## Promising Practices for Engaging 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth in Online Programming

Since the first **large-scale study** exploring violence in same-sex romantic and sexual adolescent relationships was published in 2004[1], the topic of adolescent dating violence (ADV) among 2SLGBTQIA+[2] youth has received **steadily increasing** research attention. Recent data highlight that youth who belong to 2SLGBTQIA+ communities are at **disproportionate risk** of experiencing ADV, due to societal homophobia and transphobia. For example, using data from over 87,000 students in grades 9 and 11 in Minnesota, Martin-Storey and colleagues found that sexual and gender minority participants were at higher risk for all forms of ADV than their heterosexual and cisgender peers, with adolescents who identified as **transgender** particularly at risk[3]. Recent nationally representative data from Canada also suggests that **non-binary youth** are at significantly higher risk for ADV, as compared to their cisgender peers[4].

Given the disproportionate rates of ADV experienced by youth in 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, **2SLGBTQIA+-specific ADV prevention is critical**. However, specific ADV prevention programs for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities are still few and far between[5]. Specific prevention programs are important due to the **unique risk factors** that may be experienced by youth in 2SLGBTQIA+ communities[6]. In addition, in the face of COVID-19, many existing prevention programs needed to move online, which introduces additional complexities to the delivery of ADV prevention programs to 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. Understanding **best and promising practices** for **online** program delivery is also important post-pandemic, as it may help practitioners research **rural and remote youth**, as well as youth who are not able to attend face-to-face sessions (e.g., for privacy reasons).

To help **guide the online delivery** of ADV prevention programs to youth in 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, PREVNet convened a panel of practice and research experts in March 2021, and asked them to highlight **green light (proceed), yellow light (proceed with caution)** and **red light (stop)** practices for working with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth online. As there is very little guidance on how to deliver ADV prevention programming online with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, the tips in this document are an excellent **starting place** for practitioners and researchers engaged in this work. However, future research is needed in this area to identify effective ADV interventions – and intervention core components – for this population.
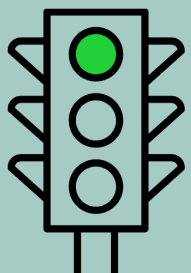
PRE-WORK (REQUIRED)

- Ground all ADV prevention programming for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in an intersectional and trauma-informed approach (whether online or in-person). Ensure program design and access to programming is accessible

- Find a way to acknowledge the land and to put the prevention work you are doing in context of decolonization (e.g., non-Indigenous facilitators can identify as settlers)

- Review any pre-made content (e.g., pronouns in examples, visual representation of youth) for inclusivity and avoidance of stereotypes. Replace/adapt problematic content.

- Include examples of content that reflect 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences (case scenarios, etc.)

- Staff training prior to engagement with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth on- or off-line is critical. This includes clear commitment to and alignment with best practices in human resources, data collection, etc., that are trans inclusive. Facilitators also need to be competent to manage instances of homophobia and transphobia, and to implement equitable conversations/activities

- Explicit and ongoing 2SLGBTQIA+ training for facilitators who may not be confident, comfortable, or competent in supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ youth should be embedded as part of program implementation

PRE-WORK (STRONGLY SUGGESTED)

- Use an interactive framework/learning approach and focus on relationship development. Incorporate "non-content" activities to complement learnings

- Listen to youth and use their ideas to help build your program (and any online adaptation of that programming). Design should be collaborative. Provide ample opportunity for anonymous feedback underscoring interest in the points of view of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

- Allocate funding to provide access for youth with limited technology access

- Have participants sign-up/engage directly with your program

- If you can, meet online with youth individually before the program starts, so you can get to know them and their needs. This also helps to bring excitement to programming and ensure actual attendance

- Use intentional opt-in communication (i.e., intentionality around how and through what pathways you contact youth – need to ensure safety in possibly unsafe homes, etc.). Make sure any identity disclosures are opt-in. If possible, provide an option for anonymity / no identifying information shared or collected

- Provide frameworks for youth and facilitators for family dialogue around online activities

- If you have a group with both 2SLGBTQIA+ and heterosexual youth, ensure there is some time set aside for closed-identity / community-specific spaces

- Emergency plan beforehand for EVERYTHING. Have backup plans for tech, programming, emergency numbers etc. Make sure the metaphorical "backpack" you pack/ unpack is ready for all types of weather!

DURING IMPLEMENTATION

- Welcome everyone in through the chat and acknowledge youth as they enter the digital space

- Don't require video but do share your screen/video and recommend that youth turn on their video if they feel comfortable. Tell them that if they are comfortable, having video on can help create a safe space

- Ask people their pronouns (and to display them in their screen name if possible/safe)

- Work to create a safe and inclusive space through language. Always use gender-neutral language (except when folks specify otherwise)

- Build trust and relationships through co-constructing group guidelines (i.e., ground rules) and using intentional ice breakers/community development activities

- Co-construct guidelines with youth about what to do if someone needs to leave the online room (e.g., should someone check in with them? How will they indicate if they just need a break but are safe?)

- Give youth the right to pass and check out. Have safety words for youth to use if they feel uncomfortable/upset, or need to stop talking for privacy reasons.

