

# ***Preventing Suicide & Promoting Well-Being for LGBT Children & Youth***

---



**Caitlin Ryan, PhD, ACSW**  
*Family Acceptance Project (FAP)*  
**San Francisco State University**

# Social Emergence

## LGBT Children & Adolescents

---

- Wide dissemination of information about sexual orientation & gender identity has enabled children and adolescents to learn about and **identify as LGBT at younger ages**
- Sexual orientation and gender identity are part of **normative child and adolescent development**
- **Major gaps in education, services & support for families of LGBT children & youth – increases risk for LGBT children & youth**

# Range of Identity, Expression & Behavior Components of Child Development

---

## GENDER IDENTITY

Develop identity  
around age 3

## GENDER EXPRESSION

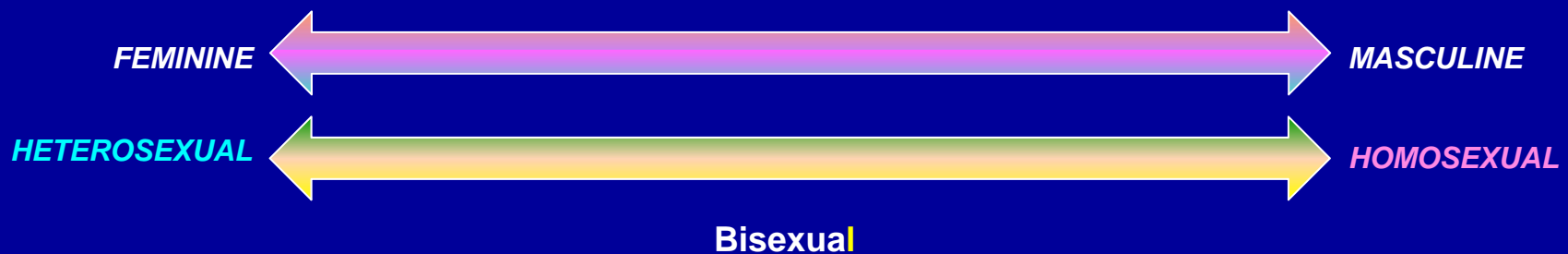
Very early ages

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

First "crush"  
on average - age 10

Identify as LGB, average age - 13.4

Increasingly  
identify as gay, ages 7-13



# Families Not Included In LGBT Youth Support

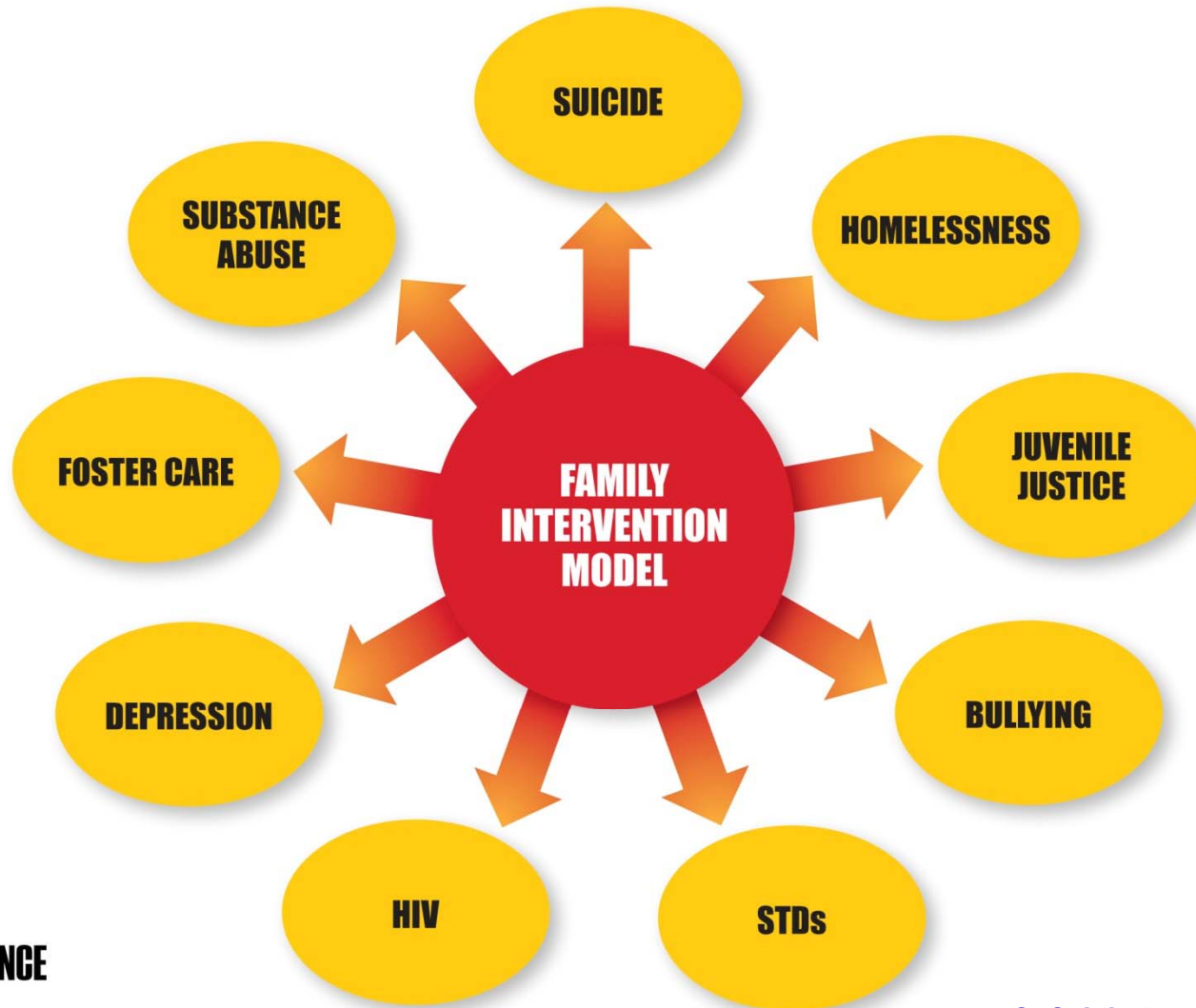
---

- LGBT youth have been served as individuals *alone* or through peer support
  - not in the context of their families
- Many providers still see families of LGBT youth as unable to learn to support them
- Re-connecting or reunifying families for out-of-home LGBT youth has not been seen as possible
- *Many community groups, providers & advocates see families as an “adversary”*

