



Supporting LGBTQ and Questioning Youth

Seth Wallace, LCSW (he/him)

Assistant Director, Yale Office of LGBTQ Resources

Clinician, Yale Mental Health and Counseling

Why is it important to support LGBTQ youth?

How can you support LGBTQ youth?

What are the challenges of supporting LGBTQ youth?



Relationships are the most important element
of support for LGBTQ youth.

Your role as a **dedicated assistant**
is to be supportive, encouraging, curious, and open.



Make a friend!



Why Support LGBTQ Youth?

- LGBTQ youth are disproportionately at risk for suicide and self-harm as a result of social stigma and discrimination.
 - Approximately **42% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide** in a given year, including **more than half** of transgender and nonbinary youth
 - LGBTQ youth of color are particularly at risk.
- LGBTQ identity cannot be changed or erased.
- The best thing we can do for our LGBTQ youth is to support them and create a secure base from which they can explore and live safely.

Family support for LGBTQ youth is lifesaving.



Good Enough Family Support

N = 150,000 US transgender youth
(13 to 17)

	Physically or emotionally abusive families	Non-abusive families
Suicide attempts	51%	32%
Homelessness	48%	9%
Drug/alcohol use	47%	19%
Sex work	29%	7%

Negative outcomes are NOT a given!

Affirming Language

A signal of inclusivity and the foundation of a supportive relationship



What do labels mean to us?



Strategies for Families of LGBTQ People

- Provide **separate spaces** for parent and child to process information and emotions
- Connect with sources of information and support other than the LGBTQ person
- Speak from a **point of commonality**
 - E.g. desire for safety, health, authenticity
- Family members of different lived experiences will have varying understandings of LGBTQ concepts
- Practice responding to scenarios **when (not if) you make a mistake.**



Good Enough Conversations

- **Brief conversations** that are baby steps along the process of understanding and supporting LGBTQ identity.
- Occur over weeks, months, and years
- Provide milestones for progress within a relationship
- Allow for time and space to process
- Create opportunity to access outside information and resources
- You will not be able to “sit down and figure this out,” so aim to make conversations around LGBTQ identity positive ones that you would like to return to.



Practice Scenarios

What are some situations in which support for LGBTQ youth might be challenging?



Practice Scenarios

- Your child's best friend has changed pronouns multiple times recently and gets upset when the wrong pronouns are used.
- At dinner, your family friend asks you to comment about transgender athletes in college sports.
- Your child comes home curious about gender identity and says they heard about being transgender at school.
- Your child says they do not identify as any gender and would like to be referred to as "it."
- A friend of your child's is gay, and you know that their family would be unsupportive if they found out.



CT LGBTQ Resources – Community Centers

- Triangle Community Center
 - Youth and adult groups, case management, counseling, events, and more
 - www.ctpridecenter.org
- New Haven Pride Center
 - Youth and adult groups, case management, events, and more
 - www.newhavenpridecenter.org



CT LGBTQ Resources – Family and Youth Orgs

- GLSEN CT
 - LGBTQ issues in K-12 education
 - www.glsen.org
- PFLAG Norwalk
 - LGBTQ Family and ally organization
 - www.pflagnorwalk.org
- Q Plus
 - Youth groups and programming
 - www.q.plus.ct.org



CT LGBTQ Resources – Healthcare

- Health Care Advocates International Youth and Family Program
 - www.hcailc.com
- Anchor Health Initiative
 - www.anchorhealthinitiative.org
- Hartford Gay and Lesbian Health Collective
 - www.hglhc.org



General LGBTQ Resources

- Trans-Kin: A Guide for Family and Friends of Transgender People by Eleanor Hubbard and Cameron Whitley
- Helping your Transgender Teen by Irwin Krieger
- The Trevor Project
- National Center for Transgender Equality
- National LGBTQ Task Force
- Fenway Health (Boston, MA)
- Callen Lorde Community Health Center (New York, NY)



Thank you!

seth.wallace@yale.edu



2015 US Transgender Survey n = 27,715

- 39% of respondents experienced serious psychological distress in the month prior to the survey, compared with only 5% of the U.S. population.
- 40% of respondents have attempted suicide in their lifetime—nearly nine times the attempted suicide rate in the U.S. population (4.6%).
 - 47% of Black respondents
 - 45% of Latino/a/x respondents
 - 40% of Asian and Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander respondents
 - 57% of American Indian and Alaska Native respondents
- Seven percent (7%) attempted suicide in the past year—nearly twelve times the rate in the U.S. population (0.6%).
 - 9% of Black respondents
 - 9% of Latino/a/x respondents
 - 8% of Asian and Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander
 - 10% of American Indian and Alaska Native respondents

The Trevor Project: 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health

n = 34,759 LGBTQ youth
ages 13 – 24 in the U.S.

