

Involving Families in LGBT Youth Suicide Prevention

Creating Partnerships: Taking a Collaborative Approach
to Advancing Suicide Prevention

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Factors Contributing to Suicidal Behavior Among LGBT Youth

- Recent attention heavily focused on:
 - Harassment, bullying, victimization by peers
 - School as the key environment where this is expressed
 - Need for anti-bullying legislation, policies, and trainings
- Limited focus on other systems that contribute to vulnerability vs. resilience of LGBT youth, in particular, the family

Research on Family Rejection & Family Acceptance

Ryan, C. et al. (2009). Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in white and Latino lesbian, gay and bisexual young adults. *Pediatrics*; 123(1), 346-352

Ryan C et al. (2010). Family acceptance in adolescence and the Health of LGBT young adults. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*; 23(4), 205-213

Measures

- Based on open-ended in-depth interviews w. LGB youth and families/caregivers, researchers identified:
 - 51 close-ended items to assess presence and frequency of rejecting behaviors
 - 55 close-ended items to assess presence and frequency of accepting behaviors
- Responses used a scale of 0 (never) to 3 (many times)

Examples of Family Reactions

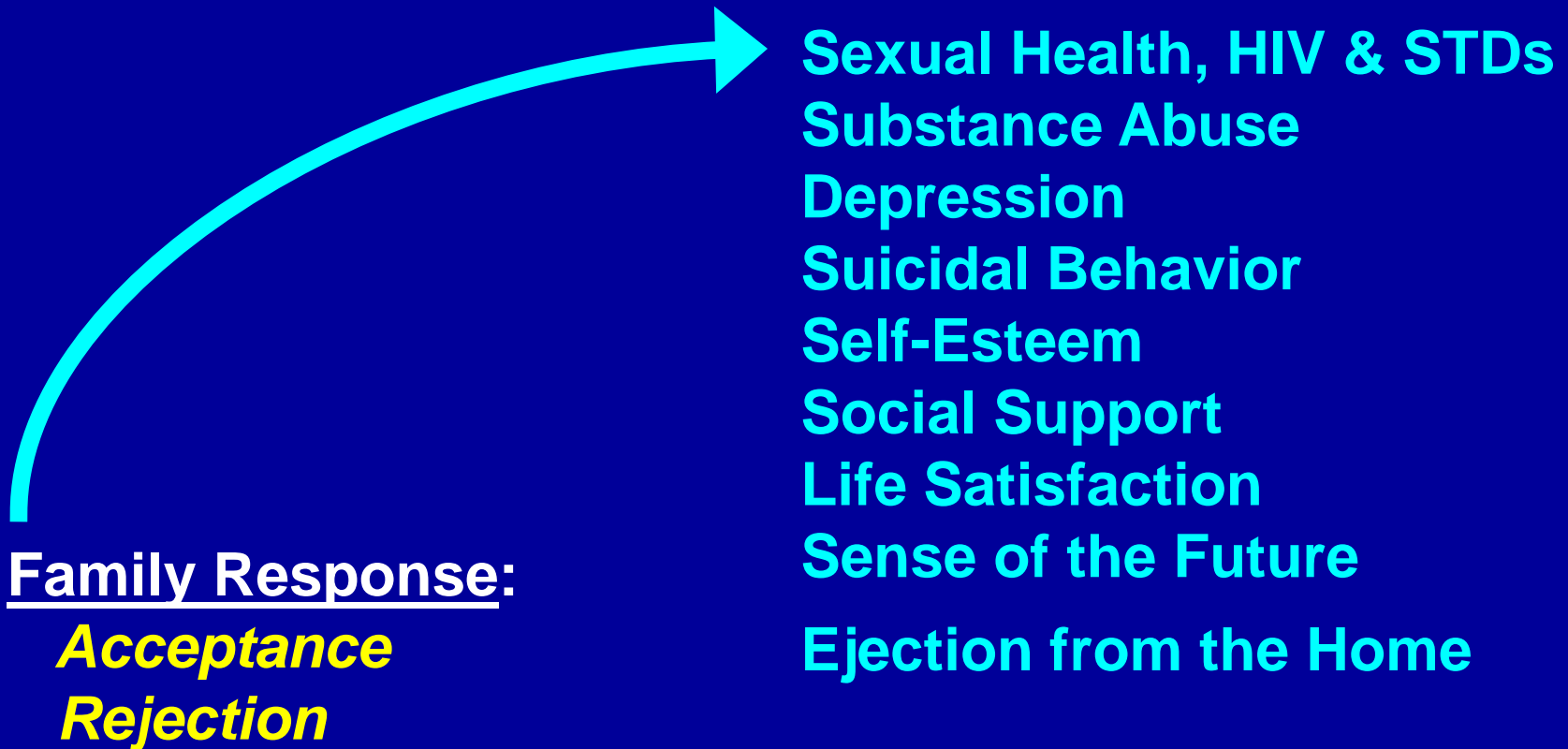
Supportive Behaviors

- Express affection & caring for LGBT youth
- Talk with your child about their LGBT identity
- Advocate for youth when they are discriminated against or mistreated by others
- Welcome LGBT friends & partners to family activities
- Support youth's gender expression

Rejecting Behaviors

- Call youth derogatory names or physically hurt them because of their LGBT identity
- Restrict access to LGBT positive information, including peers & community resources
- Blame youth when others mistreat them because of identity
- Tell LGBT youth that the way they look, act or behave is shameful to the family
- Try to change LGBT identity

