

Optional/ Supplemental Session Working with Children and B/G/L/T Issues

Learning Objectives:

- To explore with adults the issues inherent in working with children of all ages on b/g/l/t issues
- To have the adults explore some of their own issues, concerns, and anxieties around b/g/l/t issues

Session Summary:

This session is supplemental and may in some ways be a model for the *Living the Welcoming Congregation* committee and another group(s) within the church on how to work together on a common theme. This session is designed to help adults talk to children about bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender issues. The adults will explore some of their own thoughts and experiences; engage in conversations about what is appropriate to talk to children about; examine a children's book on the subject; and discuss ways in which b/g/l/t issues arise for children and how to best integrate this into their lives. (*Special note: There are three hours worth of materials in this session. Adapt as needed.*)

Background:

One of the greatest concerns in many Unitarian Universalist congregations is how to effectively deal with bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender concerns as well as biphobia, genderism, heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia inside and outside of our congregations. Many adults have anxiety about this. It is important to know that for a variety of reasons the anxiety often lies more with adults than with children. (Children have had less time to learn to be anxious about b/g/l/t issues. B/G/L/T issues are more commonly talked about than they were in the recent past, mostly because there are simply

more "out" people now than there were in the past.)

This session is designed to provide adults with a chance to "practice" talking about these issues and explore some of their own thoughts, histories, and feelings.

Materials:

1. Newsprint
2. Markers
3. Paper
4. Writing Utensils
5. Postage paid postcards
6. Children's books
 - Pre K-K: *The Story of Ferdinand* by Munro Leaf
 - K-2: *Asha's Mums* by Rosamund Elwin and Michele Paulse
 - *The Sissy Duckling* by Harvey Fierstein
 - "Am I Blue?" (Bruce Coville) from *Am I Blue?* Edited by Marion Dane Bauer

There are other books listed that can be used. Visit <http://www.uua.org/obgltc> for a list.

Preparation:

Invite appropriate groups to join the discussion. These may include religious education teachers, staff, parents, and other interested people. You may adapt this for a particular age of children/youth (such as early elementary, junior high) or be inclusive of all. Pick at least one of the children's books for the book discussion. You may wish to have copies available of the UUA pamphlet "Is Our Church Gay?" by Meg Riley (available through the UUA's Bookstore: 1.800.215.9076).

Workshop Plan

Opening Reading/Hymn (5 Minutes)

(You are invited to pick a reading and/or an opening hymn. Singing The Living Tradition is an excellent resource. Other options are a moment of silence, a prayer, or a brief check-in. You are encouraged to also begin with a chalice lighting. Please submit any readings and/or hymn choices that you have used successfully to the OBGLTC as feedback for possible inclusion in future editions of LWC.)

Activities:

Opening Questions (35 minutes)

If there are visitors, invite everyone to introduce themselves in the group. Tell participants that they will start by having time to explore what they have learned about b/g/l/t issues through a series of questions.

Ask the participants to get into groups of 3 or 4. Tell them they will have about 5 minutes for each of the questions. First they will be asked a question and given a moment to reflect on it before anyone responds. Then they will be invited to share their answers with their small group.

Let them know that often adults have more difficulty talking about b/g/l/t issues when they have not yet answered many questions out loud about b/g/l/t issues. This will be a chance to answer some questions.

Tell the participants not to disclose any information that makes them uncomfortable. Sharing will be up to them. In this session you may wish to create new guidelines for conversation or use the guidelines that were developed for *Living the Welcoming Congregation*.

1. Who was your first crush on? How old were you? What do you remember about it or the person?

2. What put-downs do you remember in which people equated being bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender with being wrong? Has anyone you have ever known been bullied or taunted using b/g/l/t words as insults?
3. How were b/g/l/t identities and issues discussed as you were growing up? What did your friends and family say and not say?
4. What changes around b/g/l/t issues have you noticed in your lifetime? What judgments would you place on these changes?
5. What messages about sex and love were you given? What judgments would you place on these changes? Were these topics connected to each other or talked about separately? How were they distinguished from one another?
6. What messages about gender and gender roles were you given? How were these messages conveyed? What judgments would you place on these messages? What impact did they have on your life? What impact do they continue to have on your life?

When the questions have been completed, re-gather as a large group and ask how it was for the participants to answer these questions? Are there implications from your answers to these questions that might inform how and what you say to children about b/g/l/t issues and why you say it.

Brainstorming (30 minutes)

Tell the participants that the group is going to brainstorm answers to three questions. Remind the participants that there is no editing in brainstorming and that all answers are encouraged and will be recorded on newsprint. You may wish to have more than one recorder for this exercise.

There will be up to 7 minutes for each question. At the end of the time look at the lists and discuss what is on these lists. If a comment is connected to a specific age range, please ask that they mention it with their idea and record that information with the idea.

Question #1:

What do kids know now about bisexuals and bisexuality, gays, lesbians, gay and lesbian issues, transgender people and gender/transgender issues, biphobia, genderism, heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia?

Question #2

What would have been helpful for you to know as you were growing up about bisexuals and bisexuality, gays, lesbians, gay and lesbian issues, transgender people and gender/transgender issues, biphobia, genderism, heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia?

