APAGS Training Video
Seeking Support as an LGBTQ Student in College
Transcript

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Welcome to the webinar titled "Seeking Support as an LGBTQ Student in College." This webinar is organized by the APAGS Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns. The APAGS Committee on LGBT Concerns works on behalf of LGBTQ graduate students in psychology and their allies nationwide. The committee provides education, advocacy, and personal and professional development opportunities to ensure the successful graduate experience of LGBTQ and allied students in psychology. We aspire to build, strengthen and empower our members through the use of innovative technologies, collaborative advocacy, and inclusive practice.

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This webinar will discuss how LGBTQ students can feel comfortable on their college campuses. It will also address various avenues LGBTQ students can use to find sources of support on their campus

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One of the most important strategies to increase comfort as an LGBTQ individual on a college campus is to find a community of others who identify either as LGBTQ or as allies that you can count on for support. There are several ways you can seek support at your university. The avenues of support we will review in this webinar are listed here.

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Support from peers can reduce the negative effects of stressors you might experience if you identify as LGBTQ on a college campus. Supportive individuals and groups can help provide emotional, material, and social resources, as well as validate who you are as an individual. Research demonstrates that as a person's support network increases, their self-esteem and feelings of overall wellbeing often increase as well. At the same time, feelings of depression, suicidality, and career indecision often decrease. For students who identify as LGBTQ, research has also shown that it might be particularly helpful to find support from others who share this identity to buffer against the stress of identifying as LGBTQ.

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There are often many sources of social support on a college campus, ranging from individuals, like staff and classmates, to formal institutional sources of support, like LGBTQ centers.

If your campus has an LGBTQ center, connecting with resources there can be an important first step in establishing a supportive social network. Exploring your campus's LGBTQ center will

allow you to not only meet the staff there, but also meet other LGBTQ students and allies by taking advantage of programming the center offers. Some campuses have diversity centers that offer programming for multiple forms of diversity rather than a specific LGBTQ center, while some campuses may have centers that focus on multicultural or gender-related programming, and yet other campuses may just have student-organized groups rather than specific "centers."

Many of these programs and centers on college campuses are geared towards undergraduate students. So, if you are a graduate student, you might not feel these programs are the best fit for you. However, there may also be specific programs and organizations for LGBTQ graduate students on your college campus.

If your college does not have existing programs or organizations to support LGBTQ students or your particular needs, it might be possible for you to form your own. If you want to organize a university-sanctioned group or program, consult with staff in Student Affairs and Diversity offices on your campus.

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Other ways to find support on campus can include reaching out to departments that are known for being inclusive, such as gender and women's studies, and connecting with faculty members and students researching LGBTQ and diversity-related topics. Seeking mentorship from such professors and upper-level graduate students can help promote your professional growth as well as your connection to the campus community.

There also may be many people who identify as LGBTQ or as allies within your department, including those within your cohort or faculty. In whatever way you feel most comfortable with, use class discussions or private conversations to assess which peers and professors may be able to act as sources of support. Particularly on smaller campuses where there might not be as large an LGBTQ community, it may be essential to forge connections with accepting people who may not identify as LGBTQ.

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Students can also seek support through off-campus resources.

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Here is a list of some ideas of where support and affirmation may be found. We will go through each of these in more detail on the following slides.

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Many cities have LGBTQ community centers that can provide information and support relating to LGBTQ issues. You can find a comprehensive listing of LGBTQ Community Centers in the US at www.lgbtcenters.org/.

Aside from LGBTQ centers, you can typically also find support at women's centers, counseling agencies, community health agencies, bookstores, health food stores, multicultural centers, progressive places of worship, and arts centers. It is likely that at least one of these can be found in your local area. Once you make contact with groups serving the LGBTQ community, you might consider attending their meetings, social events, and fundraisers.

Many LGBTQ centers run support groups, mentoring programs, and youth programs, which can also be an excellent way for you to become involved in the community. You can participate as a group member or mentee, or, depending on your background and interest, you might also be able to volunteer to help facilitate groups, serve as a mentor, or work with youth.

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Some students may want to seek support through involvement with a religious institution. Consulting with online references might be a good first step to identify communities that would be accepting. Websites such as GayChurch.org and blogs like *Queer Faith News* provide links and contact information for houses of worship around the country that have been identified as "LGBTQ friendly." You can also do a Wikipedia search for "LGBT-affirming religious groups" to find individual congregations in your area.

You can also consult with students and faculty at your university for additional recommendations, or contact the houses of worship in your area anonymously to inquire about their positions on gender identity and sexual orientation.

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Another effective way to gain social support is to connect with LGBTQ communities through activism and volunteering. Many states have advocacy groups that monitor legislation related to LGBTQ issues. Connecting with advocacy groups can be a powerful way to create a support network. During the summer, you can attend a local Pride festival or event where local organizations have informational tables. You can also do a Wikipedia search of "LGBT political advocacy groups in the United States" to find a listing of groups to become involved with. Of particular note is Campus Pride, which is a non-profit organization that works to support LGBTQ students in college.

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Building and maintaining long-distance connections with sources of support can also be valuable. This might be an especially helpful strategy if your school is in a rural area or if it has an intolerant atmosphere that makes it difficult to locate LGBTQ-identified people and allies on-campus.

The most obvious form of long-distance support is to stay connected to loved ones via social media, emails, or phone calls. Regular contact with people who have been strong sources of support for you can help smooth the transition to being in college by providing interpersonal

continuity. It might also be a useful outlet for discussing concerns about your program or location with people who are not closely associated with it.

Additionally, online communities can offer support through discussion boards, webinars, list-serves, and chat rooms. There has been some empirical support for the mental health benefits of connecting with others on virtual platforms, such as decreasing loneliness and increasing self-esteem.

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Becoming involved with regional or national professional organizations, like the American Psychological Association, or APA, is another excellent way to establish supportive connections. APA has many committees and divisions related to diversity and several related specifically to LGBTQ issues, including Division 44 and the APAGS Committee on LGBT Concerns, as well as subcommittees for LGBTQ concerns within some of the broader divisions, such as Division 17, the Society of Counseling Psychology. These committees and divisions often have ways for students to become involved, such as serving as campus representatives, contributing to discussions, writing newsletter columns, or joining list-serves to receive announcements and information.

The APAGS CLGBTC, the group that brought you this webinar, also runs a free year-long mentoring program that connects students with mentors who are clinicians, faculty members, or advanced graduate students. Involvement with the program as a mentee or mentor can be a great way to connect with other students and professionals who are members of LGBTQ and ally communities across the U.S. and Canada.

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If you wish to explore issues related to seeking support on your campus with a little more depth, we have provided several questions for you to consider by yourself or in a class or peer group:

1. How have you felt comfortable as an LGBTQ individual on your college campus?

2. How would you encourage others to feel comfortable?

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Here is a listing of references for the content of this webinar.

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Feel free to pause this webinar as needed to view specific references.

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Thank you for listening to this webinar from the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students' Committee on LGBT Concerns. Please visit our website at www.apa.org/apags. There you can get our social media and email information to leave us feedback and suggestions. You can also view additional training resources and learn about ways to get involved in APAGS.