# Family Acceptance Project

## MULTI-OUTCOME INTERVENTION MODEL

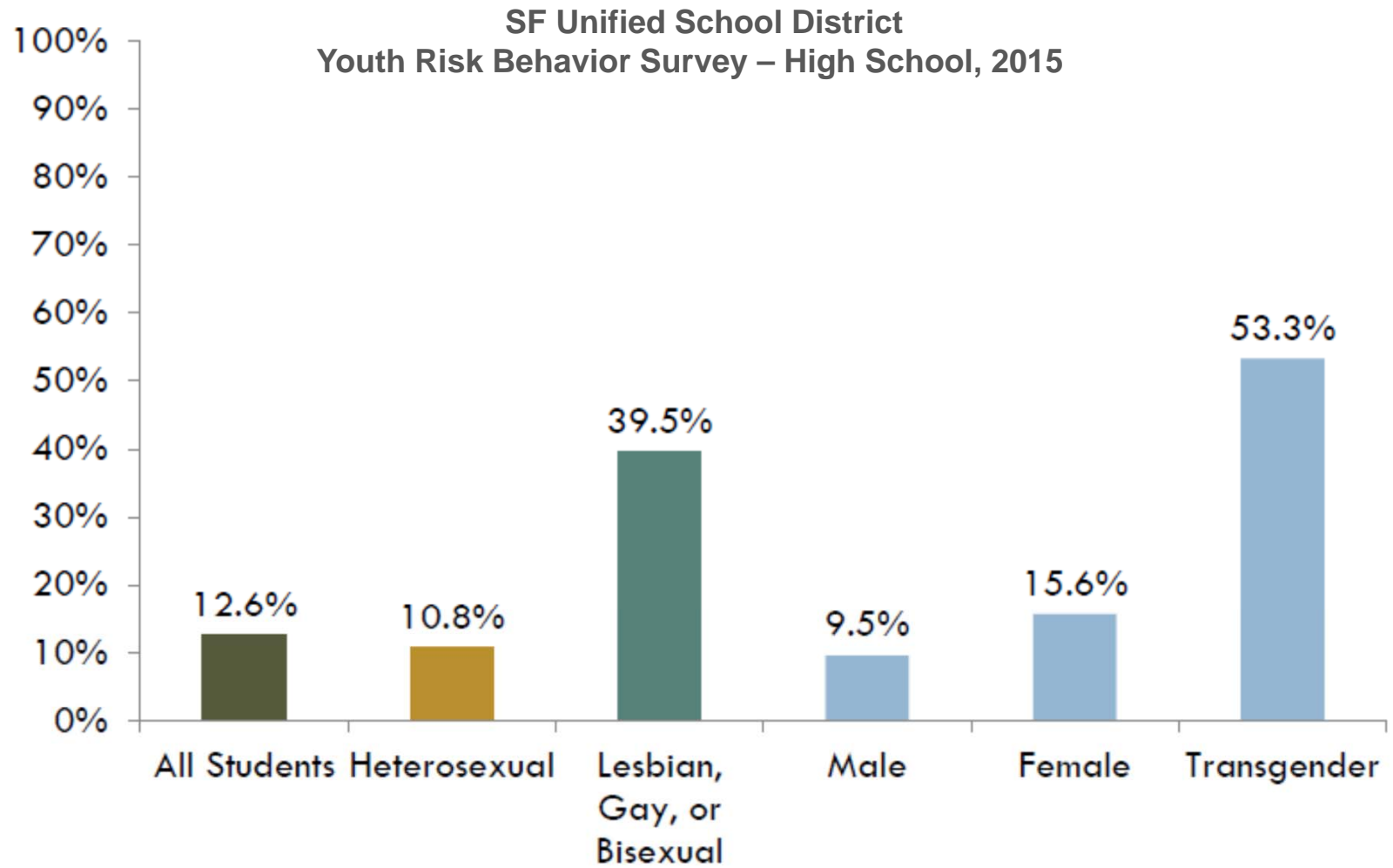
Family Intervention Approach Can Prevent & Address Multiple Adverse Health & Social Outcomes for LGBT Children & Youth Across Systems



# Seriously Considered Suicide by Sexual Orientation, Sex, and Gender Identity

(HS YRBS 2015)

10



## Disproportional Victimization of LGBT Students in Middle and High School (YRBS 2015)

24

### **LGBT youth are three to six times more likely than non-LGBT youth to:**

- ❑ Be bullied at school
- ❑ Be cyberbullied
- ❑ Be harassed at school because of their sexual orientation
- ❑ Not to go to school because due to a concern for safety
- ❑ Be threatened or injured by someone with a weapon at school
- ❑ Have their property stolen or deliberately damaged at school
- ❑ Be in a physical fight at school

SF Unified School District  
Youth Risk Behavior Survey – High School, 2015

**Connectedness** is a key  
protective factor for  
adolescents and adults

---



# Family Connectedness & Suicide Prevention

## Population-Based School Studies

---

*Family connectedness* – only type of connectedness associated with decreased suicide attempts among LGB youth

Stone, Luo, Lippy, & McIntosh (2014)

*Family connectedness protects against* suicidal ideation & attempts

Eisenberg & Resnick (2006)

# *Family Acceptance Project*

---

Building healthy futures for LGBT children and youth through:



## **RESEARCH**

on family acceptance and rejection

## **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

to decrease risk and promote well-being  
by increasing family acceptance

## **FAMILY-ORIENTED SERVICES**

to help diverse families support their  
LGBT children

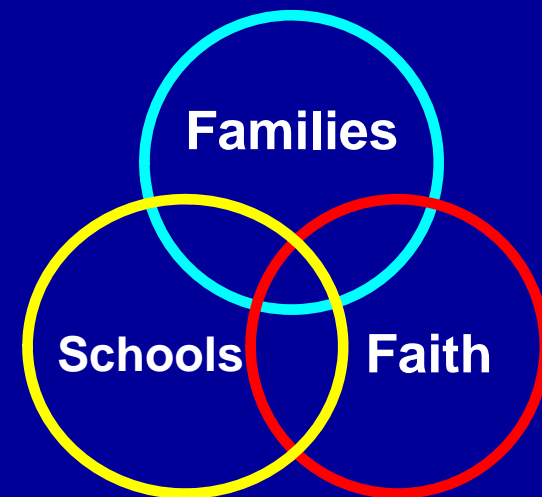
## **INFORMED PUBLIC POLICY**

to promote well-being – not just protect  
from harm

# Primary Institutions that Socialize & Support Children & Youth FAP Research & Interventions

---

- Families
- Schools
- Faith Communities



# *Family Acceptance Project*

## **Goals & Aims**

---

- Strengthen and help ethnically and religiously diverse families to support their LGBT children
- Prevent / decrease risk & promote well-being for LGBT children and youth
- Help families to maintain LGBT children in their homes
- Reconnect families and promote permanency
- Implement family intervention model across systems to support LGBT young people in the *context of their families, cultures and faith communities*
- Include focus on “upstream” prevention