- 42% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including **more than half** of transgender and nonbinary youth
- Percentage of respondents who had attempted suicide differed by race
 - 12% of white youth
 - 31% of Native/ Indigenous youth
 - 21% of Black youth
 - 21% of multiracial youth
 - 18% of Latinx youth
 - 12% of Asian/Pacific Islander youth

The Trevor Project: 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health

- More than 80% of LGBTQ youth stated that COVID-19 made their living situation more stressful — and only 1 in 3 LGBTQ youth found their home to be LGBTQ-affirming.
- 70% of LGBTQ youth stated that their mental health was “poor” most of the time or always during COVID-19.
- 48% of LGBTQ youth reported they wanted counseling from a mental health professional but were unable to receive it in the past year.

The Trevor Project: 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health

- 30% of LGBTQ youth experienced food insecurity in the past month, including half of all Native/Indigenous LGBTQ youth.
- 75% of LGBTQ youth reported that they had experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity at least once in their lifetime.
- 13% of LGBTQ youth reported being subjected to conversion therapy, with 83% reporting it occurred when they were under age 18.

Safety in Connecticut Schools

- 77% of those who were out or perceived as transgender at some point between Kindergarten and Grade 12 (K–12) experienced some form of mistreatment
 - being verbally harassed, prohibited from dressing according to their gender identity, disciplined more harshly, or physically or sexually assaulted because people thought they were transgender.
- 50% of those who were out or perceived as transgender in K–12 were verbally harassed, 25% were physically attacked, and 11% were sexually assaulted in K–12 because of being transgender
- 22% of respondents in college or vocational school were verbally, physically, or sexually harassed

Affirming Language

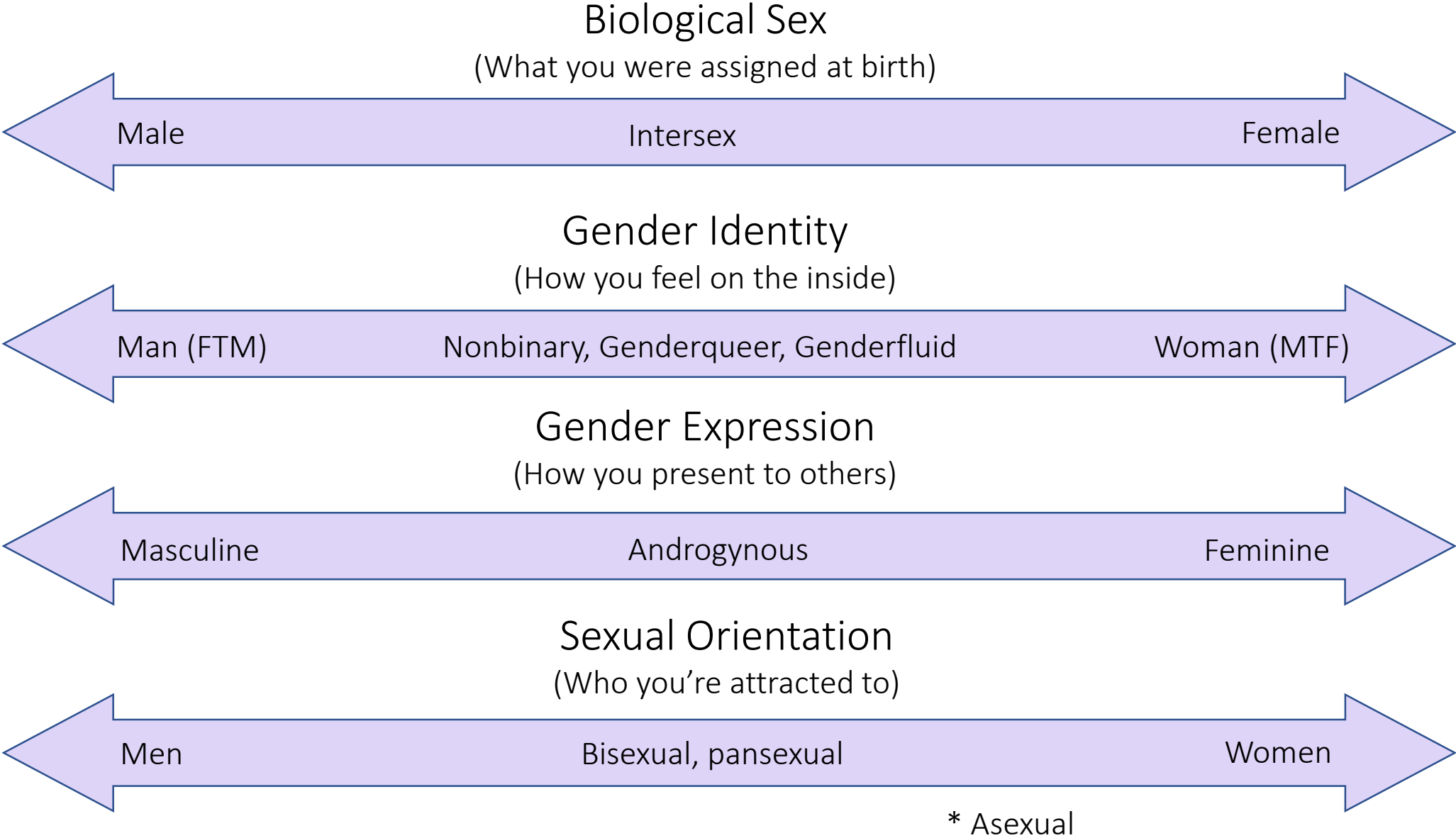
TERMINOLOGY

- Language is always evolving
- You will hear new words that people use to describe themselves
- When asked to input labels that don't fit into a form, show the client the form and explain the situation, then later share with a supervisor.
- What do labels mean to us?

