

# Mental Health Program on Alternative Sexual Expression

Ritu

*Independent Researcher*

## Abstract

Presented here is a mental health program on alternative sexual expression comprising of multiple sessions to be organised in one academic year for Classes 9-12. This program is an effort to develop an understanding of alternative sexual expressions in the students within the changing social context. This mental health program may be considered as an initiative taken to provide a platform and facilitation to students to understand, question the set norms of society regarding the spectrum of sexual expression. The different activities included in this program are hoped to help students to open up, reflect, observe, and debate on the issues related to the various concepts, myths, stereotypes, and issues encountered by persons with alternative sexual expressions. It also intends to provide to the students a historical perspective and a broad sense of development in the understanding of the different factors regarding alternative sexual expression. This program will help the students to change their mindset regarding alternative sexual expression in positive way.

## Introduction

“I was not lady like, nor I was manly. I was something else altogether. There were so many different ways to be beautiful.”

Michael Cunningham (novelist)

Alternative sexual expressions are not accepted in our culture and context because these do not fit in the popular normative frame of our society. Even after being accepted as a natural expression of one's sexuality, it is still treated like a disease or danger to the society. That is why people with alternative sexual expressions are struggling for their rights and for acceptance. This programme is planned to make our young generation, that is, the school students and teachers, aware and sensitised about the issues, struggles and humiliation that people with alternative sexual expressions face at each and every step of their life.

The various life skills that are intended to be developed and refined via this plan are self-awareness, decision-making, empathy, interpersonal relationships, critical thinking, and questioning.

The objective of this programme are:

1. To broaden the understanding of students about alternative expressions of sexuality.

2. To become aware of the nuances and multi-dimensionality of the issue.
3. To become accepting of the expression of other's and one's own sexuality.
4. To understand the importance of confidentiality and being a part of someone's support system, if needed

The various sessions will have their respective specific objectives.

The various pedagogical techniques that will be used in this plan are – individual and group activities, case-study analysis, video-filming, and discussions.

## SESSION – 1

Specific objectives:

- To reflect on students' understanding and beliefs about alternative sexual expressions.
- To be aware about the myths and stereotypes related to alternative sexual expressions.

*Activity 1:* Open Discussion (30 minutes)

In the first session of the mental health programme, some news articles will be presented and/or read before the students to start a discussion about 'alternative expressions of sexuality'.

These news articles may include the following:

“Kerala sexologist claims to ‘cure’ homosexuality, LGBTQ community demands action.” (The News minute – 23 April, 2018)

“From denying existence of ‘hell’ to LGBTQ in churches, here’s why this Pope is different.” (the Indian express – 3 April, 2018)

“India takes a step towards **decriminalising** homosexuality.” (The Pulse – 13 January, 2018)

Students will be asked to point out some important themes from these news articles and their relevance in our lives.

This discussion is essential to address the topic with students’ point of view and to know to what extent they consider this topic relevant.

Note: This session could be used to help students articulate their own beliefs, anxieties, and views about alternative sexual expressions.

*Activity 2* Sentence completion: myths and stereotypes (20 minutes)

1st sentence: As a parent, if I find that my children are being taught by a gay teacher, then, I would.....

2nd sentence: If a close friend of mine who I assumed was straight told me that he/she is homosexual, I would feel.....

3rd sentence: When I think of two people of the same sex making love to each other, I feel...

4th sentence: As a parent, if I learnt my child is not heterosexual, I would.....

5th sentence: if someone of my own sex made a sexual advance towards me, I would.....

6th sentence: If I am living in a hostel/PG and I found out that my roommate is not straight, then I would.....

7th sentence: What I admire about homosexual people is.....

8th sentence: Homosexual couples make me uncomfortable when.....

After completion of the activity ask how they felt during the activity.

## SESSION – 2

Specific objectives:

- To make them remember the incidents which shaped their early understanding about the topic.
- To understand and define the technical terms used in the context of alternative sexual expressions, such as, lesbian, gay etc.

Activity 1: Early learnings about people with alternative sexual expressions (LGBTQ) (30 minutes)

Students will be asked to partner up in pairs. The facilitator will ask four questions, and as participants listen to each question, they should try to think of specific events or experiences, asking themselves four important questions. They are:

1. When did you hear about people with alternative sexual expressions?
2. How old were you?
3. How did you feel?
4. How did that knowledge influence your attitudes, values, or beliefs about sexual orientation?

More questions that may generate further discussion:

1. When was the first time, or a significant time, when you became aware that some people had a different sexual identity than you?
2. When was the first, or a significant time, when you became aware that people were treated differently because they had different sexual identities?
3. As a child or young adult, what did you learn about lesbians and gay men from your parents, friends, or your religious experiences?
4. What was the first, or a significant time, when you were challenged about your

beliefs and attitudes regarding different sexual identities?

After participants think about each question, they should discuss their thoughts with their partner.

*Activity 2:* That's the term!! (30 minutes)

The second session will start with an activity to check the understanding about the definition of the technical terms used for people with alternative sexual expressions.

