Session Plan for Staff

Online Safeguarding Issues for LGBT+ Young People

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| Time | Slide | Notes |
| 5 mins | Intro to VAWG & this session | Open to Qs  Focus is on safeguarding LGBT YP but also relates to all YP |
| 5 mins | A blessing or a curse | Internet amazing  New experiences and potential  BUT pros & cons  = YP exposed to misleading information & people who may want to abuse their innocence  Lots of sites are sexualised & give a false understanding of homosexuality  Disenfranchised groups use online & social media to connect but become at greater risk of bullying, exploitation & abuse |
| 5 mins | Finding our tribe | All YP will use the internet to discover themselves  LGBT YP will also try to fill the gaps they are missing from home & education  Feeling different can lead to feelings of rejection, isolation and unacceptability, which can impact self-worth |
| 5 mins | LGBT youth statistics | 83% of LGBT YP are bullied in person   * Stats are 3 times higher for LGBT than non-LGBT   LGBT youth are 2-3 times more likely than non-LGBT to attempt suicide. BUT, with a family that doesn’t accept them, they are 8 times more likely  YP who aren’t out to their families are blackmailed into sexual relationships  LGBT YP use the internet more than their peers to find an accepting community and better understand themselves. Online spaces as well as gay clubs and cruising sites make LGBT YP feel valued in a way they never have before, but they can be dangerous. |
| 5 mins | Q. What makes a young person vulnerable to exploit | Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or YP into sexual activity.  This is in exchange for something the victim wants or needs, which can be simply affection, experiences, excitement.  It can sometimes appear consensual and often without the YP being aware they are being exploited.  When a child is sexually exploited online, they may be persuaded or forced to:   * Send or post sexually explicit images of themselves * Film or stream sexual activities * Have sexual conversations   Once an abuser has images, videos or copies of conversations, they may use these to threaten and blackmail |
| 5 mins | All YP are potentially at risk | Case in point: Gemma Watts – 21yr old female who disguised as a 16yr old ‘Jake Waton’ to groom & sexually assault young girls – just jailed for 8yrs  Peak age for exploitation is 15yrs  It can happen to any YP  What makes YP additionally vulnerable  -living in care, disabilities, bereavement, marginalised, rejected, homeless, loneliness |
| 5 mins | Potential signs | Some of these may be true of any teenager, but we have to be attuned to the changes  Disclosure becomes additionally difficult as the YP can experience trauma bonds and will want to hide the relationship to protect it because they believe it to be loving and special, or because they feel shame and afraid of their family finding out they are engaging in a relationship that their family would not have supported. |
| 5 mins | Protection & disclosure | Knowledge is power – educating YP about all relationships, especially what healthy & unhealthy relationships look like  Listen  Reassure  Support |
| 5 mins | Impact of exploitation | It can affect all areas of their life and can continue to affect all areas in the long term, which is why we need to protect them before something happens |
| 5 mins | Impact, remember, report | Being sexually abused and exploited can have a devastating impact on YP  Don’t judge  Be prepared – make sure your policies & practice are ready to support YP  Report and get support for you all |
| 5 mins | Summary & close |  |
|  | Q&A |  |

Facilitator Session Notes

A blessing or a curse

The internet is an amazing invention that opens our world to new and exciting experiences that we may not otherwise have had opportunity to access, but for young people this can facilitate potential contact with people who want to take advantage of their innocence and can facilitate them accessing misleading information.

Instant communication has helped disenfranchised groups to build and engage their communities, whilst also providing opportunity for those same vulnerable populations to be harassed and exploited and can mean these groups face higher rates of cyberbullying, exploitation and abuse.

Despite improved awareness of gender and sexual diversity, exploring, questioning or understanding their own identity can be a confusing time for young people. Feeling different can lead to feelings of isolation and unacceptability, which can impact self-worth and may cause the young person to feel ashamed of who they believe themselves to be, leading to negative impact on their mental health.

Young LGBT people particularly turn to the internet to access information on issues around their identity that they aren’t getting in school, which exposes them to further potential risks. Many sites are very sexualised. They may find porn online, which shows people having sex without condoms or engaging in extreme sexual acts, that they then believe to be normal.

More than 42% of LGBT youth reported being harassed or bullied online (83% in person); this is almost 3 times higher than non-LGBT youth, where 15% have this experience.

33% of LGBT young people report being sexually harassed online; again more than 3 times the rate of their non-LGBT peers.

All young people under 18 are potentially at risk of online grooming and child sexual exploitation, but around 15 is the peak age and some are additionally vulnerable, such as children in care, children with disabilities, children who have experienced the death of someone significant in their lives & children who are marginalised as they are less likely to speak out.

Young LGBT people, particularly young men, are unlikely to be out to their family and friends, which can be used to blackmail them. A much publicised statistic is that LGBT youth are 2-3 times more likely than non-LGBT young people to attempt suicide. However, with a family that doesn’t accept them, this rockets to 8 times more likely.