Question #3

What do kids need to know about bisexuals and bisexuality, gays, lesbians, gay and lesbian issues, transgender people and gender/transgender issues, biphobia, genderism, heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia?

When the time is up, ask the group to study the results. What similarities and differences do they see? What stands out to them as being important? What have they learned from this?

Children's Book Discussion (20 minutes)

Tell the participants that you are now going to share a children's book that deals with b/g/l/t issues. If you are targeting a specific age group, you should pick an age-

appropriate book. If you are looking at multiple ages in this workshop, you may find it helpful to choose only one book to use or divide into smaller groups.

Read the book/story aloud to the group. In a large group discussion, examine some or all of the following questions:

1. What did you think about the story?
2. How does this book address b/g/l/t issues for the age group intended?
3. Is it appropriate?
4. What would you want kids to think and feel after hearing this story?
5. What questions could you ask children/youth about this story?
6. How could you use this story with children/youth?

Role Plays (45 minutes)

Tell participants that they are going to explore ways to respond to children/youth about b/g/l/t issues by examining real-life situations.

Have the group divide into small groups (you may determine the size). They can examine the situations by acting them out as skits/role-plays, or by discussing them. As facilitator(s) or as a group, decide which would be most productive and helpful.

Each small group will have twenty minutes to practice role-playing or discussing the situation. Then the group will re-gather to discuss with and/or act out the skit for the entire group.

You can have several small groups working on the same role-play or different groups working on different role-plays..

Note: There are four situations listed, but you may have other real-life situations that you may wish to discuss. You are encouraged to do so.

- 1) A four-year-old boy tells his R.E. teacher he wants to wear a dress to church next week. How would you respond?
- 2) A seven-year-old girl is playing with her female friend. They finish a project together and the seven-year-old girl is so excited she kisses and hugs her friend. Her female friend wipes her face in a bit of disgust and goes, “Ugh. That’s so gay!” How would you respond?
- 3) After teaching an OWL class a 13-year-old student pulls you aside and says, “When we talked about bisexuals, I think I am one of those. How can I know for sure?”
- 4) A 10-year-old boy is upset. His friend at school has asked him if he is thinking about joining the Boy Scouts. He hasn’t told his friend he has two moms and they have all talked about the Boy Scouts. He would kind of like to be with his friends, but doesn’t want to hurt his moms. And he is scared about what his friend will say? What would you do when he tells you this?

2. They are learning by your response how you *feel* about b/g/l/t issues;
3. They are learning by your response how you *feel about talking about* b/g/l/t issues.

Ask participants to respond to this statement. In particular, invite comments about part three of the statement. Ask participants to take a moment to think about what, if any, anxiety they might have about talking with children about b/g/l/t issues. Ask if there are specific issues around b/g/l/t issues that cause more anxiety than others.

As participants share their anxieties and before others offer solutions, ask what would help reduce their anxiety about these examples. You may then wish to have some time for a general conversation about specific things that will help people reduce their anxiety, particularly if the group wants this. Check this out with the group. Remind the group that it is important to know about and to be aware of what we are teaching children both in content and with our emotions.

When the time is up, invite volunteers to talk and/or demonstrate what they would say or do in these situations. Allow time for other suggestions of approaches after each role-play. Allow about five minutes for each role-play to be discussed. Then ask what other situations might happen and ask the participants for their reactions to doing the role-plays.

Anxiety (15 minutes)

Put the following statement up on newsprint:

When talking about b/g/l/t issues with children, the children are learning three things as you talk:

1. They are learning basic information;

Next Move (25 minutes)

Now the group is going to use the information and examples from above to decide what needs to be done next. If it is a large group you may wish to divide into smaller groups (classes, for example or perhaps types of adults there, of which there may be overlap, like LWC members, R.E. teachers, and parents). If the entire group is small you may wish to stay together as one group.

Ask the participants to think about what next steps would help deepen this work in their areas as educators, parents, and other interested adults. Remind them that they are being asked to think as individuals, as part of a larger group (i.e. pre-K R.E. teachers), *and* as the congregation as a whole.

Invite the participants to think of 1-2 commitments they will implement as individuals during the upcoming year. Have them write their

commitments on a pre-stamped postcard and address the postcard to themselves. Inform them that, as a reminder of their commitments, you will send the postcards out to them later in the church year.

Next ask them to do the same for the smaller groups and collectively decide on 1-2 commitments they can make for the upcoming year. And finally, ask for them to think about what can be done to inform the congregation of this work and what can be asked of the congregation in terms of needed support to help make this happen. Decide how the small group and congregational commitments will best be carried out and agree on an action plan that says: who will do what, how they will do it and by when it will be done.

Thank the participants for being there and for engaging in the process.

Closing Reading/Hymn (5 minutes)

(You are encouraged to find a suitable one. The difference between the Opening and Closing is that we suggest that one reading and/or one hymn is selected to be used as the closing for all sessions. The Opening may vary from session to session.)

Suggested Hymns

Suggested Readings

Add Your Suggestion

Ask participants to hold hands as they are willing, able, and comfortable.