



The Family Acceptance Project

San Francisco State University

The Family Acceptance Project™ (FAP) is a research, intervention, education and policy initiative that studies the impact of family acceptance and rejection on the health, mental health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth. Developed in 2002 by Caitlin Ryan, PhD and Rafael Diaz, PhD at San Francisco State University, the Family Acceptance Project™ includes the first major study of how families respond and adapt when LGBT youth come out during adolescence.



Most importantly, FAP provides the first empirical findings that link specific behaviors that families use to express acceptance and rejection of their LGBT children with health and mental health in adulthood, including substance abuse, suicide and HIV as well as self-esteem and well-being. Based on this research, we are currently developing a new evidence-based, family model of wellness, prevention and care to promote well-being and decrease risk for LGBT children and adolescents. We are working with professional associations, government agencies, providers and advocacy groups to share our findings and new family

approach across the U.S. and with other countries.

Need for the Project: Although LGBT youth have been self-identifying at younger ages than lesbian and gay adults in earlier generations, prior to this project, little was known about how families adapt to their children's LGBT identity and how this affects their health and well-being. This work is especially important since studies show that young people become aware of sexual attraction, on average, at about age 10. Nevertheless, few services are available for families of LGBT adolescents, particularly families of color. So families and caregivers have little information or support to deal with sexual orientation and gender identity issues when young people come out during childhood and adolescence, as has become increasingly normative.

What We Did: Working closely with many community groups, providers, families and youth, we used an innovative participatory family-based approach to study risk, resiliency and health concerns in LGBT young people. Our research includes in-depth individual interviews in English and Spanish with LGBT adolescents and their families who were accepting, ambivalent and rejecting of their children's LGBT identity. We identified more than 100 specific behaviors that families use to express acceptance and rejection of their LGBT children and then measured the impact of each of these family behaviors on the health and mental health of LGBT young people.

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Family Acceptance Project™

Building healthy futures for children and youth.

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What We Found: Based on our research, we are finally able to show empirically that families and caregivers have a dramatic and compelling impact on their LGBT children's health, mental health and well-being. LGBT young people whose parents and caregivers reject them report high rates of depression, substance abuse, suicide attempts and risk for HIV infection. Conversely, LGBT young people whose parents support them show much higher rates of self-esteem and greater well-being, with lower rates of health and mental health problems.

Because we measured family and caregiver acceptance and rejection of their LGBT children, for the first time, we can show families how their words, actions and behaviors affect their LGBT children's health, mental health and well-being. We can show ethnically and religiously diverse families how to reduce their children's risk by decreasing specific rejecting behaviors and how to increase their well-being by engaging in supportive behaviors. In follow up sessions with very diverse families, we have been able to motivate families to modify rejecting behaviors to decrease their LGBT children's risk and to increase their well-being.

We have also studied what happens in families when LGBT and gender variant children and youth are victimized in school and how to help parents, foster parents, families and caregivers prevent and manage school victimization. Our new family intervention approach educates and empowers diverse parents and caregivers to advocate for their LGBT children in families, schools and communities and shows parents how advocating for their LGBT children promotes their well-being and protects them against serious health and mental health risks, including suicide and HIV.

Culturally Appropriate Interventions:

FAP received a matching grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to develop culturally appropriate interventions based on our research to help diverse families increase support for their LGBT children, decrease their LGBT children's risk and promote their well-being. We are developing this new family model of prevention and care in collaboration with Child and Adolescent Services at San Francisco General Hospital / University of California, San Francisco. We work with a wide range of community groups in carrying this out.

Our findings and interventions aim to:

- Significantly improve the health, mental health and quality of life for diverse LGBT children and their families.
- Strengthen diverse families, decrease social stigma and help maintain many LGBT children and adolescents in their homes that would otherwise end up out-of-home, in custodial care or homeless.
- Substantially reduce the cost of care, personal suffering and loss to society by preventing major negative outcomes in at risk children and adolescents.
- Educate and mobilize parents and caregivers to advocate for their LGBT children to prevent school victimization and to promote supportive school environments.
- Inform legal decisions and develop appropriate public policy related to sexual orientation and gender expression.
- Promote acceptance and support for LGBT and gender variant children, youth and adults by educating and engaging diverse families and communities.

Further Information: FAP is supported by foundation grants and individual donors. For additional information or to make a tax-deductible contribution, contact Caitlin Ryan, PhD, ACSW, Director, Family Acceptance Project™ - San Francisco State University at: caitlin@sfsu.edu or 415-522-5558.