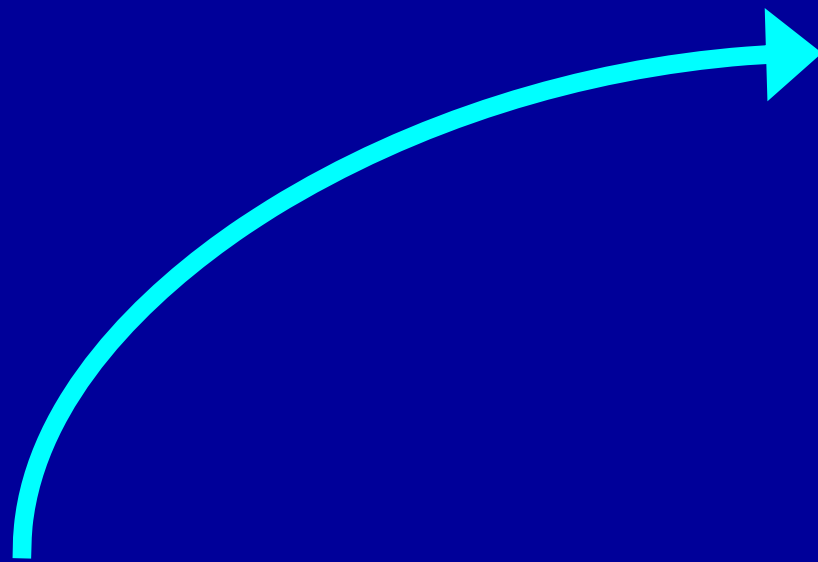
# Family Research Process

---

- ***In-depth Interview Study*** – LGBT Youth & Families  
(ages 13-18) **100+ family behaviors**
- ***Young Adult Survey*** – LGBT Young Adults  
(ages 21-25)
- ***Family Briefing Sessions*** – LGBT Families, Youth & Young Adults
- ***Family Intervention Model*** – All Family Members & Providers

# Relationship Between Family Acceptance & Rejection with Health/Mental Health

---



Family Response:

**Acceptance**

**Rejection**

*100+ Family Behaviors*

Sexual Health, HIV & STDs  
Substance Abuse  
Depression  
Suicide  
Self-Esteem  
Social Support  
Life Satisfaction  
Sense of the Future

# Examples: Some FAP Family Rejecting Behaviors

(FAP Qualitative Research)

---

- Try to change sexual orientation, gender identity & expression
- Deny that youth are LGBT (“It’s just a phase,” “They’re confused” “They’ll grow out of it”)
- Prevent youth from learning about their LGBT identity, from having an LGBT friend or from participating in LGBT youth groups, school clubs or LGBT community resources
- Blame youth when others mistreat them because they are LGBT
- Use religion to condemn / deny, make them pray, attend religious services to change their LGBT identity
- Don’t talk – or let youth talk – about youth’s LGBT identity
- Ridicule / speak about LGBT people in negative and derogatory ways

# Examples: Some FAP Family Accepting Behaviors

## (FAP Qualitative Research)

---

- Express affection and caring for LGBT child
- Get accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity
- Talk with child about their sexual orientation and gender identity, and listen respectfully
- Support child's gender expression
- Require that other family members treat LGBT child with respect
- Advocate for child when they are mistreated because of LGBT identity in families, schools, congregations & communities
- Believe LGBT child can have a happy future
- Talk with religious leaders and congregations about supporting LGBT people and welcoming them to services and activities



# Link Family Responses with Risk & Well-Being

---

- *Research shows how family experiences in adolescence contribute to risk & well-being in young adulthood*

## Adolescent Experiences

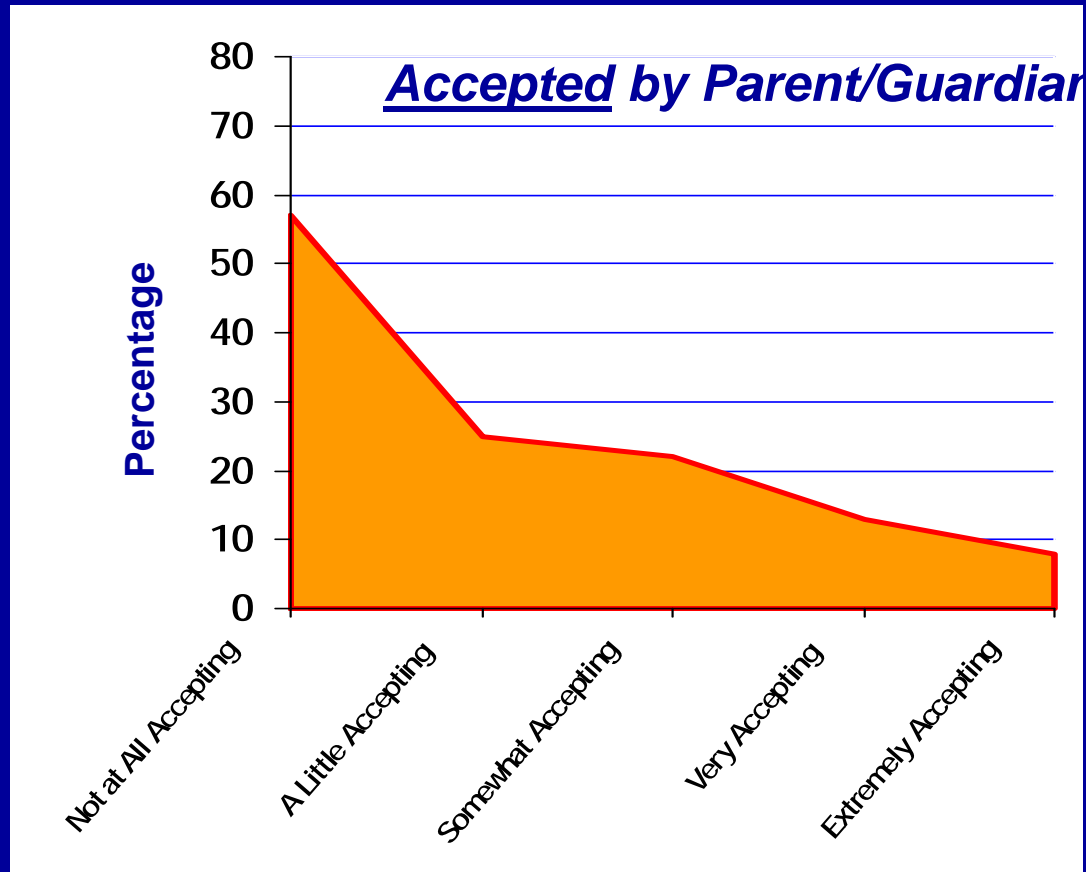
- Family accepting & rejecting behaviors
- School & peer experiences, religious & cultural experiences, access to LGBTQ peers & resources

## Young Adult Experiences

- Health & mental health status, risk behaviors & discrimination, coping, self-esteem & well-being

