



Setting the Tone for Safety in Drop In Programs for LGBTQ Youth

Safety planning begins the second a young person walks into your space. They pick up on EVERYTHING – so set the tone right from the start. Here's a checklist of things to think about:

- The physical environment is comforting and clean and has images of diverse young people of all races, gender, sizes, abilities with messages of hope and care.
- Opportunities for staff/volunteers and youth to interact in low-intensity but structured ways (e.g. playing games, making art, working on projects).
- Youth are allowed and encouraged to have some ownership of physical space (help decorate, rearrange, or get creative).
- Rules are clearly communicated and posted. They use youth-friendly language and are easy to remember and playful. At the [Youth Enrichment Services](#) program for LGBTQ youth they use the acronym CRABS to get youth to help enforce program ground rules (Confidentiality, Respect, Attentiveness, Be Open, Sensitivity).
- A sense of belonging and pride created by a unique name of your group (put on hand outs, tokens, stickers, t-shirts, used in writing) that young people can display if they choose.
- Transitional objects are used to mark comings and goings (a card, a photo together, a hand-written note).
- Consistent staff and volunteers with some predictability.
- An on-call schedule that ensures that someone is available to listen during times of distress.
- Releases of information to talk to other involved providers are gathered if possible to broaden and make *consistent* the safety net of support.
- Staff and volunteers are supported with training, supervision, coaching, colleagues and incident debriefs to deal with their own stress so they can put it aside when attending to the needs of young people.
- Perhaps the most important is the ability to provide a sense of safety and playfulness to young people who may never had the chance to experience this. You do not need to be perfect; you just need to be *good enough*.
- Equal in importance is the utter belief, no matter how challenging, that this young person is resilient, and can adapt to change and adversity within their own parameters.

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