



Reducing Inequalities Between Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Adolescents and Cisgender, Heterosexual Adolescents

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

AN AFFIRMATIVE COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH OF SEXUAL & GENDER MINORITY YOUTH (AFFIRM)

Promising practices in mental, emotional, and physical health

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Objectives

- Describe the development and implementation of **AFFIRM**, a manualized affirmative CBT intervention
- Detail the impact on depression, coping and hope for diverse populations of LGBTQ+ youth and young adults
- Articulate the evidence from offline and online trials
- Highlight emerging program: **AFFIRM Caregiver**



Fast Facts

- 8 session cognitive behavioral (CBT) intervention developed to target the unique needs of SGMY
- Promotes positive change and healthy coping through the creation of a safe, affirming, and collaborative therapeutic experience
- Rooted in the tenets of CBT and aims to improve emotional and behavioural functioning by targeting underlying, problematic cognitions
- Developed to counter the harmful and unethical 'conversion' therapies which pathologize LGBTQ+ identities and coercively aim to change minority sexual orientations and/or gender identities

(Beck, 1970; Beck, 2011)

AFFIRM is an affirmative CBT-based group designed to help **LGBTQ+** youth and adults manage stress. As an evidence-based intervention, AFFIRM supports mental and sexual health, enhances coping skills and validates strengths of its participants.

AFFIRMATIVE RESULTS

70% reported increased hope pathway thinking

Hope pathway thinking is the ability to generate multiple routes from the present to the desired future.

63% reported reduced depression

72% reported increased cognitive stress appraisal as challenges (vs. threats)
Viewing stressful situations as more of a challenge than a threat has been associated with better mental health.

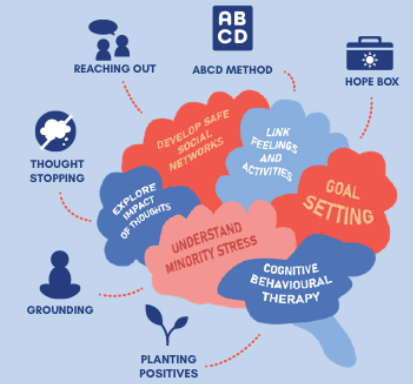


AFFIRM IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Depression -63%
Reflective coping +57%
Hope agency +70%
Hope pathway +70%
Stress appraisal: Challenge +72%
Stress appraisal: Threat -70%
Stress appraisal: Resources +65%

THE AFFIRM APPROACH

AFFIRM integrates identity affirmation with cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) to improve wellbeing.

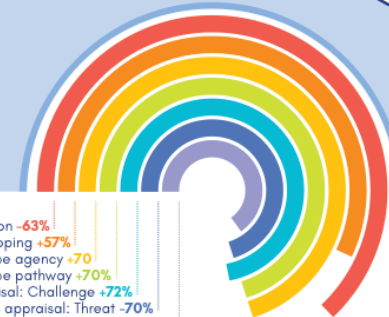


PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

"I appreciate a program like AFFIRM. It's especially **helpful for LGBTQ+ people** in terms of dealing with 'minority stress'. I really enjoyed my time participating in AFFIRM!"

"I have **benefited immensely** from AFFIRM. This program has had a profound impact on the way that I think and has given me **hope** that I thought I'd never find."

[MORE REFLECTIONS ONLINE](#)



LEARN MORE & PARTICIPATE AT WWW.PROJECTYOUTHAFIRM.ORG

The AFFIRM project in Ontario is a partnership between Dr. Shelley Craig at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto and Planned Parenthood Toronto.

AFFIRMative Tenets

Using community member and youth input, AFFIRM was developed and adapted to ensure:

- Inclusive and affirming stance toward sexual and gender diversity;
- Recognition and awareness of sexual and gender identity specific sources of stress (e.g., transphobia, homophobia, biphobia, cissexism, heterosexism, etc.);
- Youth-centric orientation that recognizes and attends to the unique experiences of navigating sexual and gender minority identities during adolescence/young adulthood;
- Delivery of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) content within an affirming framework that attends to the intersectionality of identity-based experiences.