Most young people will have access to the internet and the boom in social media and online platforms means that may will use online gaming sites, photo sharing apps like Instagram, social networking sites, instant messaging & live streaming apps as well as dating apps and chat rooms. The internet can be a lifeline to connect with other LGBT young people, and seek out information and resources on sexual and gender identity. LGBT young people will share themselves in a way they often don’t feel comfortable in real life, which results in:

* Spending on average 45 minutes more time online daily than their peers
* 73% reporting they are more honest online
* 50% reporting having at least one close online friend, compared with 19% of their peers
* LGBT young people experiencing their online friends as more supportive than their peers experience their online friends
* 62% of LGBT young people used the internet to connect with other LGBT people in the last year
* More than 1 in 10 first disclosed their LGBT identity to someone online
* 1 in 4 said they were more out online than in person
* 2 in 5 LGBT young people have met up with someone they talked to online
* 3 in 10 met someone who was older
* 1 in 5 did not tell anyone they were meeting up
* More than 2 in 5 have sent or received sexual, naked or semi-naked photos to or from a person they were talking to online

In summary, LGBT young people use the internet to a greater extent than their peers to find a safe, honest, accepting community and to better understand themselves. Online spaces as well as gay clubs and cruising sites make LGBT young people feel valued in a way they never have before, but they can be dangerous places for young people.

When young people are looking to strangers for support, they are at higher risk of being exploited, have less control over the relationship and the type of sex they have, and can be influenced into believing their abusive relationship is normal.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person into sexual activity. This is in exchange for something the victim wants or needs, which can be simply affection, experiences, excitement. It can sometimes appear consensual and often without the young person being aware that they are being exploited.

When a child is sexually exploited online, they may be persuaded or forced to:

* Send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
* Film or stream sexual activities
* Have sexual conversations

Once an abuser has images, videos or copies of conversations, they may use these to threaten and blackmail the young person to take part in other sexual activity & may share the images and videos with others or circulate them online.

What makes a young person vulnerable to exploit?

Children can be groomed when someone builds a relationship of trust and emotional connection in order to manipulate, exploit and abuse them. This can be done by giving the young person flattery & compliments, gifts, drugs, money & affection in exchange for sexual favours.

Anyone can be a groomer

Grooming can be over a short or long time: weeks to years

Groomers may build a relationship with the young person’s family or friends to make them seem trustworthy

Case in point: Gemma Watts – 21yr old recently sentenced to 8yrs in prison for posing as a teenage boy to groom then sexually assault underage girls; believed to have assaulted up to 50 girls.

Online groomers may pretend to be someone else, sending photos of other people to hide themselves.

All young people will go through a period of exploring their sexuality and are likely to use online chat rooms. For LGBT young people this may lead to discovering the world of adult dating apps.

Sadly these are highly sexualised and there is a culture of acceptance around sexting and casual, anonymous hook ups that LGBT young people may believe to be what is expected of them.

The fact that young people can see themselves as making a choice can prevent them from seeking support so understanding the context within which those choices are made is crucial to responding effectively

Young LGBT people may not recognise that they are being exploited and experience the relationship as something they have chosen and consented. This makes it difficult to address without the young person feeling you are restricting their freedoms or uncomfortable with their sexual identity.

It’s important to talk about healthy relationships & grooming

Explain how easy it is to create a fake profile online & why an adult may wish to approach them

It can be difficult to tell if a child is being groomed, they signs aren’t obvious and may be reflective of ‘normal’ teen behaviour, such as:

* Secrecy
* Underage drinking or drug taking
* Spending more time online
* Being upset, withdrawn or distressed
* Changes in mood or behaviour
* Being frightened
* Regularly missing from home or school
* Unexplained gifts

Disclosure becomes additionally difficult as the young person can experience trauma bonds and will want to hide the relationship to protect it because they believe it to be loving and special, or because they feel shame and afraid of engaging in a relationship that their family would not have supported.

What protection can we offer?

* To be able to recognise that a young person may be at risk, we need to be open to the understanding that they may not be heterosexual
* Use open, neutral language when asking questions “are you in a relationship with anyone” or phrase questions to be encompassing of different options “are you in a relationship with someone male or female or trans”
* Help young people to understand their bodies & sex in a way that is appropriate for their age
* Develop a trusting relationship so they can talk to you
* Ensure they understand the difference between safe secrets & unsafe secrets
* Teach them to understand boundaries and respect, such as privacy
* Teaching them self-respect & how to say no
* Creating safe and consistent relationships are paramount to promoting resilience in young people

If a child reveals an abusive relationship:

* Listen to what they’re saying
* Assure them they are doing the right thing by telling you
* Assure them it’s not their fault
* Assure them you will take them seriously
* Don’t confront the alleged abuser
* Explain what you are going to do
* Report what the child has said as soon as possible

The Impact

* Physical & mental pain
* Education
* Family relationships
* Friends
* How they view others

This can be long and short term and may include:

* Anxiety and depression
* PTSD
* Low self-esteem
* Nightmares
* Attachment problems
* STIs
* Isolation
* Self-harm
* Feelings of guilt & shame
* Drug & alcohol problems
* Eating disorders
* Suicidal thoughts
* Youth offending
* Poor educational prospects
* Negative future relationships
* Increased risk of further/ other violence or abuse

Remember:

* Be aware of your own misconceptions and assumptions
* Review your safeguarding policy and risk assessment to ensure it is encompassing of LGBT young people’s experiences

Reporting can be to:

* CEOP (child exploitation & online protection command) <https://www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting/>
* The police
* The website the grooming has happened on
* Local child protection services

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-spot-child-sexual-exploitation/>

<https://www.youngstonewall.org.uk/system/files/staying_safe_online_guide.pdf>

Staying Safe Online

<https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/cse_guidance_lgbtq.pdf>

Supporting LGBTQ+ Children and Young People at Risk of Child Sexual Exploitation: Guidance for Professionals

<https://www.glsen.org/news/out-online-experiences-lgbt-youth-internet>

<https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/disrespect-nobody-teaching-resources-preventing>

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/schools/making-sense-relationships/>

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/guidance/relationships-and-sex-education-and-health-education-statutory-guidance/>