# Suicidal Thoughts

## Past 6 Months

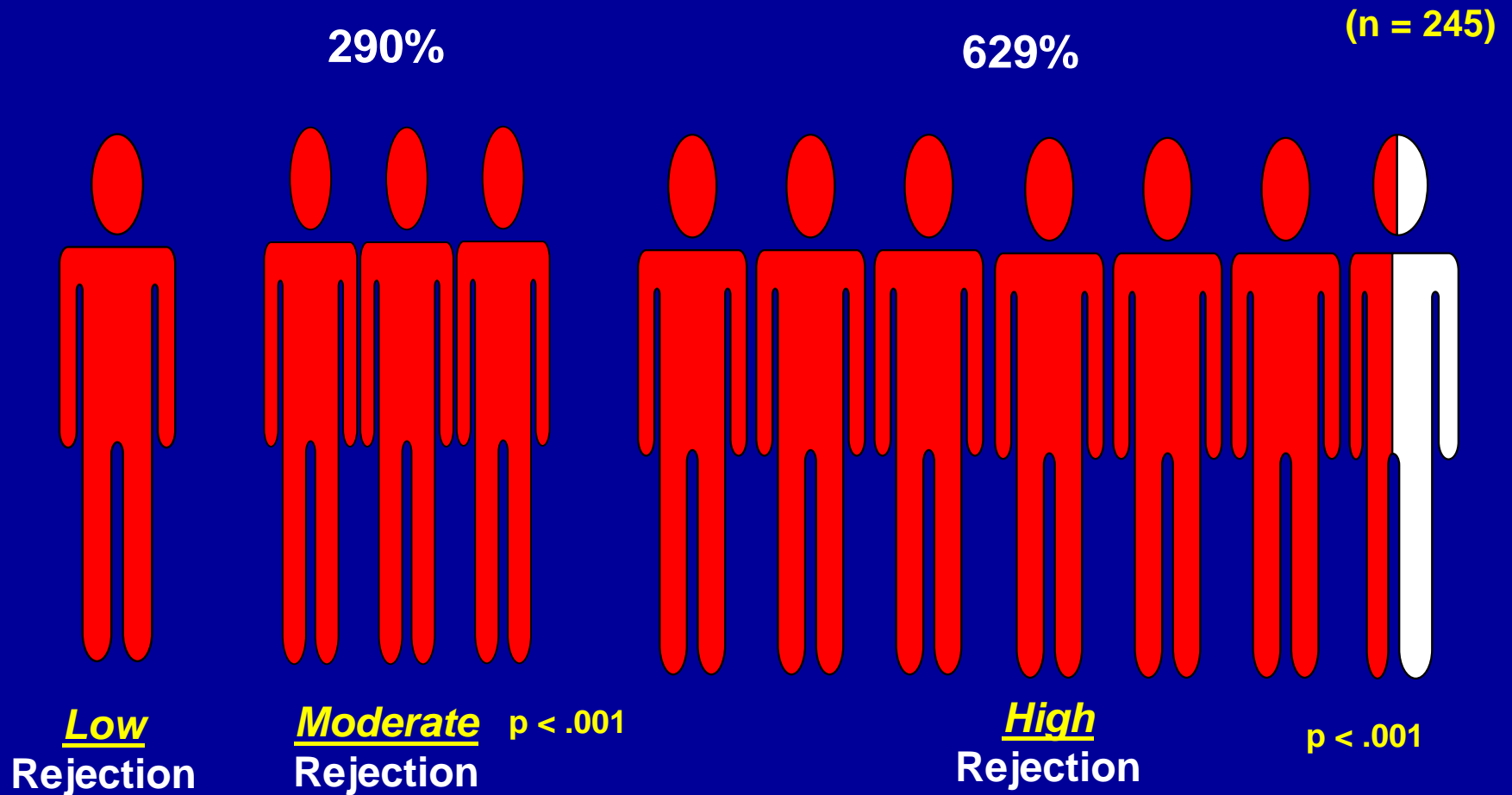


(n = 245)

p < .0001

More Thoughts ← → Fewer Thoughts

# Family Rejection & Depression



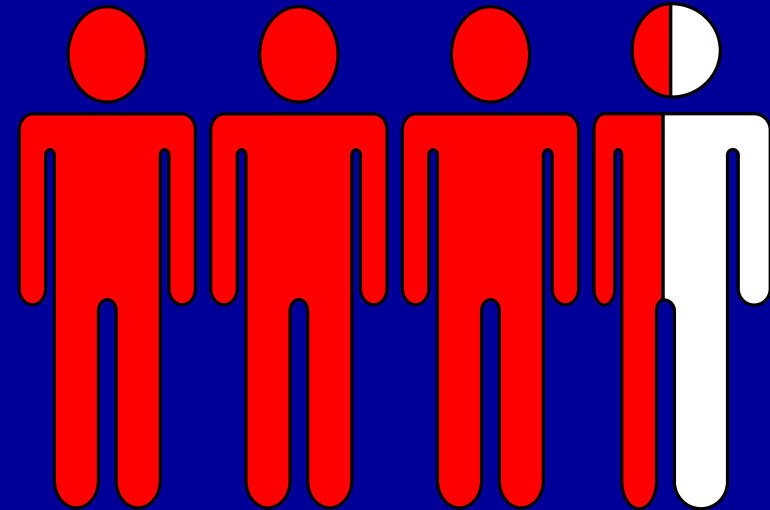
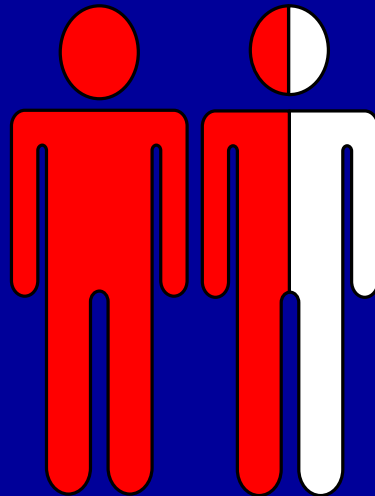
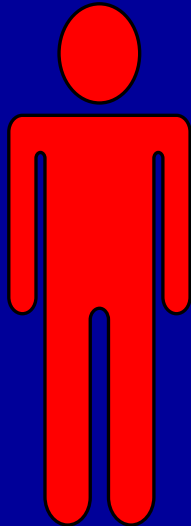
## LEVEL OF FAMILY REJECTION

# Family Rejection & Illegal Drug Use

(n = 245)

