

COLEGA EXERCISE: Mock Support Group

- 1) Revisit what happened before...Did we as a community, create a safe space for queer people, especially those who might be questioning or who want to "come out"?
- 2) How many of you are willing to spend the next 30 minutes making our community totally safe for queer and questioning people here at Reach.
- 3) **GO AROUND TO GET A VERBAL OR VISUAL COMMITMENT FROM EVERYONE IN THE ROOM.**
- 4) Explain that we are going to, as a community, role-play a lesbian/gay/transgender support group. This exercise will allow everyone to "come out" so that those people who might be queer can come out without anyone knowing and will allow those of us who are heterosexual to experience what it might be like having to publicly "come out".
- 5) Beginning with the facilitators and going around the entire room, ask everyone to stand up and introduce themselves, giving their name first and identifying as lesbian, gay or transgender.

"Hello, my name is _____, and I'm a lesbian."

"Hi, my name is _____, and I'm a gay man."

"My name is _____, and I am a transgender person."

(For the purposes of this exercise, we will not allow people to identify as *bisexual*...make it clear that bisexuality is definitely a sexual orientation but we are trying to get everyone to "feel" what it might be like having to come out and face the fear of homophobia/heterosexism...being bisexual allows for heterosexual privilege to exist and would defeat the purpose of the exercise.)

- 6) **Facilitators should be role-playing the support group counselors**, stopping the process so that everyone has the opportunity to "feel" the pride of coming out. Everyone should be encouraged to speak loudly and proudly...practice for coming out in the outside world.
- 7) For people who feel uncomfortable with the exercise, encourage them to push through...."that coming out is hard for all of us...that they are among friends" **Remember facilitators must stay in role and treat the situation as if this is a real support group...remember that "denial" happens in real support groups too.**
- 8) Be prepared to pass over people but be sure to return to them later...try to get everyone to take the risk.
- 9) Open the whole discussion to talking about how people felt doing the exercise. Was it difficult? If people know they are heterosexual, why is the role-play so hard? What are people afraid of? (this is why homophobia is so intense...more so than racism because homophobia victimizes heterosexuals as well...)
- 10) Consider the possibility of going back into the role-play. Have people imagine what life must be like for queer people and those still in the closet. Some questions to start off with:

how many of you are out to your parents? Why or why not? what makes it difficult coming out to them?...what are the consequences?

do your best friends know? how do you plan on telling them?