Impact of Family Acceptance & Rejection on Health/Mental Health

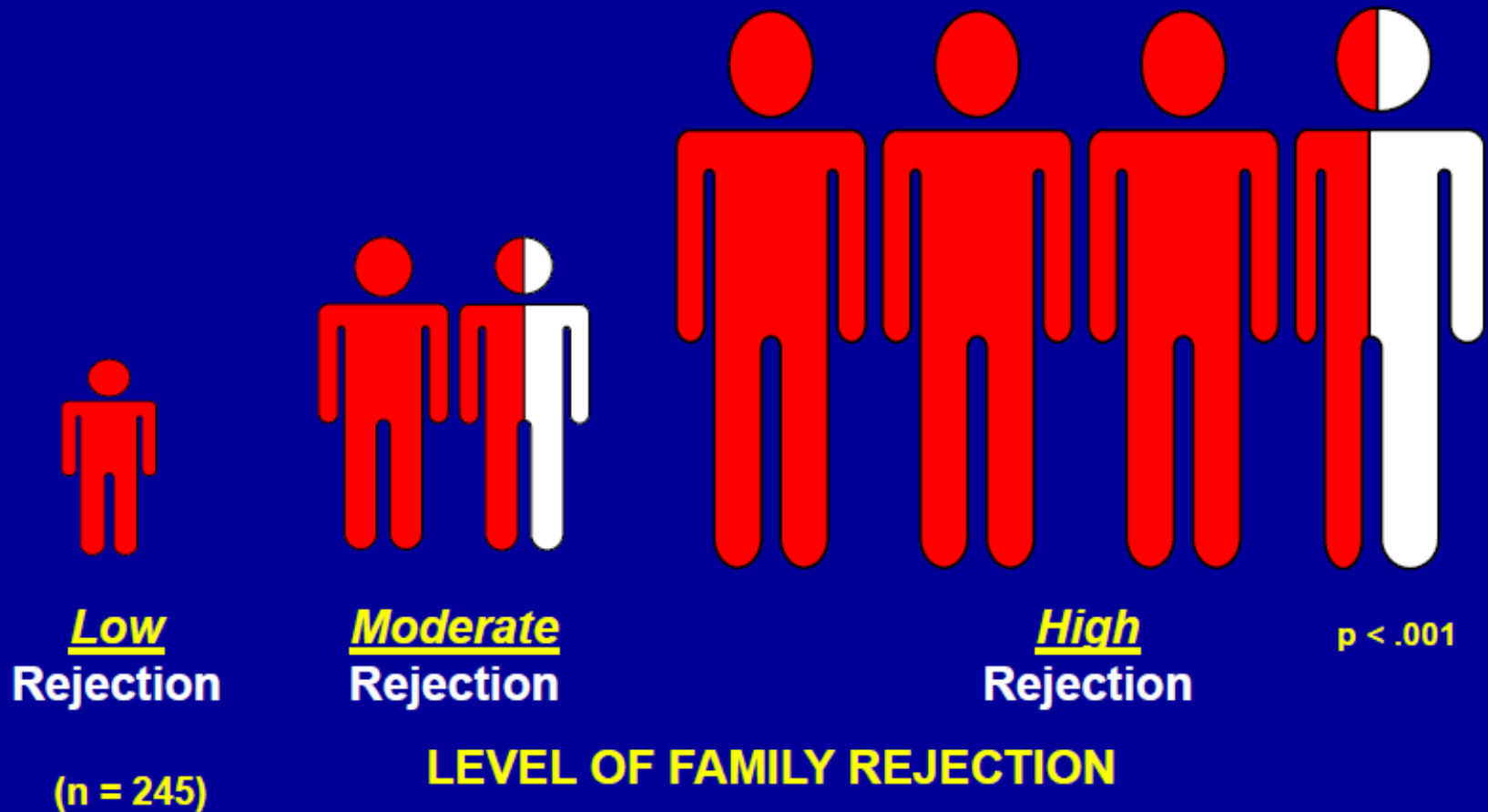


100+ Family Behaviors

Key Findings

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