157%

328%



Low  
Rejection

Moderate  
Rejection

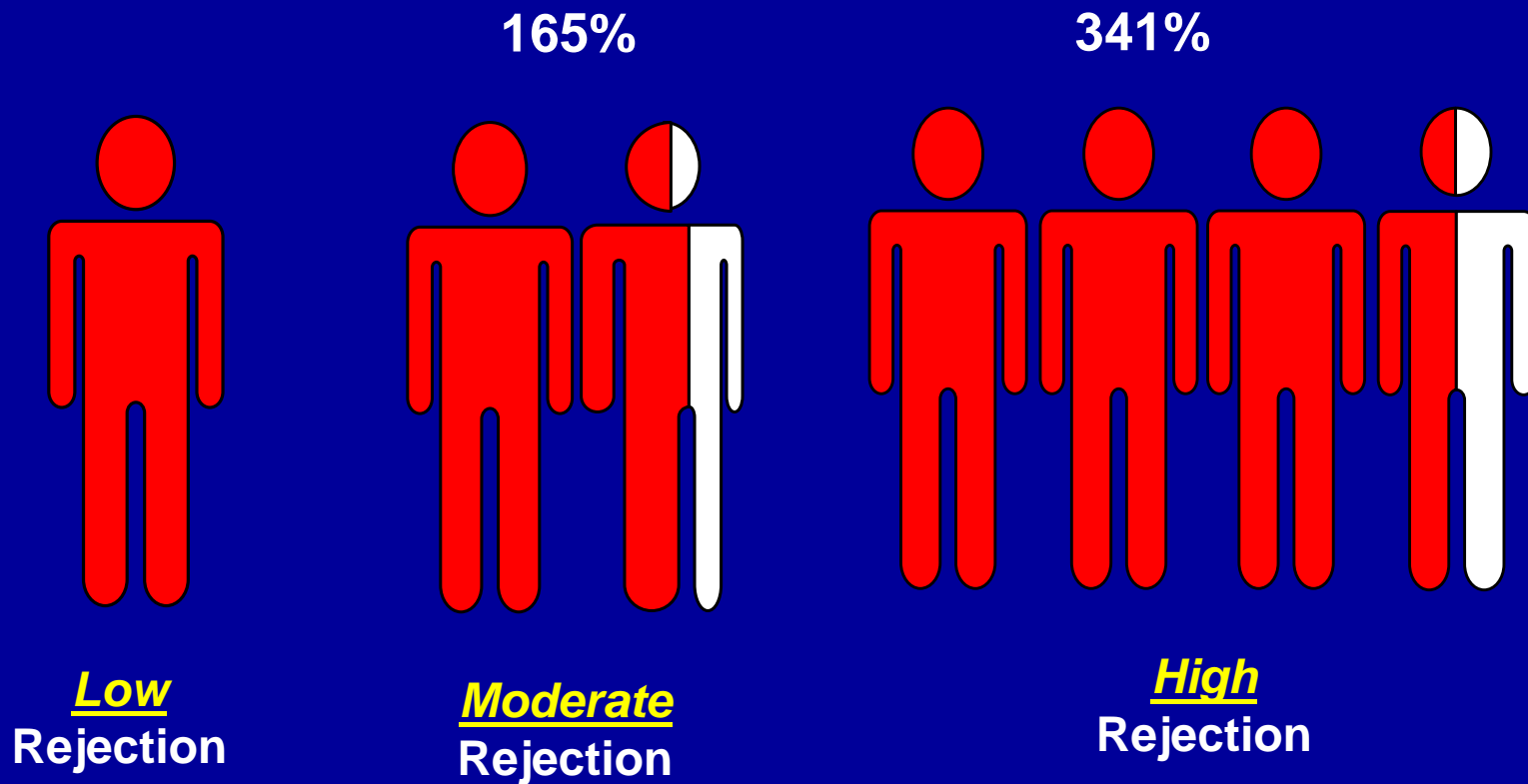
High  
Rejection

$p < .001$

LEVEL OF FAMILY REJECTION

# Family Rejection & Risk for HIV Infection

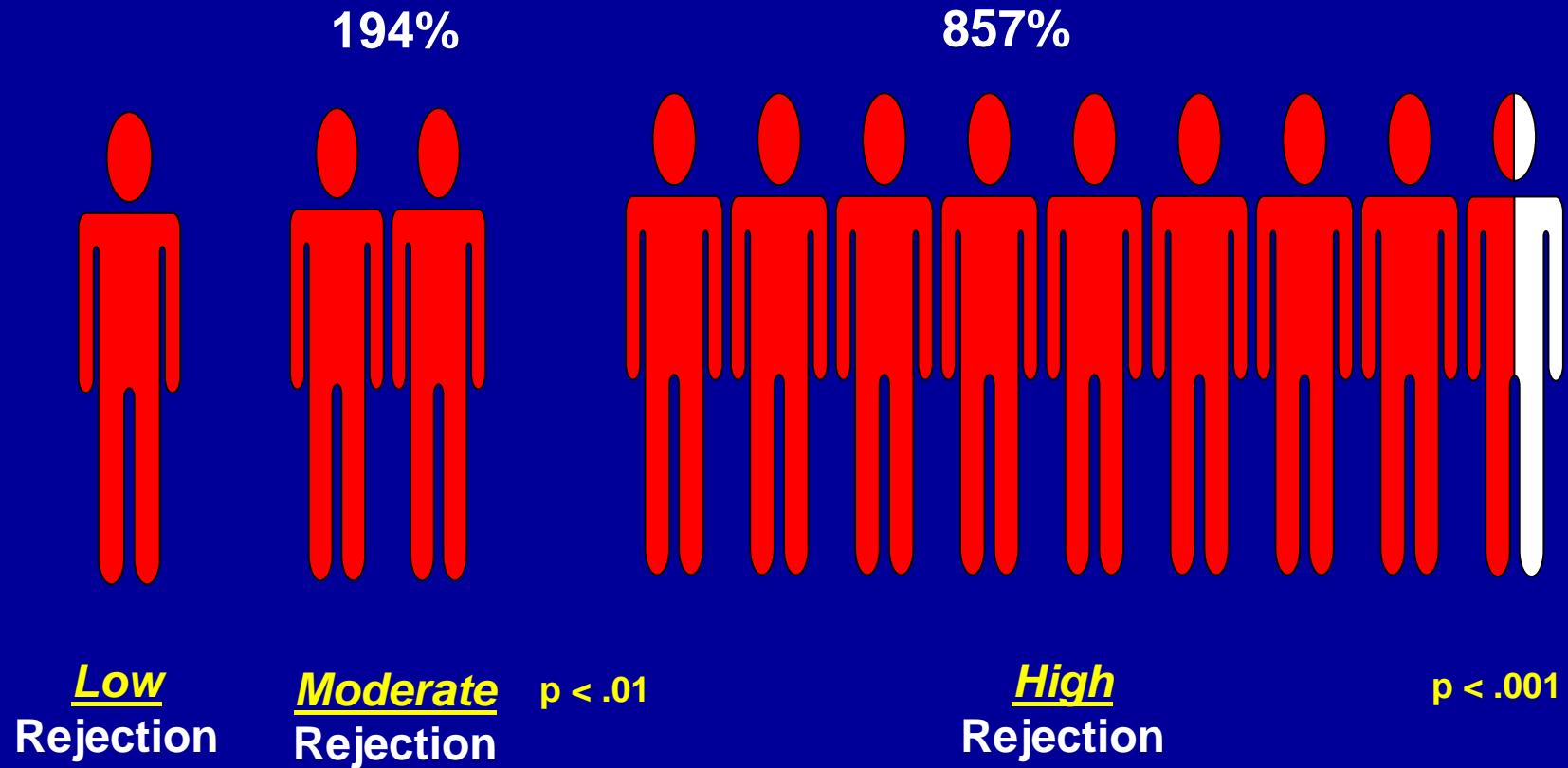
(n = 245)



