



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

LGBTQ+ Affirmative Support Groups

These groups bring together lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual and gender minority people for community, peer support, and in some cases structured treatment. They're built on affirmative practice: LGBTQ+ identities are healthy variations of human experience, and the mental health disparities these communities face are rooted in minority stress, stigma, and rejection, not in identity itself. They come in two forms. Peer support groups offer community and shared identity through LGBTQ+ centers and PFLAG. Clinician-led affirmative therapy groups range from open process and interpersonal groups to structured protocols; among the latter, the CBT-based ESTEEM and AFFIRM have the strongest evidence base.

WHO IT'S FOR, AND WHO IT'S NOT

- A fit for anyone wanting community in a space that affirms their identity.
- Especially valuable when affirming support is missing from everyday life.
- Significant depression or trauma may call for a clinician-led group too.

What it's for

Sexual and gender minority people across the lifespan who want affirming support.

For minority stress, depression, anxiety, family rejection, and coming out.

Some are broadly inclusive; others focus on youth, adults, or people of color.

WHAT TO EXPECT

1 Peer groups are open and informal, welcoming people at any stage of identity.

2 Process and interpersonal groups are open; structured ones (ESTEEM, AFFIRM) are time-limited.

3 All are explicitly affirming: misgendering and pathologizing aren't acceptable.

Affirmative group support has a growing evidence base.

- A review found affirmative CBT improves **depression, anxiety, and substance use** in LGBTQ+ people, with the CBT-based ESTEEM and AFFIRM strongest among group formats.¹
- A meta-analysis found group peer support produces significant gains in **social support, hope, and empowerment**.²

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

Social repair for social harm. Community counters the isolation of rejection.

Chosen family starts here. One of the most protective factors there is.

Affirming by design. No need to defend or explain who you are.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1** Is this peer support, an open process group, or a structured protocol (ESTEEM, AFFIRM)?
- 2** Is it broadly inclusive, or focused on a specific community or concern?
- 3** How does the group hold its affirming ground rules?

Ready to find a group?

Browse 2,000+ therapy and support groups in all 50 states.

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If you're in crisis, call or text 988.

The Group Guide is a directory, not a clinic. This handout is general education, not medical or mental health advice. Listings are written by group leaders and are not endorsements. Confirm details, cost, and fit with any group you contact. Sources on page 2.



Sources

LGBTQ+ Affirmative Support Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Tudor-Sfetea, C., & Topciu, R. A systematic review of evidence-based cognitive and/or behavioural interventions targeting mental health in LGBTQ+ populations. *Clinical Psychology in Europe* (2024), 6(3), Article e11323.
- 2 Lyons, N., Cooper, C., & Lloyd-Evans, B. A systematic review and meta-analysis of group peer support interventions for people experiencing mental health conditions. *BMC Psychiatry* (2021), 21(1), Article 315.

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