School Safety and Crisis Response Considerations for Serving LGBTQIA+ Youth

LGBTQIA+ students have unique needs during times of crisis, particularly if the crisis targets members of the LGBTQIA+ community. This handout is designed to promote inclusive practices and understanding of the unique challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ youth. The following considerations can help school staff adjust their crisis prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery practices to support LGBTQIA+ youth. School staff should recognize that crisis is a relative term, and students may experience crisis exposure in response to events outside their immediate surroundings. For more comprehensive school safety and crisis response procedures to support all students, please refer to the PREPARE curriculum.

Prevent and Prepare for Crises by Establishing a Welcoming, Inclusive School Climate

- Build school connectedness through Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) and other inclusive school practices.
- Educate all school staff members, including substitutes, on developmental facts and needs of LGBTQIA+ youth, such as increased risk of bullying, harassment, and suicide.
- Review school policy, mission, or vision statements to ensure they are inclusive of the needs of LGBTQIA+ youth.
- When developing emergency operations plans, appoint a staff member to serve as a cultural liaison (i.e., someone who is familiar with the diverse cultures in the building and district and who will work to ensure all approaches and interventions are culturally responsive).
- Use school climate measures to assess inclusiveness, include the voices of minoritized populations, and ensure welcoming and affirming environments (e.g., ensure that restrooms and locker rooms are safe and accessible across genders).

Reaffirm Safety Following Crisis Exposure

- Ensure physical safety and basic needs are met. Physical and psychological safety of LGBTQIA+ youth may be compromised if they are housed in unsupportive environments when schools are closed.
- Recognize that LGBTQIA+ youth’s perceptions of climate and connectedness affect their psychological safety. School staff may have to continually reinforce their perceptions of psychological safety (e.g., the threat has passed or is being mitigated).
- Reaffirming safety will be facilitated by providing a safe space for LGBTQIA+ youth to gather, connect, and decompress. When physical connections are not possible, these spaces should be provided virtually (with the knowledge that youth may not be able to participate given home expectations and rules).

Evaluate Psychological Trauma Risk

- As LGBTQIA+ youth are more likely to have experienced ongoing traumatic stress, consider conducting toxic stress screenings.
- Be mindful that anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation, hate crimes, hate speech, and victimization within the community may encourage or discourage youth from sharing their authentic selves—some may feel energized to come out and others may no longer feel comfortable being out. These factors can increase traumatic stress.
- LGBTQIA+ youth can be vicariously traumatized by events that affect individuals who share one or more of their intersecting identities, even when there is no physical proximity to the event or personal relationship with the victims.
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- Conduct triage in spaces or venues that may be familiar and safe to LGBTQIA+ youth (e.g., GSA meeting spaces) and with personnel who are likely to be perceived as trusted adults (e.g., GSA advisors).

**Provide Individualized Interventions and Respond to Psychological Needs**

- Augment social supports by providing opportunities to connect with other LGBTQIA+ individuals, in person or virtually, who have insights and experiences that their heterosexual and cisgender sources of support may not have, especially if the crisis targeted or disproportionately affected the LGBTQIA+ community.
- If the crisis targeted the LGBTQIA+ community, consider homogeneous crisis intervention groups specific to LGBTQIA+ youth.
- Have referrals and other resources available specifically for LGBTQIA+ youth who may require community-based health services.
- Provide opportunities for LGBTQIA+ youth to engage in activism, advocacy, and other actions that promote healing.

**Examine Response Effectiveness Following Crisis Response and Intervention**

- Follow up with LGBTQIA+ youth to get feedback on the crisis response and supports provided that can inform future responses.
- Examine response effectiveness with the entire school community—and particularly with LGBTQIA+ youth. If necessary, review school and district inclusion practices and procedures to identify areas of improvement to be addressed in the near and long terms.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

For further guidance relevant to LGBTQIA+ youth, please visit www.nasponline.org/lgbtiq2-s. Additionally, NASP has information for parents and educators on school safety, violence prevention, children’s trauma reactions, and crisis response at https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis. Some specific resources are listed below.


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