LEVEL OF FAMILY REJECTION

# Family Rejection & Lifetime Suicide Attempts (1 or more times)

(n = 245)



## LEVEL OF FAMILY REJECTION

# Risks Related to High Levels of Parental Pressure to Enforce Gender Conformity

---

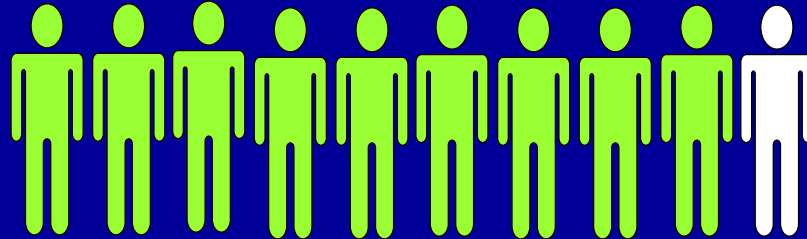
Health - Mental Health Concern	Risk
	(n = 245)
<b>Current Depression</b>	5.01 times or 501%
<b>Attempted Suicide</b>	3.90 times or 390%
<b>Illicit Drug Use</b>	3.82 times or 382%
<b>Risk for HIV</b>	2.12 times or 212%

# See a Future as Happy LGBT Adult

LEVEL OF FAMILY  
ACCEPTANCE

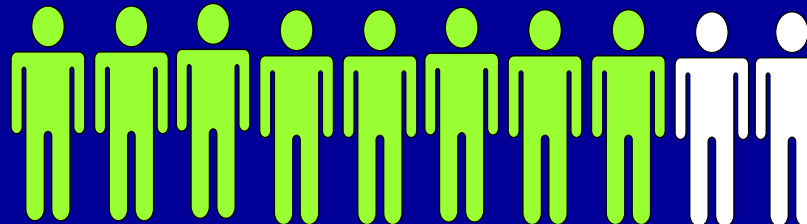
(n = 245)

Extremely  
Accepting



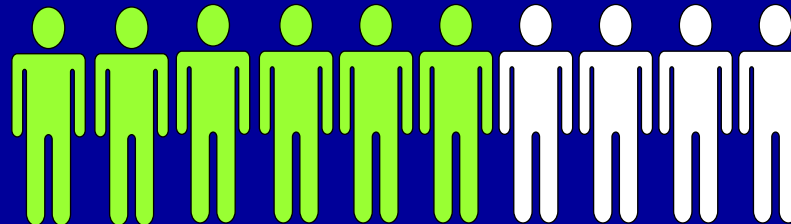
92%

Very  
Accepting



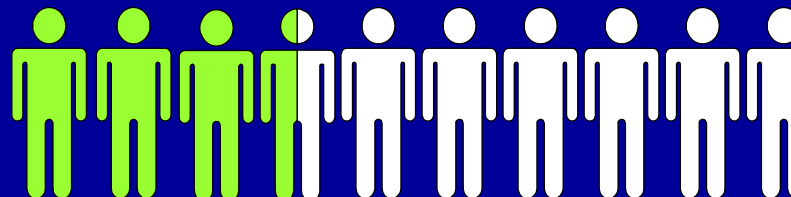
77%

A Little  
Accepting



59%

Not at All  
Accepting



35%



# Family Acceptance

---

(n = 245)

- Family accepting behaviors during adolescence:
  - protect against **suicidal behavior, depression and substance abuse** in LGBT young adults
- High levels of family acceptance during adolescence:
  - significantly higher levels of **self-esteem, social support and general health**
- Low levels of family acceptance during adolescence:
  - over **3 times more likely** to report suicidal thoughts and suicide

