

LGBTQI+ students



Practical tips for practitioners

Exploring their identity can be terrifying for a young person. With access to much more information via the internet for young people, they may see representations of themselves online. They may begin to explore themselves to discover their true identity. You may feel overwhelmed and not fully knowledgeable on all the terms or abbreviations. The important thing is to provide a listening ear and ensure the young person is heard and supported.

We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be struggling with their identity before accessing supports.

How might LGBTQ+ identity be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with LGBTQ+ issues, they may be avoiding school because they:

- Feel a sense of shame and embarrassment about their sexuality or identity.
- Feel confused about who they are.
- Feel isolated from their peers and be reluctant to attend school due to fear of social exclusion / loneliness.
- Be experiencing bullying at school or online due to their identity.

The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.



What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their sexuality and identity. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- Being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is just as normal – and wonderful – as being straight. It's important for young people to celebrate who they are! Starting to think about and understanding their own feelings is a great step towards a young person's own self-discovery. However, if a young person is questioning their identity, they might want to avoid school to get their head straight. It is important to encourage them to live their day-to-day life.
- Deciding to come out can be a big decision for a young person and it's important they pick a time that feels right for them. There is no rush or time limit on this, so ensure you encourage them to take their time and not pressure themselves into making decisions about it.

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.

“Communication”

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan

Worksheet: Rainbows Covid-19 programme – Bottling up worries

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 15.
- This worksheet can be used to explore what the young person is worrying about with regards their gender identity, sexuality etc.
- This can be used to explore both school-based worries and external worries.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

You can say, "I'm here for you and I accept you as you are."

You can say, "I can understand that. It can be scary not knowing who you are. You have plenty of time to figure things out, there is no rush."

What can you do as a practitioner?

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.

You can say, "Look at all the wonderful things you have achieved (awards, grades etc.). Your sexual identity won't change any of that. No matter who you are, you still have all these strengths."





Practical tips for practitioners

- If possible and with consent, link in with the school to see what supports can be put in place. Are there gender-neutral bathrooms the young person could use? Inform their teachers of their preferred pronouns and model the use of these pronouns amongst students.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. This may be a sensitive area for young people to discuss with their family. Ensure you talk about it with the young person before you arrange a meeting.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about their journey. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Try to encourage parental involvement in meetings by remaining mindful of scheduling of meetings, locations, travel cost etc.

Tips for working professionals to help young people struggling with LGBTQ+ issues create a safe space for them:

- Include LGBTQ curricula, hire LGBTQ educators, and adopt policies that support trans and queer young people's positive experiences.
- Participate in LGBTQ-related trainings often.
- Incorporate LGBTQ youth-inclusive resources, images, and posts on social media channels.
- Normalize the usage of pronouns.
- Provide youth drop-in hours physically and/or virtually.
- Change policies and continuously analyse procedures and programmes to ensure that they are inclusive.
- If possible, recruit culturally competent and LGBTQ-inclusive medical experts to facilitate groups for LGBTQ young people to have conversations about physical and mental health.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://goshh.ie/>



Practical tips for young people

You may feel isolated from your teachers and feel as though they don't understand you. However, teachers may just be lacking the language and knowledge you have regarding sexual identity. Patiently and politely inform teachers of your preferred pronouns. It may take them a while to get used to the change so have patience if they make a few mistakes.

Worksheet 7:

You and school (barriers)

When you think about school, what are the things that make you not want to go? Look at the list of words below and explore what memories, feelings and words come to mind. You can add your own words and ideas if you like. As you discuss, write the main things that make you not want to go to school (barriers) in the spaces provided below.

Friendships	Value of Education	Effort	Transport		
SNAs	Lonely	Teachers	Embarrassment	Lunch/food	
PE/Sports	Tiredness	Safety	Anxious	Rules	Yard
Homework	Trips	Exams	Students	Strict	Unfair

Barriers

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What do you do to manage these problems at the moment?

Who can you talk to or ask for help from when you experience these barriers?

Worksheet 8:

You and school (positives)

Think of a great day in school. What did that look like? What makes you want to go to school? Look at the list of words below and explore what memories, feelings and words come to mind. You can add your own words and ideas if you like. As you discuss, write the main things that make you want to go to school (positives) in the spaces provided below.

Friendships	Value of Education		Future Career		
Transport	SNAs	Fun	Teachers	Achievement	
Lunch/food	PE/Sports		Relaxing/Rest	Safety	
Joking	Rules	Yard	Homework	Trips	Exams
Students	Interesting	Fair			

Positives

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What can be done to make school a more positive place?

If you were principal, what would you change?

