advertising the program to parents, and conducting program activities with fidelity. SHE programs for students may also include a component for parents to build their capacity to communicate with their teens about sex.⁷⁷

Given that implementing parenting programs can be resource intensive, LEA may want to consider facilitating school-community partnerships to connect parents to community partners who can lead parenting programs. Doing so will require establishing new or using existing partnerships with community resources and developing or adapting a process for linkage and referral that can then be implemented through staff training and advertisement to parents. As with connecting students to community-based PYD programs, best practices for school-community partnerships should be implemented.



Resources

Specific resources related to parenting programs include

- **CDC. *Talking with Your Teens about Sex: Going Beyond “the Talk.”*** This infobrief lists parenting programs that promote parent-adolescent communication. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/pdf/talking_teens.pdf
- **Advocates for Youth. *Parent-Child Communication Programs.*** This resource lists parenting programs that promote parent-adolescent communication. <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parent-child-communication-programs>
- **Family Acceptance Project. *Training.*** This website includes parent trainings specifically designed to support LGBT youth. <https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/training>
- **LA LGBT Center. *Supportive Families, Safe Homes Training.*** This resource includes parent trainings specifically designed to support LGBT youth. <https://lalgbtcenter.org/rise/lgbtq-training-coaching/lgbtq-training-for-families>

Chapter 4 References

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