Supporting Jewish LGBT+ young people online during Covid-19

A brief guide for the Jewish community on what to consider when running services online for Jewish LGBT+ young people.

Introduction

The purpose of this brief guide is to help the Jewish community in supporting our young LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) Jewish members online.

We know that many front line services within our community already work to make their services more suitable for Jewish LGBT+ people. This guide specifically focuses on services delivering to young people and services who haven't delivered a lot of content online before.

At a time when LGBT+ people are at home and perhaps not out (open with those they live with about being LGBT+) and have limited access to their usual support mechanisms – they may need additional support in order to access new online sessions being run. Some of the points below are relevant to a wider audience than the LGBT+ people you may support.

We hope that this guide will also be helpful for wider members of the community who are offering support and to friends and family of Jewish LGBT+ young people.

What are some of the issues Jewish LGBT+ young people may experience during the Covid-19 crisis?

There are a number of potential risks to the well-being and welfare of the LGBT+ young people you support during the pandemic crisis. For example:

- Feelings of isolation and loneliness may feel more intense during lockdown. Many LGBT+ young people will not be able to access support networks and trusted relationships. This may increase mental health issues.

- Access to services may be affected. Young people may not be able to access youth work and teacher relationships in the usual way, which many people express as being vital for their wellbeing. LGBT+ young people may also face barriers to accessing mental health and other health services as the NHS redeploy staff. [1][2][3]

- Domestic abuse is on the rise during lockdown. Many Jewish LGBT+ young people will have no choice but to shelter in domestic situations that may be hostile and unsafe. Some young people may feel forced to hide their LGBT+ identity in order to stay safe at home during the isolation phase of the pandemic which might have a knock-on effect on their mental health.

- As services and educational activities move online, there might be an increased risk of direct and indirect discrimination such as misgendering, LGBT+phobic bullying and harassment and exploitation.

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[1] UKYouth: Covid-19 Impact Report

[2] The Independent: LGBT+ Charity advises young people to 'think hard' about coming out during lockdown

[3] The Guardian: Impact of youth worker provision being reduced

Good practice when working with LGBT+ people online during the Covid-19 pandemic

Not all the people you support may be in spaces where they feel safe or are out. It's important you take that into consideration when trying to create a welcoming space online. It may mean that individuals who are usually more open, feel unable to be themselves. Having that awareness will already help you support young people better.

Please look at this CST guidelines for secure online streaming. This will not only help prevent antisemetic incidents but depending on your session it could also help prevent homophobic, biphobic and transphobic hate.

A few points for your consideration:

- **During a session, do you require people to have their videos on?** Some LGBT+ people, specifically trans people, may not want to have their camera on because they may not want to have to see their own image constantly. It might be that they don't mind others seeing their picture but don't want to see themselves. On Zoom, you might want to make people aware that they can hide their own picture but not turn off their video ("Hide Self View"). Please note: If you require a video to be on initially verify who someone is - this should still take place and not negate your own safeguarding processes but consider how you can minimise negative impact.

- **Do you require people to speak?** Some people who aren't out may not be able to take part in any LGBT+ specific content you're doing (e.g. anything for Pride). Consider which platforms you're using and if people can participate through text and check if people have earphones (if they need them).

- **What language are you using?** Language matters and sometimes it can unintentionally exclude people. Think whether your language is unnecessarily gendered or makes assumptions about your participants. This is also the case when making phone calls. This is something that is relevant throughout the year, however, might be highlighted more now – especially if you're in the process of inducting new people. If you're making more phone calls during this time, consider the language you're using on the phone (to avoid misgendering them). For example, rather than saying 'Is this ABC?' (assuming who someone is by the sound of their voice), you might want to say 'Can I please speak to ABC?'.

Other Resources

We have put links on our website to other organisations who run groups or have resources specifically for LGBT+ people (although not always specifically Jewish LGBT+ people) and who run services that may compliment what you are offering currently. For guidance on safeguarding, please see Reshet's new resource "COVID-19 Reshet Safeguarding Guidance for Organisations."

We are also moving much of our training online. So if you're interested in LGBT+ inclusion training or looking for bespoke support or have any questions – please let us know at info@keshetuk.org.

Example scenerios with good practice guidance

Scenario 1: Isolation

You work with a 16-year-old who recently came out. Their parent emails you saying the young person seems withdrawn and is spending a lot of time alone in their room on their computer. When you ask the young person how they are feeling, they say that they are missing their friends and their weekly youth club. The parent is finding it harder than usual to engage them. This parent asks you for your advice.

What does good practice look like?
- Tell the parent that you are not a counsellor/therapist (unless you are).
- Risk Assess and ensure you follow any safeguarding / other related policies & procedures.
- Arrange to speak to the young person and record the conversation.
- Make it clear to the young person that everything they discuss is confidential unless they or someone else is at risk of harm.
- Ensure you report any safeguarding concerns to your designated safeguarding lead and refer to appropriate services if needed (via school or recognised local authority).
- Support the parent if there is an issue around miscommunication.
- Make sure they know about ways they can safely engage with other young LGBT+ people during lockdown.
- Help to equip parent with skills to take up conversation around online safety.

Scenario 2: Online LGBT+phobia

You run a welfare service and want to check in with LGBT+ service users. You arrange a video call to bring the LGBT+ people you support together to chat about how the are doing. When you log in, you notice that everyone has their video enabled except for one person who uses the name Sam. You are not aware of anyone called Sam who uses your service. As the activity progresses, you notice that Sam posts offensive comments about trans people. A number of your service users leave the room.

What does good practice look like?
- Ensure you understand and use the security settings of the chosen online video provider.
- Have more than 1 leader/co-host on the call. Ensure that one of those leaders is able to focus on monitoring what's going on and is able to react quickly to any inappropriate activity of young persons.
- If you use a waiting room, check in with people before they enter the main room.
- Ensure that everyone has signed up to your ground rules and behavioural expectations.
- Ensure that you use the mute function and that you can ask people to leave if needed.
- Check in with people afterwards and refer if need be to support services.

Example 3: Misgendering

You are running a virtual workshop on Zoom. As part of the conversation you are having someone refers to Jo as he. Jo sends you a message saying that they have been misgendered and their pronouns are they.

What does good practice look like?
- Ask people to write their names and, if they'd like, their pronouns on their profile or in the chat.
- Introduce ground rules at the start of each activity that includes respect, mutual support and kindness.
- Encourage positive behaviour around making mistakes. For example, apologising if an error has been made and understanding the impact of words on others.
- Stop what you are doing and reiterate that everyone needs to be mindful of gender pronouns.
- Be vigilant and pay attention to any misgendering. This can prevent a young person needing to message you.
- It might be an innocent mistake. Correct people kindly and assertively, but if it is persistant, a 1-2-1 chat could be beneficial.