

# INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



## Exploring Sexualities Group

A psychoeducational group for  
young people

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**DESCRIPTION OF GROUP:**

All of us look for wholeness – a wholeness that includes our sense of sexuality as a joyous, meaningful and fulfilling experience – and for that reason I have called this group Exploring Sexualities. For many young people who struggle with problem sexual behaviors, substance abuse and addictions, their sexuality has often been robbed from them, either through early childhood sexual abuse, rape, prostitution, unwanted pregnancies, or other types of trauma. Loss and grief are often exhibited with a sense of shame about their past.

Though the meaning of *sexuality* has been reduced to the *act of having sex*, in this group participants will have an opportunity to explore their sexualities in a more complete sense. This is a psychoeducational group for young people in residential treatment designed to teach the importance of healthy sexuality. The group leaders will acknowledge trauma, but this will not be a group to explore trauma. It will focus on discussions around a wide variety of sexual issues, using a strengths-based approach.

By creating a safer space for frank discussion in five (5) one (1)-hour weekly sessions, the group will look at issues such as: 1) what is sex, 2) sexual relationships, 3) sexual orientation and gender identity, 4) sexual addictions and 5) taking care of their bodies. Each section is short and participatory with no lengthy or moralistic lectures from the instructors. The group will finish with a graduation and Spoken Word session, where they will read their written work created in conjunction with the group.

**Important to Note:**

1. This group works best if it is co-facilitated by a Certified Sexuality Educator (from outside the facility) and a member of the clinical staff of the residential program.
2. Each session will have a discussion component and a piece of music to accompany it thematically. Enlist the participants help on this and be sure to include the lyrics so they can read along to the music you and they choose.
3. This works well as a voluntary, closed group.
4. There will be (minimal) homework each week consisting of writing in journals from a prompt given at the end of each session.
5. A pre- and post-test is included at the end of this manual.

**Acknowledgements**

I have many people to acknowledge who helped make this curriculum what it is today. First and foremost, I want to thank the young women and men I worked with at the residential facilities of CT DCF and DMHAS. Many of the exercises came from Vermont's Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force's Workgroup on Joyful Sexuality and through my work with the Body Electric School.

## Week 1. Getting Grounded and Defining our Terms

1. Introduce Facilitator(s)
2. Discuss Goals (and write them on a large flipchart):
  - a. Define concepts of consensual sex, gender, sexuality
  - b. Explore healthy sexuality in the context of addictions, abuse and trauma
  - c. Develop a capacity for hope and exploration
3. Discuss Guidelines (and write them on another sheet of a large flipchart):
  - a. Closed Group
  - b. Respect
  - c. Confidentiality
  - d. Empathic listening
  - e. Acknowledgement of trauma
  - f. OK to pass
  - g. Consistency with Unit Rules (ie, language)
  - h. Safe space
  - i. Anything else you or they want to add?
4. Start with a grounding exercise (use a visualization that connects them)
  - a. Roots / Trunk / Branches of a Tree intertwined into a community
5. Introductions of group (ask them to go around the room and record on flipchart)
  - a. Their name
  - b. One strength they bring to this group
6. Defining our terms (pass out info sheet)
  - a. Gender: physical expression of one's person, male or female, social construct
  - b. Consensual Sex: expression of physical pleasure involving genital contact
  - c. Sexuality: expression of wholeness of an individual, including gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual history, trauma history
  - d. Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual, Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender
  - e. Transgender: Describes people whose gender identity, expressions or behaviors are not those traditionally associated with their birth sex.
  - f. Gender Identity: physical expression as either male, female or something in-between
7. Music (suggestions at the end of this manual, but you can ask them for ideas)
8. Homework (hand out journals)
 

Ask them to respond to the following prompt in the form of a poem or a short narrative: **Life is great when...**
9. Appreciations and snaps (snaps instead of clapping for each other)

## **Week 2. Consensual Sex and Healthy Sexuality**

1. Welcome everyone back to the group
2. Review Guidelines and Goals: Ask someone from the group to review the guidelines and goals.
3. Review Homework: Ask participants to read from their journals based on prompt from first week (not mandatory).
4. Presentation: Do a short (5-10 minute) presentation on the effects of trauma, problem sexual behaviors and substance abuse on sexuality.  
Consensual sex and healthy sexuality can be difficult for young people with problem sexual behaviors. Often your sexuality has been robbed from you (e.g., child sexual abuse, rape, prostitution, unwanted pregnancies, other trauma, loss and grief, shame, court involvement). It is difficult to take care of ourselves, but self-care is linked to recovery. All of these are ways we can take care of our bodies: 1) eating right, 2) letting your body move by dancing, 3) learning different types of breathing, 4) treating yourself with dignity and giving up negative self-talk, 5) giving yourself lots of acknowledgement, 6) making time for solitude, 7) incorporating spirituality, and 8) dealing with your past.
5. Exercise: What does sex mean to you? (Brainstorm and summarize discussion)
6. Music
7. Homework: Ask each participant to answer the following phrases in their journals: **Once I was...Now I am... Someday I will be...**
8. Appreciations and snaps

### **Week 3. Making Our Way through the Hourglass of this Life**

1. Welcome everyone back to the group and ask if there were any questions from last week.
2. Review Ground Rules and Goals. Ask two members of the group to review.
3. Start with a grounding exercise
  - Tighten muscle groups along the body and release tension
4. Group Discussion: As a young child, what felt good on your body?  
Alternatively: If you are a parent, think about your child or what you would have wanted yourself as a child.
5. ACTIVITY: The Hourglass (try to explain this quickly and draw a picture of an hourglass on the flipchart)  
Imagine the shape of an hourglass, the contents being our sense of sexuality. In childhood, many of us are able to fill the top of the hourglass to full measure: experience the wonders of all our senses, with others and ourselves. As we emerge into adolescence, cultural silence and messages of secrecy, trauma and danger surrounding sexuality restrict our experiences and language to create the small middle of the hourglass. Our primary educator becomes the media and our feelings become fear-driven. Many of us, and our children, find ourselves in this stuck place, in the middle of the hourglass where there is no room for wholeness, fluidity or joy. We will explore what is inside each of our hourglasses.
6. Exercise: Notice your body:
  - Warmth in your legs?
  - Cool of the feet?
  - Tension in the belly?
  - Tightness in your chest?
  - Sweating of the palms?
  - Tingling in your head?
  - Where do you feel the strength in your body?
  - Where do you feel good in your body?

