



Group Therapy for Latinx Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ+) Latinx Youth

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The Latinx LGBTQ+ youth group represents a range of sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions. Their diversity also includes the intersection with other aspects of their identity beyond race and ethnicity such as religion, ability, and socioeconomic class. In general, Latinx LGBTQ+ youth are resilient and are able to cope with the typical pressures that are part of the adolescence developmental stage. However, LGBTQ+ youth are faced with additional stressors related to the discrimination, harassment, physical and verbal violence, stigma, and rejection they experience at school, in their community and within their own family unit. As a result, Latinx LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to experience suicidal ideation than their white heterosexual peers, and experience religious conflicts that may increase the possibility for depression and suicidal ideation. Cultural understanding of the strong religious beliefs and conventional family values held by Latinx LGBTQ+ youth and their families must be integrated in the psychological services offered.

Adolescent suicide is currently one of the top three leading causes of death with rates becoming greater for Latinx adolescents (19%), when compared to the nationwide sample of youth (17%) and black youth alone (14.5%). The minority stress model suggests that like other minority groups, sexual and gender minorities, including LGBTQ+ adolescents, experience chronic stress stemming from their stigmatization. Experiencing discrimination has a great psychological impact raising the risk of suicide for LGBTQ+ youth, specifically adolescents of color (i.e., Latinx/Latinx, Black), transgender and nonbinary youth. The experience of not conforming to the dominant heterosexual orientation and binary gender norms, as the minority stress model suggests, results in a higher incidence of anxiety, depression and substance use among LGB individuals.

Group therapy is a developmentally appropriate treatment that fits the adolescent's need of seeking input and feedback from peers. It becomes a safe space and at times a brave space where LGBTQ+ youth share with each other how they truly feel and listen to each other's stories and experiences. In this therapeutic process led by a psychologist, therapist, counselor or mental health professional, the adolescents offer each other suggestions and ideas to address the challenges they are facing at home, school, community, and in society at large. They also share their successes and approaches that have helped them thrive as an LGBTQ+ youth.

Group therapy interventions for LGBTQ+ youth cultivate self-acceptance and affirm their sexual and gender identity. To provide appropriate therapeutic services for Latinx LGBTQ+ youth, clinicians must first understand all aspects of the Latinx/Latinx experience integrating social factors as well as recognize cultural factors such as strong religious beliefs, conventional family values, traditional gender roles, familismo, and machismo, as they will impact the life of the Latinx LGBTQ+ adolescent. Culturally appropriate interventions that assist the Latinx LGBTQ+ youth deal with chronic stressors and that focus on improving their family dynamics should be integrated.

During group sessions LGBTQ+ youth are encouraged and guided to identify and discuss feelings they've experienced such as isolation, rejection, fear, shame, guilt, pride, and relief. They also work to develop coping skills that address the social stigma, emotional stress and physical threats associated with being a Latinx LGBTQ+ youth. In group therapy sessions, they will evaluate their own "coming out" process--a two-level process that includes an internal process that focuses on self-exploration, and an external process in which they reveal it to others. These processes can occur at different times for different people throughout their development and are affected by external or environmental factors and internal or psychological factors.

A comprehensive network of support is crucial for Latinx LGBTQ+ youth's overall well-being and is at the core of the therapeutic process. During the group therapy sessions, the Latinx LGBTQ+ youth are encouraged to connect with the LGBTQ+ community, in addition to identifying people in their life who will join this supportive network. Clinicians should also provide parents with resources aimed at supporting their Latinx LGBTQ+ adolescent since active parental support has been associated with reductions in depression, anxiety, substance use, psychological distress, and suicidality. The key therapeutic goal is to support the Latinx LGBTQ+ youth during their self-affirming process and strengthen them emotionally, socially, and psychologically, so they can be their genuine selves.

Resources for LGBTQ+ Youth:

- **TrevorLifeline: 1-866-488-7386**
- **TrevorChat: using a **smartphone, tablet, or computer****
- **TrevorText: text **START** to **678-678****
- **LGBTQIA+ National Youth Talk Line: 1-800-246-7743**

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