Decreasing Violence Toward Native Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Students on a BIA High School Campus

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This workshop will present the anti-violence and tolerance program entitled “Circle of Connection” A group designed to reduce violence toward LGBT students at Wingate High School, a BIA dorm high school at Ft. Wingate, NM.

- We will introduce the “Relational Practice in Action-A Group Manual” This is the group manual used with this project. The theory this manual is based on will be presented.
- The eight groups used in this project will be discussed and outcomes will be presented.
- A video of selected portions of the eight groups will be viewed.
"Just the Facts"  
Planned Parenthood of Connecticut

- "97% of students in public high schools report regularly hearing homophobic remarks from their peers.
- The typical high school student hears anti-gay slurs 25.5 times a day.
- 80% of gay and lesbian youth report severe social isolation.
- Homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims of hate crimes in the U.S.
- 45% of gay males and 20% of lesbians report having experienced verbal harassment and/or physical violence as a result of their sexual orientation during high school.
- 19% of gay/lesbian youth report suffering physical attacks based on their sexual orientation.
- 20% of LGBT youth report skipping school at least once a month because of feeling unsafe.
- 42% of adolescent lesbians and 35% of adolescent gay males who have suffered physical attack attempt suicide.

Violence and Hate Crimes  
Excerpt from "School Safety Leadership Guide"

- "Violence and hate crimes are motivated by bias against an individual’s actual or perceived race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. Examples include assault and battery, vandalism, or threats that involve bias indicators -- pieces of evidence like bigoted name calling or graffiti. In schools, while hate crimes and violence are usually carried out against a targeted individual, this one action can effect an entire student body. School aged youth live in an increasingly multicultural and multiracial society. Accordingly, they must learn to overcome the biases and intolerance passed on from previous generations. Children of diverse backgrounds need opportunities to be exposed to valid information about one another. Students need to be involved in activities that will help them examine their own beliefs and prejudices."
“Circle of Connection" An anti-violence group program conducted with students and teachers at Wingate High School.

- One group consisted of four gay students and four straight students. There were eight sessions.
- Another group consisted of eight teacher. This group met for eight sessions.
- A training workshop for WHS staff and teachers was presented on “How to reduce homophobia in the WHS campus setting”.
- A training workshop for WHS dorm staff was presented on “How to reduce homophobia in the WHS dorm setting”.
- WHS participated in the “Day of Silence” on April 10, 2002 (a nation wide program sponsored by GLSEN) sponsored by the students and teachers in the “Circle of Connection” groups.

“Circle of Connection Groups”

- Relational Development
- Connections and Disconnections: The Ebb and Flow of Relationships
- Understanding Diversity/Difference: Opportunities for Growth
- Cycles of Disconnections and Isolation
- Transforming Disconnections
- Growing and Learning Through Conflict
- Gender Issues
- Empowered to Empower Others: Building Community
Relational Development

Goal: To create a spirit of empowerment and freedom to question and to create a place to examine, create and connect.

- Core concept: we live in a culture that gives lip service to the importance of relationships between people but actually rewards people for individual, competitive efforts and tends to denigrate anything that suggests dependency or a need for other people.

- This group looked at existing power structures (involving power over other people).

- This group examined disconnections created at both personal and societal levels by forces of sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and heterosexism.

- This group helped students and teachers develop relational awareness and intelligence and enhanced their capacity to watch their own patterns of connection and disconnection.

Group 2: Connections and Disconnections: The ebb and flow of relationships

- Core concept: The cycle of connection-disconnection-reconnection suggests that working through disconnection is how relationships grow and change.

- Connection is defined as a relationship in which both people are growing and contributing to each other's growth.

- In connection we experience a sense of mutual engagement, empathy, authenticity, and empowerment within the context of relationship.

- Disconnections can result in new, stronger connections when there is responsiveness, respect, and a mutual desire to understand and grow from the experience.

- Condemned isolation: people feel cut off from others because they cannot represent themselves authentically. When individuals learn that connections are not safe, they begin to withdraw out of relationship through use of strategies of disconnection.

- Strategies of disconnection: strategies that people use to limit their sense of vulnerability by taking themselves out of the relationship.

- Core Concept: diversity is about differences between people and the way we deal with those differences. It involves our perceptions, thoughts and how we act when faced with differences in others.
- In working with diversity, we must become aware of the stereotypes we have developed and work to eliminate these biased attitudes toward others and ourselves.
- When we accept the person for who she/he is, with awareness of the contextual factors impacting both/all people in the interaction the natural outcome can be a sense of mutual empowerment.
- Empathy across difference can be a source of tremendous growth. As we stretch to meet someone around difference, we grow, move and are enlarged.