Illegal Drug Use

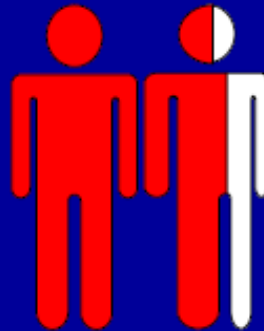


Risk for HIV Infection

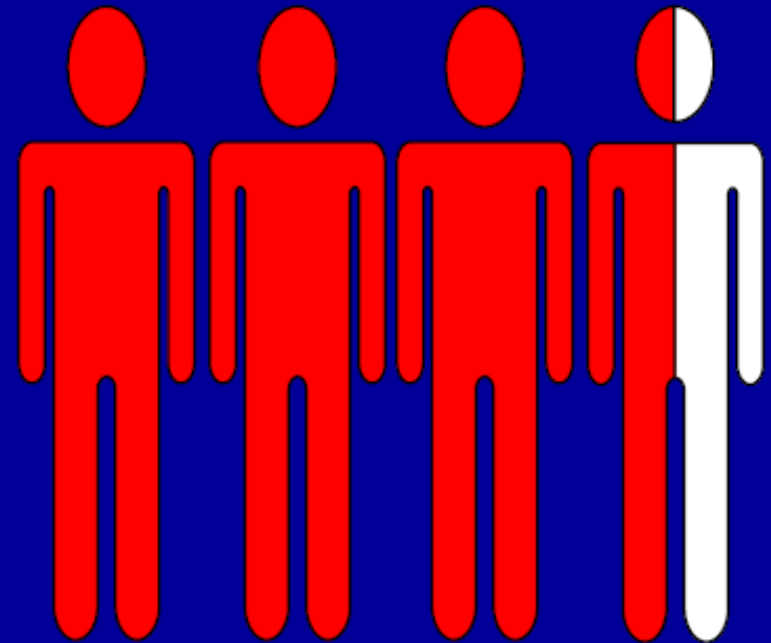


Low
Rejection

(n = 245)