There are chances that students might have used or heard some of these words before, without properly understanding them. In this activity, the teacher would write the various terms that would emerge in the first session on the board and their definitions in a random order and ask students to match up the terms with their definitions.

After completion of the activity, students will check their responses themselves to make their understanding better.

Home task: For the next session, students will be given a home task (group task) to search about:

- Historical development of the movement for acceptance of alternative sexualities
- Laws in different countries for expressions of alternative sexuality

### SESSION – 3

Specific objectives:

- To understand the historical perspective.
- To interpret the statements of the law and their implications for the acceptance of people with alternative sexual expressions.
- To understand the struggle and humiliation faced by the person with alternative sexual expression and his/her family as well.

*Activity 1:* Group discussion (50 minutes)

In the first slot of the third session, students will be asked to present their findings about the given topics.

The teacher will be present throughout the first slot and there will be feedback and question-answer session for each group presentation.

### SESSION – 4

Specific objectives:

- To appreciate the power of audio visuals/media to shape the opinion of the society
- To understand expressions of different agents and social institutions around the issues

*Activity 1:* Video screening followed by an open discussion (90 minutes)

In this session, students will be shown an episode of the TV Show *Satyamev Jayate* on “Accepting Alternate Sexualities”.

After this video, an open discussion will be organised to understand the key points in a better way.

Home task: Students will be asked to find one case pertaining to this topic and study the positions of various stakeholders thoroughly.

### SESSION – 5

Specific objectives:

- To empathise with the discomfort that people with alternative sexual expressions face when they open up to their relatives, friends, and acquaintances.
- To empathise with the cause of acceptance of alternative sexual expression

*Activity 1 – Case presentation* (60 minutes)

In this session, first of all, students will present their case studies and the various contradictory positions. Students will be asked to arrive at some solution or give suggestions for their cases collectively.

*Activity 2:* Group discussion

After the discussion of different cases, students will be shown a documentary “Breaking free” to know about real life cases of alternate sexual expressions.

After the documentary, a discussion will be held over the topic with students.

**SESSION – 6**

Specific objectives:

- To understand the misuse of power to crush the alternative reality.
- To explain the safety issues faced by the persons of alternative sexual expressions.

*Activity 1:* Are we all equally safe? (30 minutes)

In this session, a group discussion will be planned to understand the safety issues for people with alternative sexual expressions.

Students will be asked to imagine how safe they think is our society for people with alternative sexual expressions.

The spaces around which the discussion may be organised are:

- Educational institutions
- Gyms and other such spaces that focus on physical health
- Movie theatres, restaurants, and other spaces for entertainment
- Family and kinship
- Work spaces
- Hospitals and other clinical spaces

Students will be asked to give reasons for their responses.

*Activity 2:* Is the ‘collective’ against the ‘individual’? (3 hrs)

In this session, the Bollywood movie “Aligarh”, which is based on a true story of a gay university professor who is shamed by society and compelled to commit suicide, will be shown to students.

After the movie, a discussion will be held about the movie with the students.

**SESSION – 7**

Specific objective:

- To understand how disability and alternative sexuality add up in the challenge for survival

of a person, especially woman, in our society.

*Activity 1:* Multiple layers of struggle (3 hrs)

In this session, the Bollywood movie “Margarita with a straw” will be screened for students. The movie shows the triple challenges for a girl with disability and alternative sexual expression in our society .

After the movie, a discussion will be conducted over the same with the students.

*Activity 2 –* What have I always wanted to know? (60 minutes)

In the second slot, a question–answer round will be planned in which anyone can ask questions about what they always wanted to know related to this topic. To answer, this will be an open session.

“What have I always wanted to know?”

Participants will be provided with blank cards on which they will be anonymously free to write any questions they might have around the acceptance of people with alternative sexual expressions.

Questions from the cards will be read by the facilitator and attempts will be made to answer these questions with the participants.

**SESSION – 8**

Specific objectives:

- To empower students to talk about the topic in public and social spaces.
- Learning to respond to the various arguments and reactions of people about alternative sexual expression

*Activity 1:* How do people respond?

Home task: Students will be given a home task for the next session, i.e., to bring up this topic in public and social settings and discuss the varied responses that they get from different people.

**Instructions:**

- Ask students to choose a social setting where they will bring up the topic of LGBTQ issues. For example, they could go out for coffee, have lunch or visit a family member, and bring up the topic in conversation in a public space.
- Suggest that the student say something like, “we are learning about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues in school, and it’s been very interesting.” The student could be prompted to wait for the other person’s reaction before proceeding.
- Ask students to analyse the subsequent conversation, noting changes in tone or voice, their own comfort level, the comfort level of the other person, the comfort level of those who might have overheard the conversation.
- Have them report about what was said, how it was said, how they felt throughout the conversation, and what they were made aware of as the discussion unfolded. Did they notice a change in tone, or voice when they said the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender? What was comfortable or uncomfortable about the interaction?

## SESSION – 9

Specific objectives:

- To accept alternative sexual expressions as natural as heterosexual expressions.