Hold on to that feeling.
7. PRESENTATION: Exploring and Reclaiming Your Sexuality (try to do this in less than 10 minutes – make it your own)
  - a. Being present (locate the senses)
  - b. Learning to communicate with a partner around sex
  - c. Creating a ritual for consensual sex
  - d. Understanding your own body – explore it yourself
  - e. Why sex and drugs don't go well together
  - f. Learning to love your body
  - g. Your body is a temple – only you can decide what goes on with it or who enters it – it is a holy place to be nurtured and kept safe.

- h. Now that you are in recovery, how you take care of your body is as important as staying clean – takes sex to a different place.
- 8. Music
- 9. Homework: Ask them to write a poem or short narrative using the following prompt: **If I ruled the world, it would...**
- 10. Appreciations and Snaps

#### **Week 4. Reclaiming Our Bodies**

- 1. Welcome everyone to the next to last session and ask if anyone would like to read from their homework.
- 2. Review Goals and Guidelines. Ask a member of the group to review goals and guidelines.
- 3. Start with a grounding exercise: Breathwork
- 4. Presentation on Self Care (try to do this in less than 10 minutes)
  - a. Eat, Drink and Be Merry (and still stay in recovery)
  - b. Let your body move -- dance
  - c. Breathe in life, exhale the past
  - d. Treat yourself with dignity
  - e. Give yourself lots of acknowledgement
  - f. Make time for solitude
  - g. Incorporate spirituality
  - h. Deal with addictions (drugs, alcohol, self deprivation, etc.)
  - i. **ACTIVITY AND HOMEWORK: Choose three things from the self-care list and write about what you want to change in yourself in the future**
- 5. Appreciations and snaps

#### **Week 5. Taking Back Our Sexuality**

- 1. Welcome everyone to the last session of the group.
- 2. Review Goals and Guidelines. Ask a participant to go over the guidelines and goals.
- 3. Grounding Exercise: Ask for a volunteer to create a grounding exercise.
- 4. Discussion: What hopes do you have for your sexual future? Brainstorm and summarize.
- 5. Exercise: How To Say No and Yes -- Boundaries
  - a. Line them up in two parallel lines facing each other. Ask everyone in one line to make increasingly more intimate requests of the person in front of them. For instance, they can start with asking to go out for ice cream, then a movie, then a romantic dinner. The respondents are to say no or yes in a clear, respectful manner.
  - b. Then ask them to switch roles and do it again.
- 6. Activity: Kegels are exercises that allow you to connect with your genitals by engaging the pubococcygeal (P-C) muscles. (A simple way to teach this is to ask them to sit comfortably and imagine that they are urinating.

To stop the flow of urine, they must squeeze those muscles.) Practice can increase sensation and create more connection to areas of the body the young people might be disconnected with.

7. Music
8. Graduation and Spoken Word Performance: All participants are to receive a certificate for completing the group. For the spoken word portion of the event, all who are prepared are asked to read from their writings.
9. Appreciations and Snaps

# MUSIC

## Why use music?

Music is a great translator of ideas, emotions and experience. Here are a few ideas for songs with great lyrics, but they are pretty dated.

I Will Not Be Broken

Words and Music by Gordon Kennedy/Wayne Kirkpatrick/Tommy Sims

Sung by Bonnie Raitt

Dear Mama

Lyrics and Music by 2Pac (Tupac Shakur)

Follow

Words and music by Jerry Merrick

Sung by Richie Havens

See if you can find your own or ask the participants in the group to help you find music that they can relate to. Music is a huge part of young peoples' lives, and it would be a great way to incorporate some of their culture into this new group.

# DEFINITIONS

## What do we mean by:

### Consensual Sex

The mutually-agreed upon expression of physical pleasure involving genital contact.

### Gender Identity

Describes your internal self-awareness of being male or female, masculine or feminine, or something in-between.

### Sexuality

The expression of your wholeness as an individual, including gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual history, trauma history.

### Sexual Orientation

Describes your feelings of sexual attraction toward others which could be gay or lesbian (attraction to the same gender); straight or heterosexual (attraction to the opposite gender); or bisexual (attraction to both genders).

### Transgender

Describes people whose gender identity, expressions or behaviors are not those traditionally associated with their birth sex.

# Exploring Sexualities Group

## Pre-Post Test

### True/False

- 1. Gender identity is a physical expression of your biological sex.
- 2. Sexuality is an expression of the wholeness of an individual and can include gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual history, and trauma history.
- 3. Sex is always an expression of power and control.
- 4. Sex and drugs go well together.
- 5. Substance abuse and trauma can have a large impact on someone's sexuality.
- 6. Exploring your sexuality can be difficult but can engender hope.
- 7. Understanding your own body can be a first step toward reclaiming your own sexuality.
- 8. Child sexual abuse can rob you of your sexuality.
- 9. Trauma history includes child sexual abuse.
- 10. Self-care is not an important aspect of your sexuality.