Moderate
Rejection



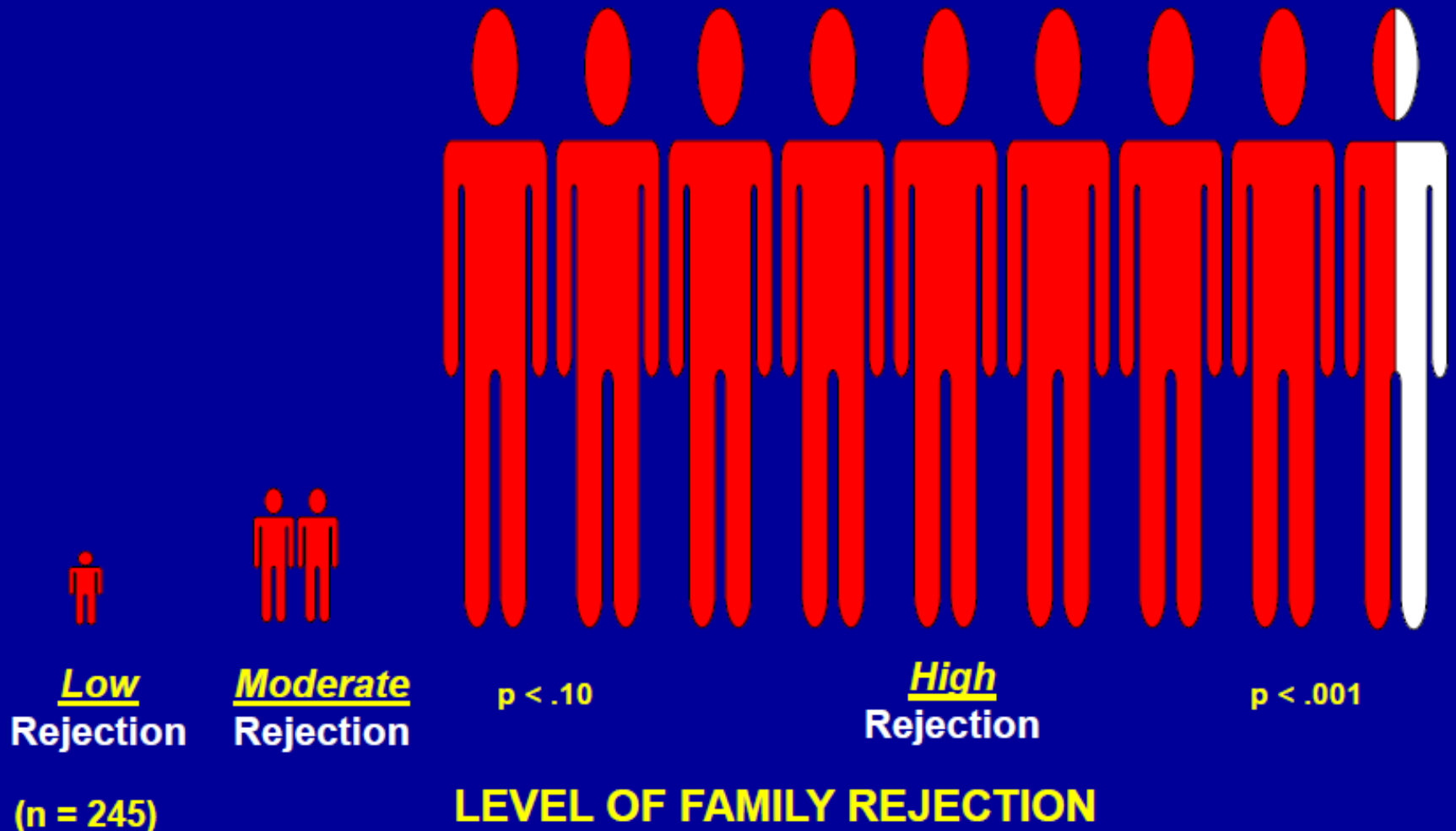
High
Rejection

$p < .001$

LEVEL OF FAMILY REJECTION

Lifetime Suicide Attempts

(1 or more times)



(n = 245)

Family Acceptance

- Family accepting behaviors during adolescence **protect against suicidal behavior, depression and substance abuse** in LGBT young adults
 - Increase intimacy and connectedness between parents, caregivers and LGBT children
 - Improve family relationships and strengthen families
- LGBT young adults with high levels of family acceptance during adolescence had significantly **higher levels of self-esteem, social support and general health** — compared to peers with low levels of family acceptance
- LGBT young adults with low levels of family acceptance during adolescence were **over three times more likely to report suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts** — compared to peers with high levels of family acceptance.