Goals of AFFIRM



**Decrease
unhelpful
thoughts**

Decrease unhelpful thoughts that may have roots in stigma and homo/bi/transphobia



Feel better

Feel better about selves and lives



Cope

Cope in ways that affirm identities and support healthy behaviours/actions

Evidence-informed, community-based intervention

- Systematically developed (adapt and evaluate framework) to enhance the practice "toolbox"
- Transdiagnostic/intersectional to modify cognitions related to underlying minority stressors
- Grounded in realities of contemporary mental health service delivery
 - Can be delivered in natural settings (e.g., schools, LGBTQ+ community centers, hospitals etc.)
 - Can be easily integrated into existing programs

“

AFFIRM is holistic-focused on the intersection between context, psychosocial factors and mental health.

”

For full details on AFFIRM's intervention structure and methods of the current trial:

- <https://www.researchprotocols.org/2019/6/e13462/>
- <https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT04318769>
- <http://www.projectyouthaffirm.org>



Key concepts

- Minority Stress
- Trauma-Informed Care
- General stress processes
- Coping
- Intersectionality
- Resilience

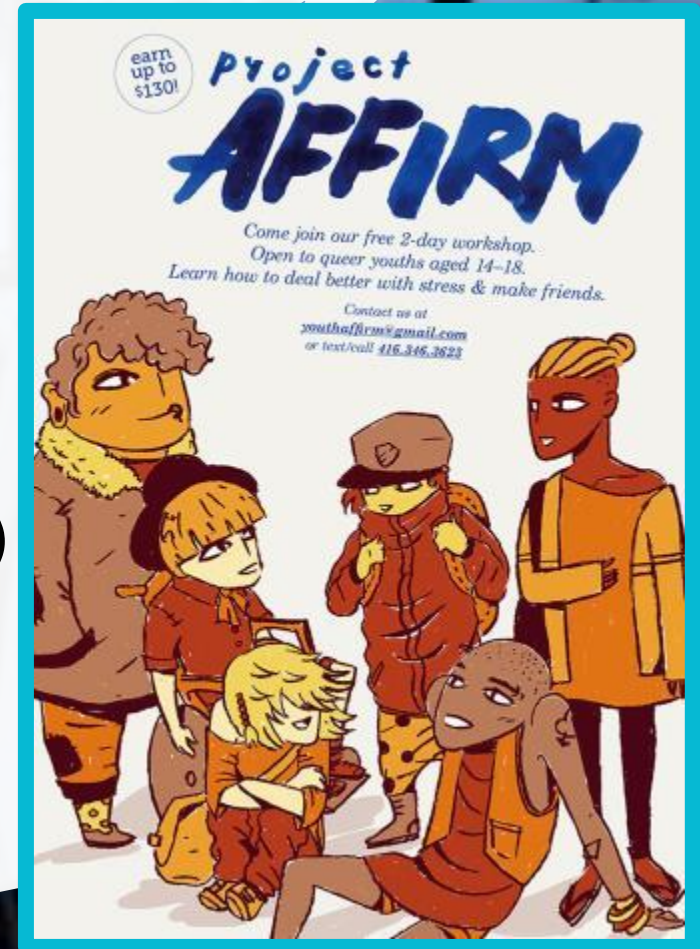




Evidence Supporting Effectiveness

2014 Open Pilot Feasibility Study

Positive outcomes were achieved for depression, coping, and stress appraisal during a pilot implementation delivered at an LGBTQ+ Center in Toronto (**youth:15-18**)

