



HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth Training and Implementation Overview

This document was produced through the Centre for School Mental Health (CSMH), Faculty of Education, Western University, as a supplementary resource for those facilitating the Healthy Relationships Program (HRP) for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual (2S/LGBTQIA+) Youth. This document provides an overview of training options and results and explores pros and cons associated with using various program delivery models in school settings. Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) implementation model considerations are emphasized and program delivery strategies and supports are detailed.

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Training

Many school boards are looking for 2S/LGBTQIA+ specific training to promote [Gender and Sexuality Alliance \(GSA\) formation](#), inform club programming, and/or build school staff's capacity to support rainbow youth. GSA advisors, department of education employees, school board administrators, mental health clinicians, and equity leads may participate in the professional development to further their understandings and practice and share localized information about 2S/LGBTQIA+ related policies, procedures, and supports.

Training overview. The interactive, discussion-based professional development seeks to enhance attendees' knowledge of resiliency among 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth and bolster their capacity to support students. Training organizers can choose a one- or two-day training model to fit their individualized needs and timelines. The two-day model examines GSA roles, functions, and programming, and explores [The Healthy Relationships Program for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth](#), whereas the one-day workshop focuses primarily on the innovation. Workshop attendees develop an understanding of the fundamental principles of the program and the focus of the individual sessions. Participants also experience a variety of program activities since a large portion of time is devoted to preparing for and engaging in practice facilitation.

Two-Day Training Agenda Items. Day one: land acknowledgment; introductions and co-constructed group guidelines; 2S/LGBTQIA+ specific protective factors; GSA roles and functions; barriers to GSA development and functioning; structured youth programming; and a HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth overview. Day two: session one exploration and modelling; small group session review and facilitation preparation; practice facilitation; program delivery debrief; GSA program planning; and shared learnings.

The most impactful aspects of the training have been identified as follows:

- session modelling and practice facilitation ([Lapointe, 2023](#); [Lapointe & Crooks, 2022](#))
- connection with and information exchange between colleagues ([Lapointe, 2023](#))
- HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth ([Lapointe, 2023](#))

Including a focus on skill development and practice facilitation is an integral component of GSA and/or 2S/LGBTQIA+ focused trainings. Over the course of many years, attendees indicated that practice facilitation was the most beneficial components of their professional development experience because it helped them build confidence in their abilities to support rainbow youth and lead 2S/LGBTQIA+ related activities and sessions ([Lapointe, 2023](#)). Trainees also benefited from a Community of Practice where they exchanged knowledge with local champions and received ongoing mentorship and guidance.

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Program Delivery Models

School sites have delivered the HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth through one or more of the following implementation models:

- regular GSA meetings
- additional GSA meetings [i.e., regular meeting for standard GSA programming and an additional meeting for structured programming (i.e., HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth)]
- sign-up program (i.e., delivered outside of regular GSA meetings: additional GSA meeting, during class, or after school)
- class time (i.e., students removed from class with teacher and administrator approval and support) ([Lapointe & Crooks, 2022](#))
- everyday teaching and learning when it aligns with curricula

Model	Pros	Cons
Regular GSA meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - structured group sessions bring all club members together (i.e., builds connection and community) - program helps youth: validate and affirm their identities/ways being and expressions; identify and process minority stressors; and develop essential coping strategies to bolster their well-being and manage toxic relationships (Lapointe & Crooks, 2018) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - structured programming may displace standard conversations or activities - structured programming may seem more like class than a club - students may prefer to hang out and socialize rather than participate in formalized programming
Additional GSA meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more consistent implementation because program delivery is purposefully planned and delivered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more work and time for school staff to plan, organize, and facilitate extra club meetings
Sign-up program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more consistent implementation because it is scheduled and there is no competing GSA programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - students may not be able to attend an extra meeting, miss class, or stay after school
Class time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - students connect with peers who have similar needs and goals - students experience 2S/LGBTQIA+ affirmative content and pedagogies rather than hetero/cisnormative curricula and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some students may have difficulty attending due to scheduled assessments - some administrators and/or teachers may not be cooperative in allowing students to miss class
Everyday teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all students, regardless of their interlocking identities/ways of being, experience 2S/LGBTQIA+ affirmative content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teachers unprepared for or unable to troubleshoot backlash/ignorance from staff, students, or parent(s)/guardian(s)

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GSA Delivery Considerations

Alignment with Club Functions and Membership. Many educators and support staff are seeking advice on how to cultivate safer/braver spaces in schools. Over the years, the Centre for School Mental Health has helped school staff troubleshoot barriers to GSA formation and functioning since having a robust club is a precursor to delivering more structured mental health promotion and healthy relationships programming (i.e., the HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth). Although GSAs are a relevant venue to reach 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth and deliver mental health promotion programming ([Lapointe, Dunlop, & Crooks, 2018](#)), The HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth is meant to complement, rather than replace, regular or standard GSA programming. When deciding whether to deliver the program in or through a GSA, it is integral to note the primary function of the group as it relates to its unique and diverse membership. Since GSAs have varying roles and functions (e.g., social, support, education, advocacy), as determined by group members, clubs that emphasize support and intrapersonal education are ideal venues to deliver the HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth.

Dosage. The HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth was designed to supplement standard GSA programming, particularly for school staff and GSA members who are looking for evidence-informed 2S/LGBTQIA+ content and support ([Lapointe & Crooks, 2018](#)). Youth recommended that there be a balance of structured (i.e., the HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth) and standard GSA programming ([Lapointe & Crooks, 2018](#)). Following this recommendation ensures that structured programming does not trump or displace regular club programming or the pursuit of collective initiatives or projects that the group may work on throughout the school year, particularly around International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia or Pride. Thus, it is best to commence program delivery in the Fall to allow for gradual implementation integration throughout the school year.

Facilitator(s). Although most facilitators of the HRP for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth were GSA advisors, some youth (i.e., GSA members) delivered the program to their fellow club members. Facilitators suggested that recently graduated students or local postsecondary students could help co-facilitate the program. They also recommended pairing experienced facilitators with new facilitators to provide ongoing mentorship and guidance ([Lapointe & Crooks, 2022](#)).

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Implementation Supports

The following strategies and supports may help school staff plan for the implementation of structured 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth programming ([Lapointe & Crooks, 2022](#)):

- select a viable program delivery model
- have the means to implement the program (e.g., knowledgeable and competent staff)
- develop and facilitate ongoing supports for educators/youth workers (e.g., professional learning communities)
- schedule regular check-ins, provide individualized feedback; offer co-facilitation support
- remain flexible and adjust implementation times and locations to meet the needs and desires of youth

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