# Key Findings

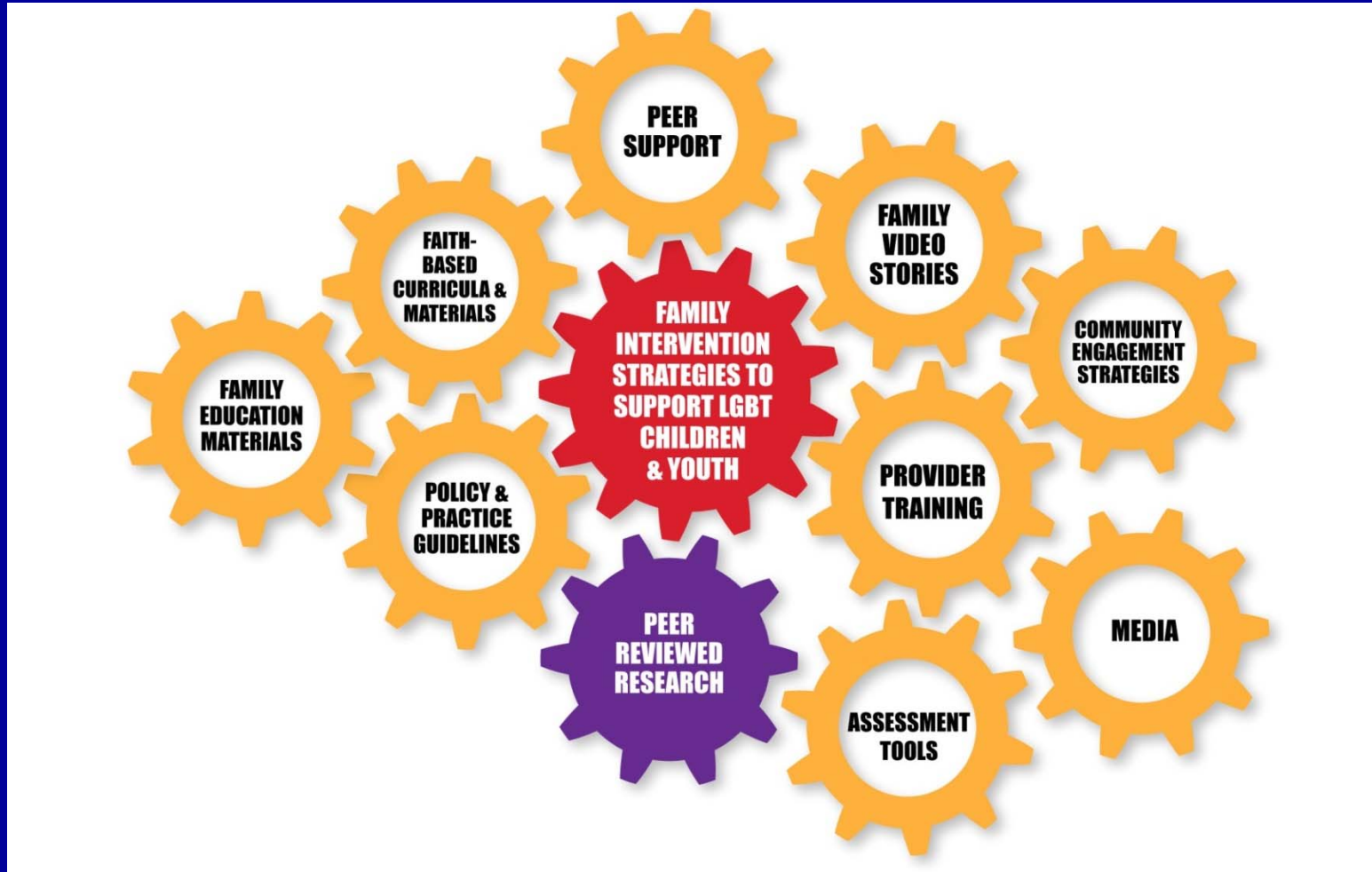
---

- *Family rejection* is linked with serious health & mental health problems for LGBT young people
- *Family acceptance* is an important protective factor for LGBT young people
- *Family acceptance* helps promote well-being for LGBT young people

# ***Family Acceptance Project Components***

**Components to Engage Families, Providers & Communities to Implement FAP's Family Intervention Approach**

---



# FAP Family Education Booklets



While accepting behaviors promote overall health and stability, family help reduce health risks for LGBT youth, parents and caregivers who are capable of even a little change—being a **little less rejecting** and a **little more supportive**—can make an important difference in reducing their adolescent's risk for serious health problems, including suicide and HIV.

### Illegal Drug Use

LOW rejection      MODERATE rejection      HIGH rejection

Level of Family Rejection

As with risk for suicide, LGBT young people who experience high levels of family rejection are more than three times as likely to use illegal drugs compared with young people from families with little or no rejection. Their use of illegal drugs is greatly reduced in families that are moderately rejecting.

### Risk for HIV Infection

LOW rejection      MODERATE rejection      HIGH rejection

Level of Family Rejection

LGBT young people from highly rejecting families are more than three times as likely to be at high risk for HIV and for sexually transmitted diseases than young people from families that exhibit little or no rejection.

LEONOR, MADRE DE UNA HIJA LESBIANA, CON 2 NIETOS

“Hay que empezar con la familia. Ahora sabemos cuán perjudicial es para los niños homosexuales no ser aceptados, no recibir amor y ser discriminados. Cuanto más se hable sobre el tema, más personas reconozcan a sus hijos homosexuales, más familias se formen donde ellos sean aceptados, se les ame, y no se les discrimine, más familias y sus niños crecerán sanos y saludables”.

**Family education booklets:** available in print and online

Lower literacy and versions for families from specific faith traditions in development

<http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/publications>

# FAP Family Video Series

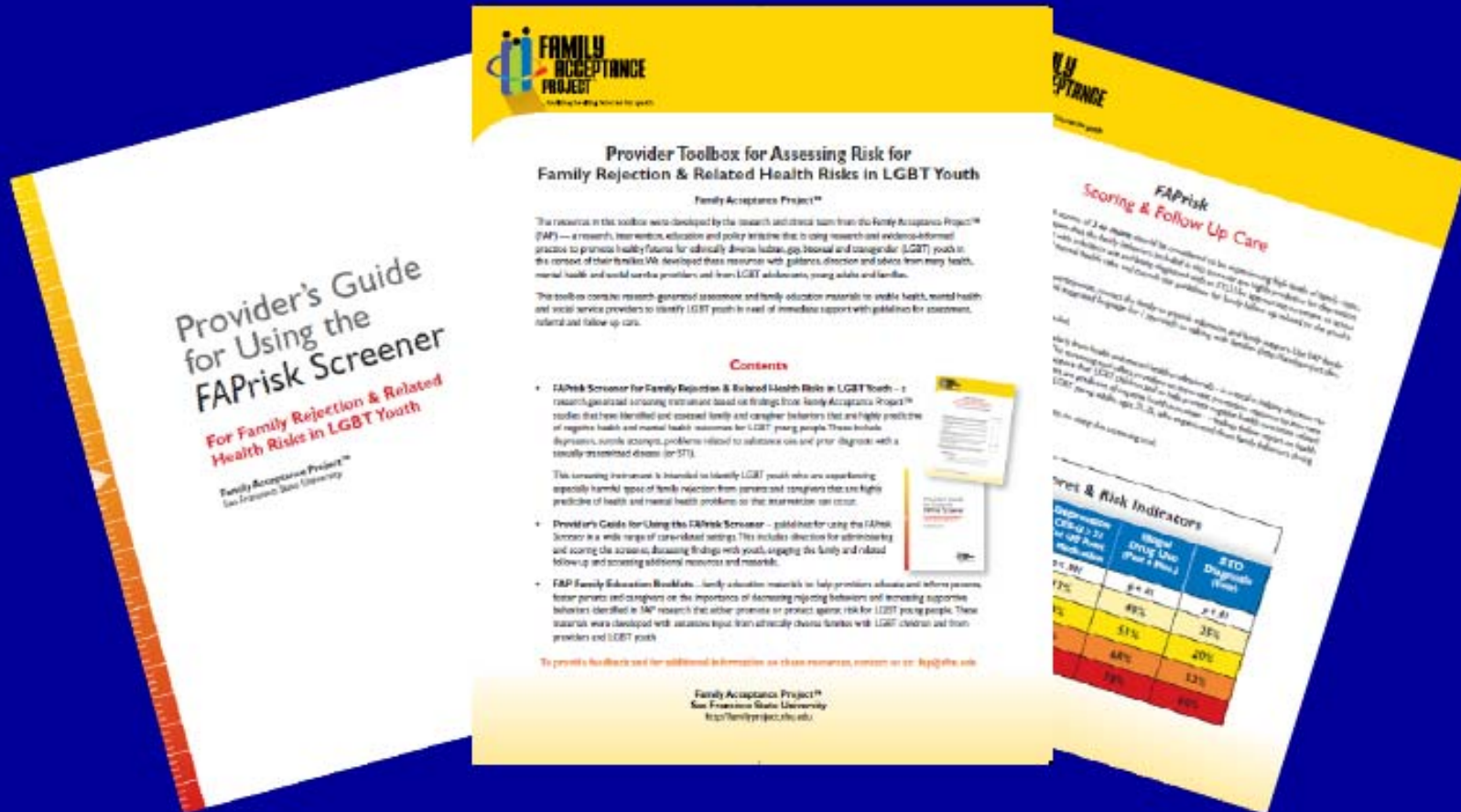
*Short research-based documentary films that show the journey of diverse families from struggle to support of their LGBT children*