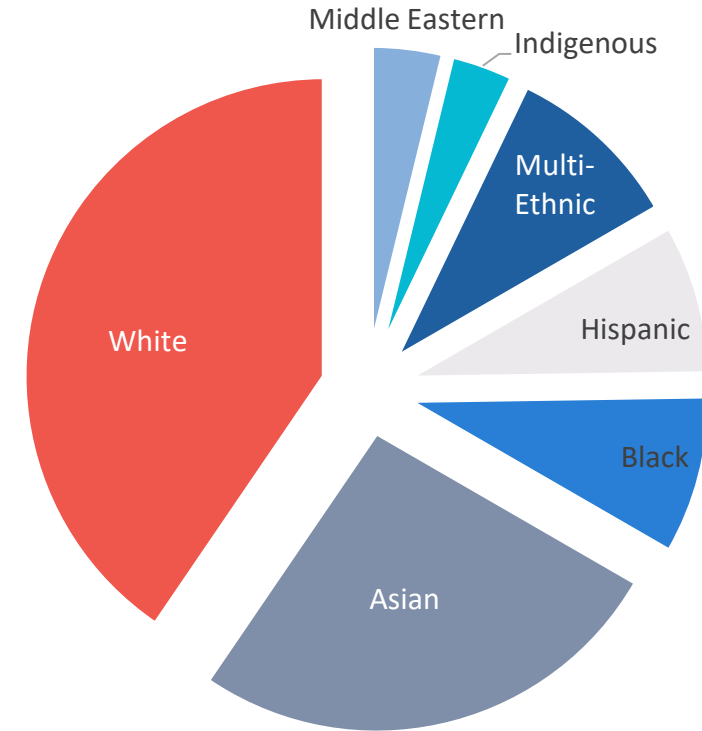


Ongoing clinical trial Participants (N=461)

Since 2017, AFFIRM has been delivered:

- 56 times
- 16 community sites & online
- LGBTQ+ youth aged 11-25
- 8.5% attrition

- 71% were born in Canada
- 51% at least 1 newcomer/immigrant parent
- 35% moderate to severe depression
- 31% previous suicide
- Most were accessing other LGBTQ+ services

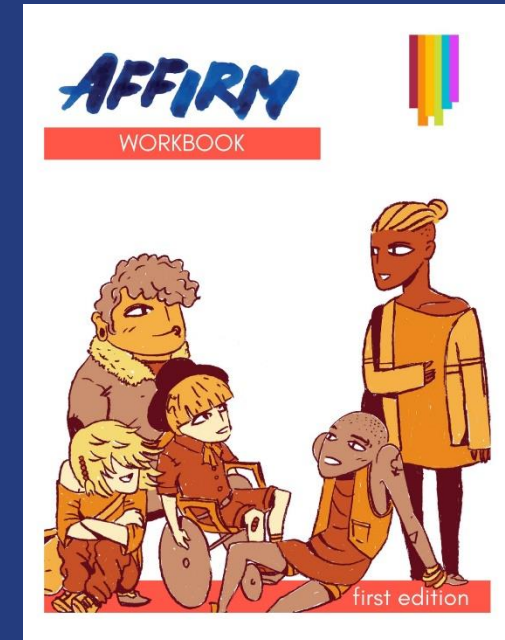


Race/Ethnicity

(Categories were not mutually exclusive)