TERMINOLOGY

- Gender Identity
- Gender Expression
- Transgender
- Cisgender
- Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB)
- Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB)
- Intersex
- Deadname
- Nonbinary
- Pansexual
- Asexual
- Non-Monogamous
- “T” and “E”
- Top and bottom surgery
- Queer

Gender and Sexuality Spectrums



WORD SWITCHES

- Identifies as
 - Use: “Is a”
- Preferred name, preferred pronouns
 - Use: “Correct name, chosen name, pronouns”
- Homosexual
 - Use: “Gay, lesbian”
- Transsexual
 - Use “Transgender”
- Transvestite
 - Use: “Cross-dresser” in rare circumstances, only when clinically indicated. Or, “Gender-exploring,” “gender-fluid”
- Transgendered
 - Use: “Transgender”

WORD SWITCHES

- Lifestyle
 - Use: “LGBTQ lives,” “LGBTQ people,” “LGBTQ identity”
- Choices
 - Coming out, accessing medical care, etc. are not choices
- “Fully” transitioned
 - Medical transition looks different for everyone
- Biological male/female
 - Use: “Assigned male/female at birth,” “AMAB/AFAB”
- Sex change
 - Use: “Gender affirming surgery,” “surgical and hormone therapy for gender dysphoria”
- The surgery
 - Use “*Gender affirming surgery, surgical therapy, hormone therapy.*”

REFERRING TO TRANS PEOPLE

- When referring to transgender people before their transition, **always** use the correct and current pronouns.
- Only mention their transition if it is clinically relevant.
- Avoid the temptation to share their deadname, previous pronoun, or your knowledge of their medical history.
 - “I knew Mike way back when he was a little girl”
- Avoid indicating that the person is trans through context
 - E.g. “Stella used to be a member of the boy scouts”

Pronouns

Asking For Pronouns

- Offer your pronouns before asking others'
- Ask all members of a group for pronouns, not just some
- Pronoun sharing should always be optional and site-specific
- Ask: Is it okay to use this pronoun when I'm referring to you elsewhere?
 - Is it okay to use this pronoun around your groupmates/teachers/parents?
- Do not change pronouns when a person is not there (unless asked)
- Offer multiple pronoun options on intake and other forms
 - Train office staff in using them consistently

When to Share Pronouns

- New beginnings
- Email signatures
- Zoom names
- Buttons, patches, stickers
- Positions of power or leadership
- Anything else?

They/Them Pronouns

- They **are** in eighth grade
- They would like their pen back
- The pen is theirs
- They want to keep it for **themselves**
- I'll ask them if they have another to share
- They met their friend after school, and **the two of them** walked home

*Practice makes perfect!

Pronoun Practice

- Introduce yourself with your name, pronoun, and role
- Each person practice asking a client what pronouns they would like you to use for them.
 - What pronouns do you use?
 - What pronouns would you like to use here?
 - What pronouns would you like me to use on your clinical record?
- Identify an area where you can share pronouns in your practice

Family Support

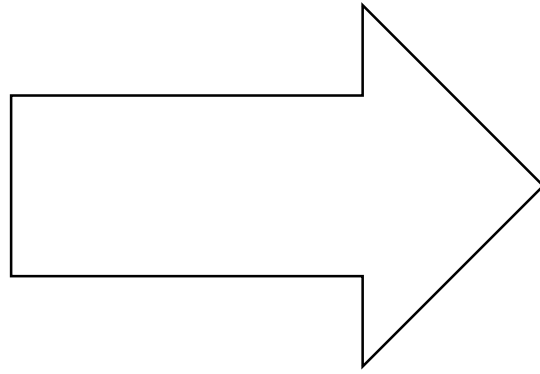
Coming Out to Families

- What do you want your family to know?
- What are you asking your family to do/not do?
- Where are your boundaries? What do you not want to discuss?
- What are some indicators that your family members are not able to be listening at that moment?
- What are some ways you can pause the conversation?
- Consider small, good enough conversations
- Consider a position of telling rather than asking permission

LGBTQ Intersectionality

Distinct and overlapping experiences related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression

- Low Income
- Housing insecure
- First generation
- Undocumented
- POC
- Neurodiverse
- Disabled



- Coming out
- Language
- Representation
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Relationships
- Self Expression
- Safety

* LGBTQ people face social, medical, and mental health disparities that are exacerbated by COVID-19

Trauma in the LGBTQ Community

- Family trauma
- Medical trauma/lack of appropriate healthcare
- Lack of social support
- Intimate partner violence
- Sexual harassment and assault
- Schools
- Restrooms
- Substance use and abuse
- Political violence
- Navigating professional spaces
- Community violence
- Incarceration
- Lack of support for identity development
- Lack of positive representation
- Lack of access to appropriate services
- Lack of safety in everyday situations