Conceptual Foundation

Family Acceptance Project

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

FAP Resources & Tools

- ***Family education materials*** – basic guidance in English, Spanish & Chinese
 - ***Family video stories*** of ethnically & religiously diverse families with LGBT children
- ***Policy & practice related materials*** – assessment materials; policy & practice guidelines; consultation on legal cases
- ***Training*** in school systems, faith communities, health & mental health services, child welfare & homeless programs to ***teach providers how to engage families***
- ***Research publications*** – building an evidence-based foundation through peer-reviewed journals
- ***Evidence-based family interventions*** – help families decrease risk & promote support for LGBT children

Parent and Provider Education/Support Materials

Family Responses to Learning How Their Behavior Affects Their Child's Risk

We found that families from all ethnic groups were shocked to learn that reactions they thought would help or would protect their children from being gay or transgender – instead put their children at very high risk for health and mental health problems.

These behaviors – such as trying to change their children's identity or trying to keep them away from gay friends to protect them – instead, isolated their children and made them feel alone and unwanted. Many youth who are rejected actually feel like their parents and family members hate them.

Some Family Behaviors that Increase Your LGBT Child's Risk for Health & Mental Health Problems

Behaviors to Avoid

- Hitting, slapping or physically hurting your child because of their LGBT identity
- Verbal harassment or name-calling because of your child's LGBT identity
- Excluding LGBT youth from family and family activities
- Blocking access to LGBT friends, events & resources
- Blaming your child when they are discriminated against because of their LGBT identity
- Pressuring your child to be more (or less) masculine or feminine
- Telling your child that they will punish them because they are gay
- Telling your child that you are ashamed of them or that how they look or act will shame the family
- Making your child keep their LGBT identity a secret in the family and not letting them talk about it

© Keith Ryan, Family Acceptance Project, 2009

Parents may react with anger, fear, sadness or disgust when they learn that their child is gay or transgender. Some parents or family members may call their children names or get into physical fights with them. Others may prevent their children from attending support groups for gay and transgender youth, or from learning about their gay or transgender identity. Or parents and foster parents may prevent them from attending family events because how the gay or transgender youth looks or behaves is shameful and embarrassing to them.

Our research identified many behaviors that parents and caregivers use to reject their child's gay or transgender identity. We found that some of these rejecting behaviors – such as blocking access to gay friends and resources or preventing a gay youth from attending family events – were just as harmful as physically beating a gay or transgender child. Instead, these behaviors that parents and caregivers may use to try to protect their children from harm put them at very high risk for suicide, depression and other health problems.

“我們必須從家人開始。”

認識到，如果同志孩子不被接受，不被疼愛，成長的過程會很困難，會變成對身體健康有害。不過，如果我們公開的談論，家長能開始接受和支持他們的同志子女，不是排斥他們。就會有更多的同志孩子能夠在家庭的茁壯成長，我們的家庭從而變得更加堅強。