Group 4: Cycles of disconnection and isolation

- Core concept: every individual is affected by the view the culture holds for her/his particular group. Women and other marginalized groups often end up feeling deficient, defective, or “less than”. In order to be accepted, they often hold their emotional and relational needs out of the relationship.
- Shame has an enormous impact on people that can become immobilizing. When people experience shame, they feel the desire for connection but do not feel worthy of love or compassionate understanding.
- The dominant group will use poser imbalances, value judgments, economic inequities, and stereotypic assessments to induce shame and isolate the subordinate group.
- The path out of isolation is through authentic connection. As individuals are heard with compassion and acceptance by others.
Group 5: Transforming Disconnections

- Core Concept: A disconnection can be defined as an interaction where one person does not feel heard, understood, or responded to by another person. The ability to move back into connection—to transform disconnections into even stronger and deeper connections is essential to human growth.
- Where there is agreement on a goal of mutuality, both people take responsibility for being responsive to the other’s feelings and needs.
- When people feel immobilized or isolated by an inability to move from disconnection to connections, it is helpful to think about developing relational resilience. This is the ability to move back into connection following disconnections.
- Developing relational resilience also involves recognizing obstacles to mutual participation in relationships and discerning when we can trust others and when we can’t.

Group 6: Learning and Growing Through Conflict

- Old models of conflict are based on the traditional view that expressing oneself is essential, even if it is at the expense of the relationship.
- Through the use of greater relational awareness and psychological understanding, we can transform conflict into an opportunity for new understanding and growth. Interactions, which are mutually empathic and respectful, encourage honest interactions, which can widen one’s understanding of the issues at hand.
- Anger can be seen as a relational signal that something hurts, something is wrong, something needs to be changed in the relationship. Viewed in this way, difference and conflict become opportunities for growth and learning.
- Anger can be most useful when it is presented with an awareness of the impact on the other person and when it is in the service of seeking justice or creating a stronger relationship.
- When disconnections happen in new relationships, we can experiment with our efforts to move back into connection. If the other person is willing to hear us and also willing to speak from his point of view, we can move forward and begin to go deeper in the process of relationship building.
Group 7: Gender Issues

- Core Concept: Stereotyped gender roles in our culture restrict possibilities and create developmental problems for both girls and boys. The emotional and relational strengths typical of girls' behavior are devalued, while the bravado and power-over behaviors characteristic of "boy culture" are empowering to boys.
- Homophobia and heterosexism exert destructive pressures on both boys and girls. Boys, in particular, experience extreme shaming around any behavior that violates rigid gender-role stereotypes.
- Beginning at a very young age, the dominant cultural message to boys is to disconnect and distance themselves from their mothers. From the dominant cultural perspective, maintaining a close, connected mother-son relationship will likely lead boys to develop "undesirable" attributes.
- The enduring media image for girls is one of thinness, flawless beauty, and coy compliance.
- We need to help girls and young women move into power positions in society without giving up their need for connection and their relational strengths.

Group 8: Empowered to Empower Others, Building Community

- The Relational-Cultural Model embraces the building of community. There is a sense that as people engage in growth-fostering relationships, they seek to reach out to others and create contexts that are supportive of growth of others.
- When it is necessary to push back or seek change in our context, it is useful to be strategic and to focus on small steps rather than large, confrontational changes.
- RCT suggests that human beings have a deep desire to engage with others in creating meaning and good.
- RCT is about the growth of relatedness and connectedness. It emphasizes a belief in the importance and centrality of mutuality and connection in the lives of all people.
Duane Champagne, Ph.D., in “Two Spirit People” wrote:

- “The Sacredness of Being teaches the honoring of the present world as a given sacred gift from the Creator. Attempting to recreate the past will only distract us from the future. The reclaiming of the sacredness of Gay American Indian status must take place in the present historical, political and cultural situation. By taking on the understandings, beliefs, ethics and wisdom of the Indian view of Sacredness of Being, The Gay American Indian can reaffirm their identity, worth, and purpose, and seek actively to recreate and contribute to a world that continues to hold them at arms length.”

References for Workshop: Decreasing Violence Toward Native gay, Lesbian, Bisexual And Transgendered Students on A BIA High School Campus