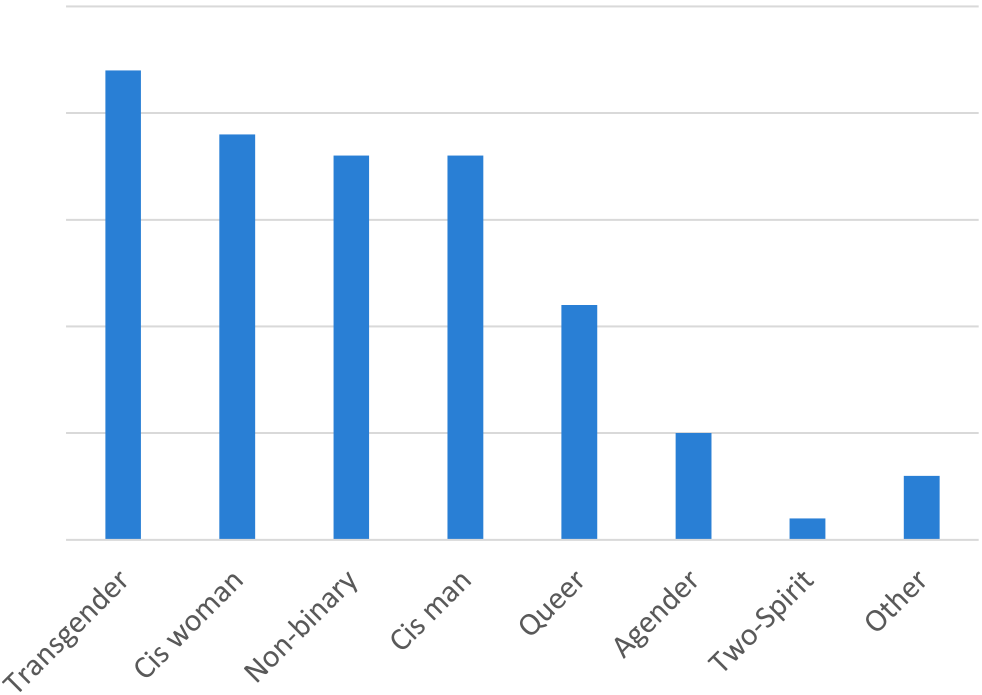
Pivot to AFFIRM Online



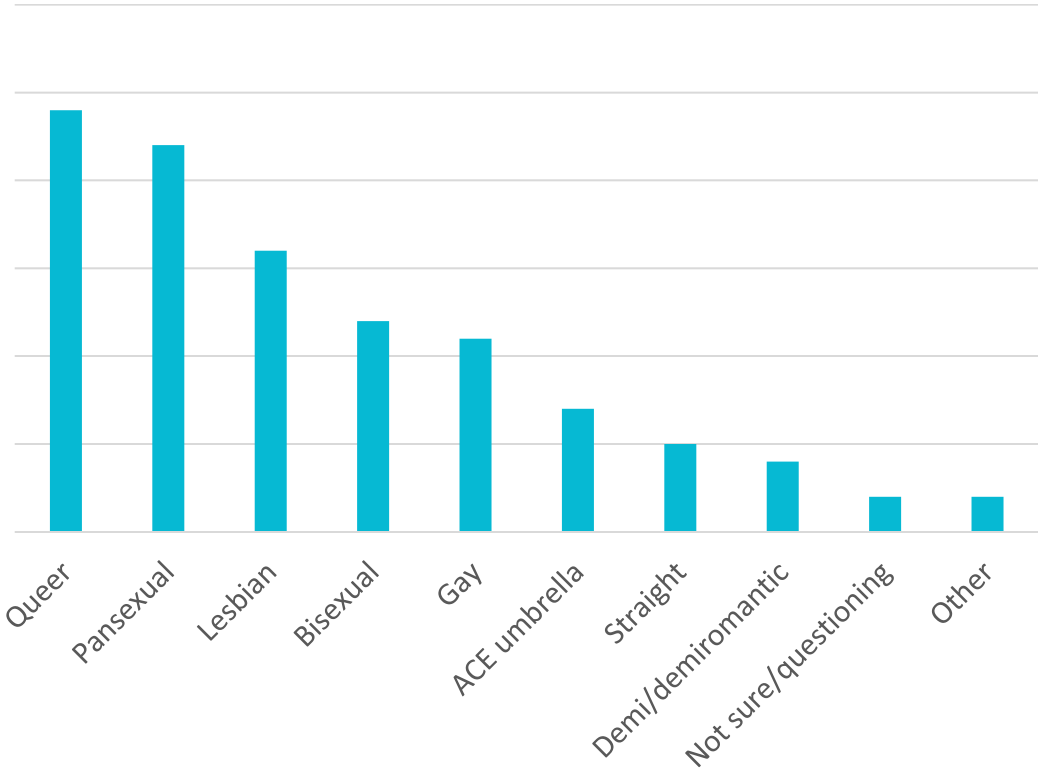
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AFFIRM: Demographics

Gender Identity



Sexual Orientation

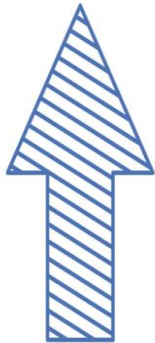


AFFIRM Results: Mental Health

Four time points



Depression (BDI-II)
Significant reduction in depression ***



Coping (Brief COPE)
Significant increase in:

- Emotional support***
- Instrumental Support***
- Positive Framing***
- Planning***
- Reflective coping (PCI-A)**

Stress Appraisal (SAMA)



Threat appraisal
decreased significantly ***



Challenge appraisal
increased significantly**



Resource appraisal *
increased significantly

Hope (AHS)



Significant increase in:

- Agency **
- Pathway **

All measures: Cohens $d = 0.42-.70$

Acceptability, Satisfaction and Fidelity

Satisfaction

- 98% felt AFFIRM helped them understand how feelings, actions and thoughts are connected.
- 97% indicated that could apply what they learned to deal with stress
- 98% would recommend AFFIRM to others.