*Activity 1:* Guided imagery (40 minutes)

In this session, after developing much understanding on the topic, an activity will be planned on Imagine how you would feel.

**Purpose:** This guided fantasy gives people the opportunity to feel what it’s like to be ridiculed, excluded and discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation. In this case, heterosexual orientation. It was developed by students at Cornell University and by M. Rochlin.

**Script:** *We’re going to do a guided fantasy now that gives you a chance to feel what it’s like to be hated and excluded because of your sexual*

*orientation. The fantasy assumes that you, the listener, are heterosexual. Even if you happen to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning, concentrate on the feelings it touches in you.*

*I would like you now to concentrate on my voice and how you feel... not what you think. Don’t rationalise or intellectualise, simply feel. Ask yourself what emotions are affecting you.*

*Find a comfortable position and close your eyes. Let your body relax. Notice your breathing, in and out. Relax all the muscles in your body.*

*I’m going to ask you to imagine a world that’s very different from one you currently live in. Because it’s different, it requires you to stretch your imagination. Let yourself experience and imagine as fully as you can. Rather than judging yourself for what comes up, just notice and record in your mind without editing. If you feel the pressure to edit, simply notice that you have the feeling. If you become distracted at any point, just notice that and return to the process. The more you can be with your experience, the more you will get out of this exercise.*

*Imagine for a while that you live in a society in which the majority of people are lesbian or gay. The entire society is set up for homosexuality – it’s the way things are. By the way, having children is no problem: adoption, artificial insemination and other methods are used. Children are raised by parents who are both of the same sex. So, your parents are the same sex, your peers are all lesbian or gay, and everyone you’ve ever met is gay... but you are heterosexual.*

*Now open your eyes.*

Students will be asked to think and articulate their feelings towards the following scenarios:

1. How do you feel having your sexual orientation be in the minority?
2. How does it feel having to make a decision about admitting your heterosexuality to yourself? To others?

3. What's the difference between flaunting your heterosexuality and asserting your identity?
4. How does it feel to hear "straight" jokes from your family and friends?
5. How does it feel to have religious authorities – perhaps even your own pastor or rabbi – saying your feelings are wicked or sinful?
6. How does it feel when you can't understand why you have certain desires, desires that involve fantasies about the other sex, that no one around you seems to share?
7. How does it feel when you turn on the TV or open a magazine and all the ads are for people unlike you? The ads are always about what toothpaste men should use to attract the best men, about the perfect wine for two women in love. Never anything for people of different sexes who are attracted to each other.
8. How does it feel to think you are the only one attracted to the other sex – no one else in the world is like you? Who do you talk to about it? Who can you risk telling your secret to?
9. If you are a woman, how does it feel to be asked each time you call home, "When are you bringing your girlfriend home to us?", or if you are a man, "Where's your boyfriend? Why, I must have dated dozens of boys when I was your age."
10. How does it feel when everyone always assumes you are gay or lesbian, never allowing for the fact that you are straight?
11. How does it feel when not only do you have to hide the fact that you may want a sexual relationship with the other sex, but you have to pretend that you want one with someone of the same sex?
12. How does it feel to know that you can never raise children because society tells you that you are harmful to children and awards them only to lesbian and gay couples?
13. How does it feel to know you might lose your job or your apartment or your health insurance just because someone suspects that you are heterosexual... and to have no protection from the law?
14. How does it feel to be assaulted by a hetero-basher, but to not be able to go to the police about it?
15. How does it feel to be always, aware of what you say, of how you act? Aware of things you have to do in order to be considered homosexual? Aware of the things you would never dare do, because you might be suspected of being heterosexual?
16. What does it feel like to be asked and have to answer questions like these:
17. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
18. When and how did you first decide you were heterosexual?
19. Is it possible your heterosexuality is just a phase you might grow out of?
20. Isn't it possible that all you need is a good gay or lesbian lover?
21. If you've never slept with a person of the same sex, how do you know you wouldn't prefer that?
22. If you chose to nurture children, would you want them to be heterosexual knowing the problems they would face?
23. The great majority of child molesters are heterosexual. Do you really consider it safe to expose your children to heterosexual teachers?
24. Why do you insist on being so obvious, making a public spectacle of your heterosexuality? Can't you just be what you are and keep it quiet?

25. Why do heterosexuals place so much emphasis on sex? Why are heterosexuals so promiscuous?
26. There seem to be very few happy heterosexuals. Techniques have been developed to help you change if you really want to. Have you considered aversion therapy?

The intent of this activity is to normalise alternative sexual expression as much as the heterosexual expression.

### **SESSION – 10**

This is the concluding session of the mental health program in which the participants will

be asked to share their feedback about the programme. The activities performed in the earlier sessions will be discussed to reflect on their relative importance, strength, and scope for improvement for understanding about alternative sexual expressions.

*Note:* This is a tentative planning of Mental Health Programme in school for a year with adolescent students. In between, news articles, real-life stories or any other stuff related to the topic can be added by the students as well as the facilitator. The program may also be adapted as per the need and context of the school and the context in which it is situated.