## AIMS

- Give youth & families hope
- Show family accepting & rejecting behaviors
- Show the journey of diverse families from struggle to support of their LGBT children
- Humanize LGBT young people & their families

# FAPrisk Screener



Screening tool to quickly identify LGBT youth who are experiencing family rejection & related health risks to provide immediate intervention & care

Agency & on-site training to implement screening tool across disciplines and systems of care

# Family Acceptance Project Scope of Intervention Approach

---

*Early Childhood*

Core Education  
& Guidance

“Upstream” Prevention  
& Wellness Promotion

*Range of Ages*

Increasing  
Family Conflict  
  
Health Risks

Early intervention to  
Crisis intervention

*Range of Ages*

Family  
Disruption  
  
Health Risks

Re-connection



Permanency

# FAP Approach

---

Shifts the focus  
on LGBT youth  
from morality

to

*health and well-being*



# Conceptual Shifts

## Family Acceptance Project (FAP)-Generated

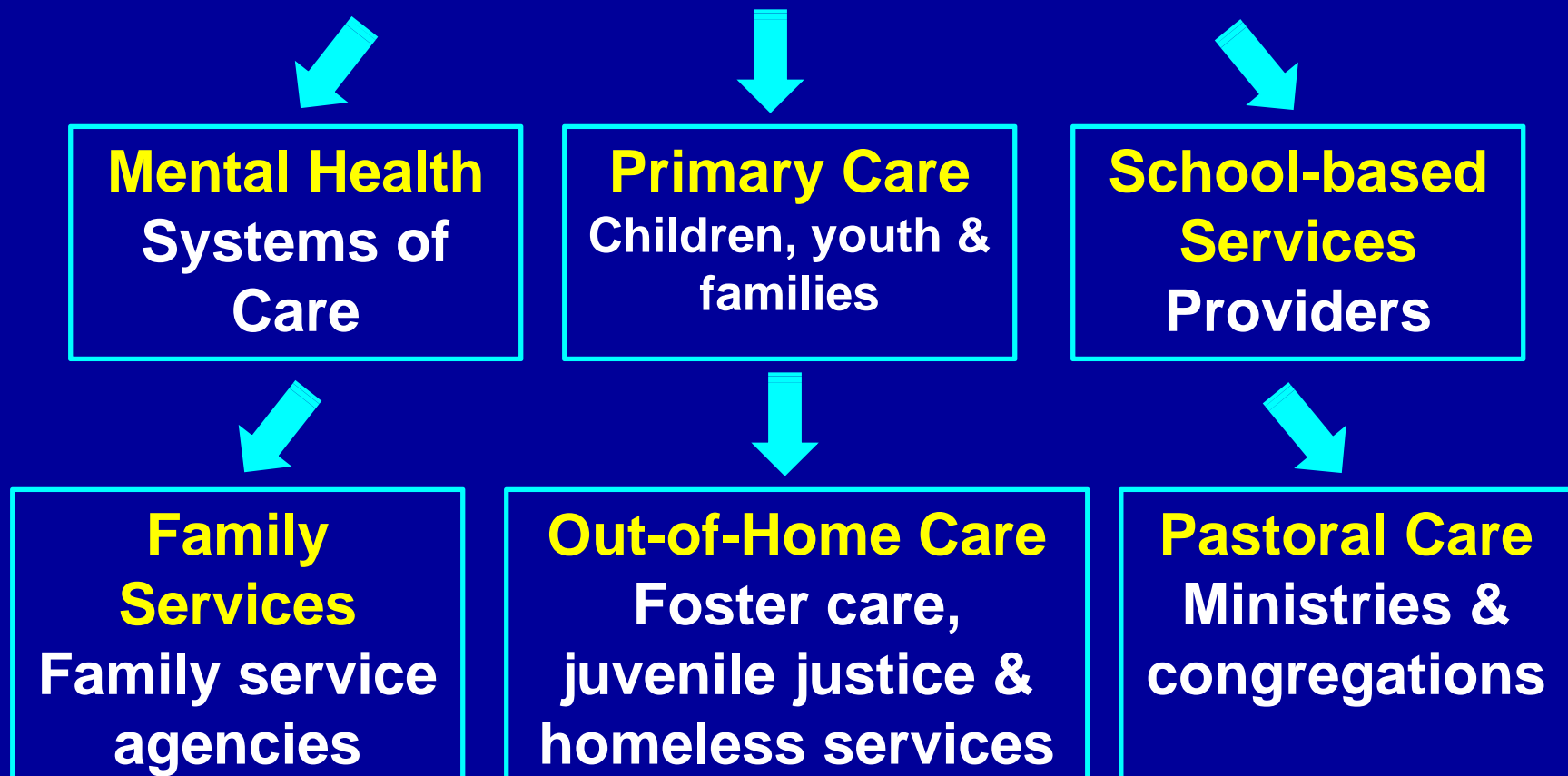
---

- Families are **potential allies** for their LGBT children
- Families **want the best** for their children
- Parents, families & caregivers **have the capacity to support** their LGBT children
- Family “rejecting” behaviors are **motivated by care & concern** to help their LGBT children

# Integrating FAP's Family Support Approach into Systems & Services

---

*Workforce development & cultural work to prepare providers, systems & advocates to deliver family-oriented services*



# Key Messages for Families

---

- A little change in how families respond to their LGBT children can make an important difference in their child's health, mental health & well-being
- Families and caregivers' words, actions & behaviors have a physical & emotional impact on their LGBT children

# Working with Conservative Families

---

- Meet families where they are
- Align cultural and religious values with FAP findings
- Help families bridge divide of “all or nothing” (e.g., my child vs. my faith or my cultural values)
- Help families understand impact of rejecting & accepting behaviors on LGBT child & family
- Educate extended family and support system (e.g., cultural and religious leaders)

# Recommendations

---

- Collect data on SOGIE in all state data sources & include Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity in the death records
  - 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention objective
- Provide targeted funding to support promising suicide prevention and intervention approaches for LGBT populations
- Include education on role of family acceptance and rejection in school suicide prevention policies mandated by AB 2246
  - 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention objective
- Integrate family-based suicide prevention and intervention approaches into services for children, adolescents and transition-aged youth
  - 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention objective

# Family Acceptance Project

---



fap@sfsu.edu

<http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>