- Make sure technology used has features (e.g., quick leave buttons, chat functions) that allow for increased privacy and confidentiality

- Provide trigger warnings before any sensitive content, so that youth can choose whether they wish to participate

- Use interactive tools, and explain how to use them (e.g., Padlet, Jamboard, etc.). Also, use tools that allow for both verbal and non-verbal sharing, so that there are numerous ways for youth to engage

- Give clear and repeated instructions for any activity. To make sure these are accessible, display any instructions/guidelines on the screen and read them out loud as well

- Have staff/cheerleaders/navigators in any breakout rooms to ensure everyone is safe/on track etc.

- Provide extra time for online activities (i.e., over and above the time you would provide if you were face-to-face)

- Meet youth where they're at in terms of programming content that day – social/support as a foundation before more structured content

- Create a routine – strive for semi-structured sessions with flexibility to adapt based on which youth attend that day

- Do a safety check at the end of every session

- Provide swag bags/some sort of incentive for attendance (e.g., gift cards)

- Make it fun! You can create fun with music, videos, games and optional icebreakers

AFTER A SESSION

- Ensure any peer or mental health support provided is 2SLGBTQIA+ specific

- Continue to provide individual check-ins to youth

- Check-in with other facilitators for debriefing and social support
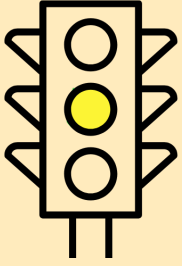
- Be thoughtful about requiring parental consent to participate. This can be risky for some 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, because it may out them. For more, see this PREVNet research summary

- Co-facilitation with youth can work, but requires planning. Make sure to have a plan to mentor and support any youth who are interested in taking on a leadership role

- Using freeform spaces to allow for casual engagement (e.g., discord). Unstructured conversation can work well, but also opens up the potential for harmful interactions. So, if using freeform conversation, it is critical to establish group guidelines grounded in relational accountability, and ensure these guidelines are reviewed at the beginning of each session

- Using a sex-positive approach can be a plus, but this approach needs to grounded in consideration of cultural sensitivities within the group. Being aware of who is in the group and reframing the conversation based on who is there is key. Sex positivity may also imply that all sexual experiences are positive, which is not the case for many youth. Instead, consider a focus on holistic sexual health and wellness

- Program fidelity is important, but needs to be balanced with the needs of the youth in the room at that moment. Flexibility in an asset
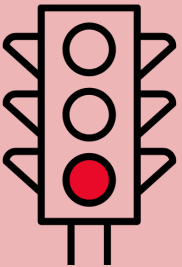
Mandating Use of Pronouns
- Using pronouns that youth identify with is an essential part of trauma-informed practice with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. Instead of mandating use of pronouns, give youth options for how they can share their pronouns. If you use the wrong pronouns, apologize and let the youth it is very important to you to get it right in the future

Requiring Cameras
- Youth live in many different situations, and it may not be safe or comfortable to require them to have their cameras on. Trust that youth know best whether or not it is safe to have their camera on, and give youth the option to have their cameras on or off throughout the session

Mandating Participation During the Session
- Youth may not feel comfortable participating for a variety of reasons, so participation should not be mandated. Forcing youth to participate may also lead to re-traumatization. Instead, ensure that youth in the group know they always have the right to pass on a question/discussion or to leave the room if they need to. It is also important to establish ground rules about leaving the room (e.g., letting someone know you are safe but just need a break; see Green Light Adaptations)

Enforcing Strict Language (i.e., not giving folks space to use and define terms as best suit them)

• Language changes rapidly, and youth may have different ways of describing themselves or their situations than what you are used to, so don't force them to use specific terms. Trust that youth know best, and don't correct them. Empower youth by supporting them to use the language that they feel best describes them. However, it is important to note that if the language being used is harmful to someone else in the group, then relational accountability guidelines need to be used (see Yellow Light adaptations)

Speaking Over or on Behalf of Youth

• Doing this is a common way many adult facilitators (even though many are well-meaning) take power and agency away from youth. Give youth the space and time to speak and reflect. Become comfortable sitting in silence.

Policing or Presuming Youth's Lived Experiences

• Youth are the experts on their own lives.

[1]Halpern, C. T., Young, M. L., Waller, M. W., Martin, S, L., & Kupper, L. L. (2004). Prevalence of partner violence in same-sex romantic and sexual relationships in a national sample of adolescents. Journal of Adolescent Health, 35(2), 124-131. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2003.09.003

[2]Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (see https://kidshelp-phone.ca/get-info/lgbtq2s-what-does-it-mean for more information).

[3]Martin-Storey, A., Pollitt, A. M., Baams, L. (2020). Profiles and predictors of dating violence among sexual and gender minority adolescents. Journal of Adolescent Health. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adohealth.2020.08.034

[4]Exner-Cortens, D., Baker, E., & Craig, W. (2021). The national prevalence of dating violence in Canada. Journal of Adolescent Health. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.01.032

[5]Lapointe, A. (2017). Teen relationship violence and wellbeing among LGBTQ+ youth. Western Centre for School Mental Health. https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/csmh-healthyrelations/2/; Wesche, R., Galletly, C.L. & Shorey, R.C. (2021). Developing an inclusive Safe Dates program for sexual and gender minority adolescents: A pilot study. Journal of Adolescence, 86, 11-14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.11.002
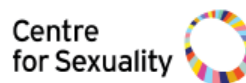
[6]Scheer, J. R., & Baams, L., (2019). Help-seeking patterns among LGBTQ youth adults exposed to intimate partner violence victimization. Journal of Interpersonal Violence. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/0086260519848785; Trans-specific power and control tactics. FORGE. https://forge-forward.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/power-control-tactics-categories_FINAL.pdf