以下的故事是來自一位有同志女兒的母親



Niños saludables con el apoyo familiar

Ayuda para familias con hijos e hijas lesbianas, gays, bisexuales y transgénero



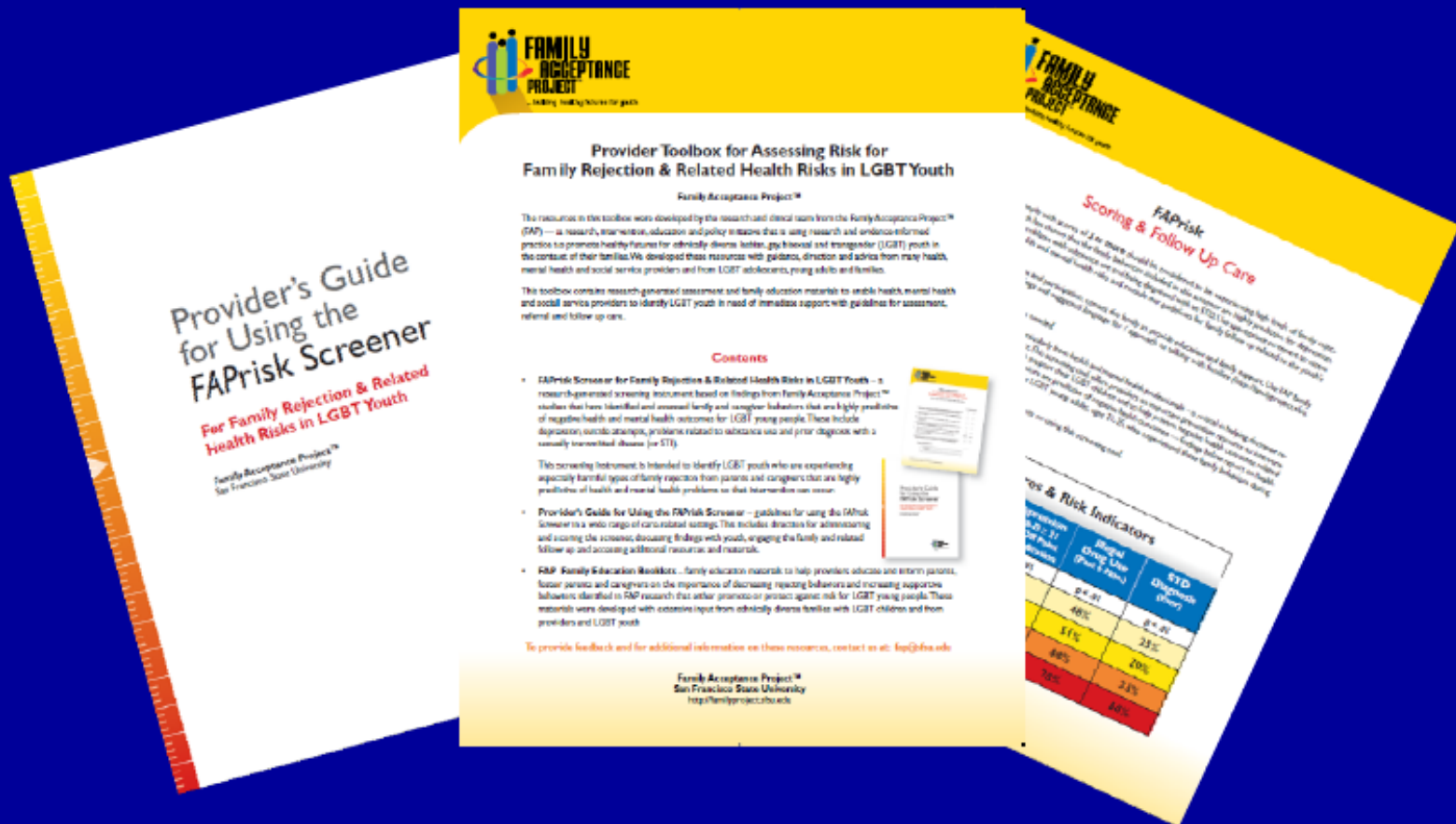
SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Family Education Booklet Series - lower literacy levels and versions for specific faith traditions in development. Can be downloaded or purchased in hard copy

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

FAPrisk Screener



Assessment Tool to identify LGBT youth at risk of family rejection & related health risks to initiate intervention

FAP Family Video Series – *series in development*



One of a series of short documentaries to help diverse families support their LGBT children

MY SON A family's journey to support their gay son

Premiere Screening at Frameline's
San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival:
Friday, June 18, 2010 – 7pm, Victoria Theater
2961-16th Street, San Francisco

"Always My Son" – will be disseminated in 2012 with discussion materials. We're raising funds for 6 other short documentaries, based on our research, that show the journey of ethnically and religiously diverse families to support their LGBT children.

<http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/family-videos>

Always My Son

Strategies for Fostering Acceptance in Families of LGBT Youth

- What strategies are suggested by this family's story?
- How can families be reached and encouraged toward acceptance of LGBT youth?
 - Family services agencies
 - Schools
 - Community health centers
 - Faith communities

Conclusions

- Family acceptance is a critical aspect of LGBT youth suicide prevention
- Creating broad-based family acceptance requires integrated approach across multiple systems
- Family Acceptance Project is an excellent resource for guidance, materials and training