SUPPORTING LGBTQ+ YOUTH THROUGH AFFIRMATIVE CARE:
TIPS FOR THERAPISTS
a checklist to support therapists looking to provide affirmative care to LGBTQ+ clients

1. Establish the relationship!

Ask for...

☑ Chosen name and pronouns early on, and use that information throughout session.

☐ The context of chosen name and pronoun use. For example, they may want their chosen name during face-to-face interactions but not on medical files.

Strive to be...

☐ Open and collaborative in describing the process of therapy.

☐ Transparent about what your credentials mean. For example, explain your training, experience with LGBTQ+ populations, and any differences between professions (e.g., coach, psychologist, social worker).

☐ Clear about your social location. Identify your own pronouns and note whether you have cis or trans experience. Remember that shared identities don’t equate to shared experiences.

☐ Open to learning about issues that impact LGBTQ+ clients.

☐ Able to ask hard questions as you build your therapeutic alliance. LGBTQ+ people are at a high risk of mental health concerns. Don’t be afraid to ask about their safety, about suicide, healthy sexuality, harm reduction, etc.

☐ Accountable and apologetic about your mistakes.

☐ Trauma-informed by recognizing distressing events related to LGBTQ+ identity experiences.

Instead...

☐ Consistently evaluate progress.

☐ Maintain neutrality so the client can make their own decisions and evolve in their understanding of their identity and sexuality. As a therapist, don’t have a vested interest in the outcome.

☐ Commit to being in the space to support the client in their trajectory of change, whichever way it may manifest.

☐ Encourage self-determination and self-empowerment.

☐ Speak up and not over.

☐ Support clients in advocating for themselves, teaching skills instead of fixing things.

2. Challenge your assumptions

Don’t assume...

☐ you understand what someone is going through because you relate to what they’re going through.

☐ the goals of the client. For example, if someone is not out, their goal may not be to come out.

Instead...

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☐ Speak up and not over.

☐ Support clients in advocating for themselves, teaching skills instead of fixing things.

3. Improve your knowledge

Remember...

☐ Language is complex and always evolving. Consistently develop your vocabulary, understanding, and skills.

☐ To ask yourself: Do I have an awareness of my knowledge limitations?

☐ If I don’t know the answer, who can I go to for that information?

☐ Do I need to refer the client to someone else?

☐ Look up and be aware of local LGBTQ+ resources – if you don’t know, find out!

☐ Ensure that you maintain strict confidentiality with caregivers/parents of LGBTQ+ youth. Understand what your client is open to sharing with their caregivers.

This list was compiled by AFFIRM group therapy facilitators who identify as members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community and are informed by their extensive experience providing therapy to queer clients and facilitating AFFIRM groups. For more information, visit projectyouthaffirm.org.

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