Fidelity

- Extensive training
 - significant improvement in competence (ACCS) $t(128) = -16.21, p < .001$.
 - Clinicians (multiple identities/experiences)
- Implementation coaching
- Clinical supervision
- Co-facilitation (community co-facilitators)
- Fidelity study (in progress)

Youth Highlights

Being able to connect real life situations to skills we were building.

The loving atmosphere and counselors helped me try to love myself

I have benefited immensely from AFFIRM. This program has had a profound impact on the way that I think and has given me hope that I thought I'd never find.

It feels like AFFIRM was made just for queer youth like me!

What was most helpful about AFFIRM?

Learning from others' lives.

AFFIRM Caregiver

- 7-session manualized intervention *designed for parents and caregivers of LGBTQ+ children and youth*
- Three key domains:
 - (a) fostering an affirming stance toward sexual and gender diversity
 - (b) developing awareness and understanding of LGBTQ+-specific sources of stress (e.g., identity-based rejection, bullying, stigma, etc.)
 - (c) the delivery of content within an affirming and trauma-informed framework
- Through a variety of therapeutic strategies, AFFIRM Caregiver helps caregivers **move away from rejection of LGBTQ+ identities and towards affirmation.**

AFFIRM Caregiver: Study results

- 103 caregivers
 - Three child welfare settings across the U. S. (Cuyahoga Cty, OH; Allegheny Cty, PA & Prince Georges Cty, MD)
- Recruitment criteria ranged by jurisdiction (voluntary self-referral, case manager referral, or all foster parents)
 - 97% were current foster parents
 - 10% foster/kinship providers

Statistically significant pre-test to post-test differences for all key variables (e.g., LGBTQ+ affirming knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour).

Table X. Repeated Measure ANOVA Results

Measure	Pre(SD)	Post(SD)	3-Mo (SD)	F(df)	p	Partial η^2	Observed Power
Attitudes LGB (N=40)	4.4(.6)	4.7(.4)	4.6(.5)	11.506(1.968)	<.0001	.228	.991
Attitudes T (N=39)	4.4(.6)	4.7(.5)	4.6(.5)	13.896(1.876)	<.0001	.268	.997
Behavior LGB (N=39)	4.5(.6)	4.7(.4)	4.6(.5)	9.717(1.661)	<.0001	.204	.959
Behavior T (N=39)	4.4(.6)	4.6(.5)	4.6(.5)	15.089(1.912)	<.0001	.284	.999
Confidence (N=35)	5.4(1)	6.3(.7)	6.1(.8)	10.847(1.593)	<.0001	.448	1

All post-test gains were maintained at 3-month follow-up.

AFFIRM Caregiver

- At the close of a recent group series, a foster father stated, “*I am not the same man that I was*” prior to his participation.
- He described a transformation of some of his core beliefs and shared that the intervention had impacted his life beyond skills for caring for LGBTQ+ youth.



References and Selected Publications on the AFFIRM Model

Craig, S. L., Iacono, G., Pascoe, R. & Austin, A. (2021). Adapting clinical skills to an online environment: the virtual implementation of affirmative cognitive-behavioral therapy for LGBTQ+ youth. *Clinical Social Work* (1), 1-13
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-021-00796-x>

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Austin, A., Craig, S.L., Matarese, M., Greeno, E., Weeks, A. & Betsinger, A. (2021). Preliminary effectiveness of an LGBTQ+ affirmative parenting intervention with foster parents. *Child and Youth Services Review*, 127, 106107
[10.1016/j.chidyouth.2021.106107](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2021.106107)

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Levenson, J. S., Craig, S. L., & Austin, A. (2021). Trauma-Informed and Affirmative Mental Health Practices with LGBTQ+ Clients. *Psychological Services*,
<https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000540>



Conclusion

Interventions such as AFFIRM and Affirmative Caregiver can:

- support the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth and their families in community
- develop organizational capacity to implement interventions for LGBTQ+ youth

Currently conducting studies:

- impact on anxiety, suicidality
- longer-term outcomes (one year)
- key fidelity indicators
- Implementation sites (US, Mexico, Amsterdam, Australia)

THANK YOU!

AFFIRM

projectyouthaffirm.ca . www.affirmativeresearch.net

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Any
questions?

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for their guidance and support



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