

Introduction to Gender and Sexual Orientation for Youth

Video and Discussion Guide

How to Use This Workshop

This video and discussion comprise a one-hour workshop. The youth view an [animated video](#) (11:15) that introduces the differences between “gender” and “sex,” models of sexual orientation, and the concept of a core identity. The workshop is suitable for any group of youth that the facilitator(s) believe can approach the topic with a basic maturity.

It is essential that facilitators (1) understand the difference between one’s gender, one’s sex, and one’s sexual orientation, (2) be familiar with a range of sexual identities, both conceptually and through exposure to diverse people, and, of course, (3) be comfortable with their own gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Facilitators should view the video and walk through the discussion questions themselves, before leading the workshop.

Do not assume youth will enter this workshop with a clear or fixed understanding of their own gender and sexual orientation. Rather, expect to use this workshop to guide self-reflection, affirm self-acceptance, and build awareness of the diversity possible in gender and sexual orientation.

Before leading the workshop, identify local resources to share with youth, including identity-based groups that welcome youth, organizations that support youth who are questioning gender identity and/or sexual orientation, and suicide prevention counseling resources, such as a hotline. List resources and contact information on a handout, or post them on newsprint.

Materials

- Chalice and lighter
- Computer with Internet access and large monitor or digital projector
- Pens/pencils
- Handout 1, Core Identity and Models of Sexual Orientation
- Handout 2, Sexual Orientation Questionnaire
- Handout 3, Youth Suicide
- Optional: Handout 4, Opening and Closing Readings
- Optional: Facilitator-prepared handout of local resources for youth
- Optional: Newsprint, markers, and tape

Creating a Safe Environment

The workshop asks youth to do sexual identity work, and while identity work can be empowering, it can also be painful. The video covers topics that may cause some youth

emotional discomfort, such as uncertainty about one's sexual orientation, gender identity variations, and suicide. It is recommended that your minister, a lay minister or chaplain, or another adult experienced in pastoral care be present. You may also arrange for Rev. Dr. Monica L. Cummings, UUA Program Associate for Ministry to Youth and Young Adults of Color, to participate in this workshop in person or via Skype.

If the group has already made a covenant, re-introduce it at the start of the workshop. If any participants have not worked together before, immediately after the Opening guide the group to affirm a simple covenant. Make sure these points are included:

- Confidentiality: What is said in this group stays in this group.
- Speaking from personal experience: Speak for yourself, and allow others space to speak for themselves.
- Affirming everyone's right to their experiences and opinions: When needed, respectfully agree to disagree.
- Right to pass. It is fine to participate in discussion by listening; no one is required to share.

Video

Gather the group where all can see and hear the video. Play the video.

Opening

Light the chalice with opening words of your choice, or lead the Opening Reading provided in **Handout 4, Opening and Closing Readings**.

Discussion

Lead the group to recall the definitions they learned in the video for:

Gender

Sex

Sexual Orientation

Now, invite the youth to reflect silently while you read all these questions:

- Are you a male? How do you know?
- Are you a female? How do you know?
- Is your gender other than male or female? Are you transgender, or gender neutral? How do you know?

Allow a moment, then invite volunteers to respond.

Continue discussion with these questions:

- When does a person know that they are female, male or transgender?
- What happens when a person's internal gender identity does not match their biological sex?
- What is homophobia? What is transphobia? What are some examples?

Distribute **Handout 1, Core Identity and Models of Sexual Orientation** and pens/pencils. Lead the group to read and process the information related to Core Identity. Take time to explain what “style of behavior” means in this context:

1. One’s “style of behavior” is separate from one’s gender or sexual orientation, though plenty of stereotypes exist which tie certain styles of behavior to a particular gender or sexual orientation.
2. A person’s gender expression, as discussed in the video, can also be a style of behavior, but in terms of core identity we are talking about overall personality expression, not only gender expression.
3. Someone’s core “style of behavior” is hard to capture in a single phrase. The person who identifies as “very competitive” in the example surely has other behavior styles, as well.

Invite the youth to fill in their own core identity information on their handout. Give them a moment, then ask if there are any questions. Invite a few volunteers to share how they filled in their core identity information.

Now, lead the group to read and process the Models of Sexual Orientation section of the handout.

Distribute **Handout 2, Sexual Orientation Questionnaire**. Go over the questions together.

Then invite the youth to fill out their questionnaires. Give them a minute or two, then process. Invite a few volunteers to share.

Distribute **Handout 3, Youth Suicide**. Invite the youth to skim the handout. Ask them to call out information that relates to gender and/or sexual orientation as a factor in youth suicide. Then, ask:

- Why do you think youth whose gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation does not fit the majority’s norms are at higher risk for suicide?

Direct the group’s attention to the resources at the bottom of Handout 3. Distribute a handout of local resources if you have prepared one, or post the newsprint list and invite the youth to write the information you have posted, on their handout.

Check-out and Closing

Have participants say in one or two sentences how they are feeling. Chaplains or minister need to pay close attention to what participants share, and be ready to follow up as needed.

Re-light the chalice, if needed. Offer closing words of your choosing or lead the Closing Reading from **Handout 4**. Extinguish the chalice.