Star Activity

Materials:
- Pink, yellow, blue stars equal to the number of participants
- 1 to 3 Green Stars
- Pens / Pencils to fill out stars
- Tape (optional)
- Blank Star Points (optional)

Facilitator Directions:

1) Pass out the stars to the members of the audience. Be sure to only give out only a few (or one) green star and an equal amount of all of the others.

2) Select the person who receives the green star carefully as in the role play the green star experiences the greatest emotional distress.

3) Provide participants with opportunity to fill out stars. Note that individuals do not have to fill out star if they desire to keep that information private and that they will not be required to share the information on the star.

4) Explain to them that the star is symbolic of our lives; the names within the star are the names of people who we have chosen to fill our lives.

5) Establish standards of confidentiality and safety as necessary. Be aware of the fact that the Star Activity can be a high risk and emotional exercise for some people and treat your responsibility as a facilitator accordingly.

Activity Goals

1) Build empathy for LGBT community, 2) Establish coming out as a challenge and a problem created by others, 3) Introduce concept of coming out through active learning.

Pass out the stars to the members of the audience. Be sure to give out one green star and an equal amount of all the others. Select the person who receives the green star carefully. Select a person who will be likely to speak out and do not pick someone who appears to be fragile.

Explain to them that the star is symbolic of our lives; the names within the star are the names of people who we have chosen to fill our lives. Decorating our lives is an ongoing project. And disclosing things about our selves to others is also an ongoing process.
Activity introduction

1 Activity introduction - READ ALOUD…

Now I’d like for you all to imagine that you have been struggling over the last few years with your sexual orientation. You find yourself drawn to members of your same sex and have even had a crush on someone a couple of times. Although you are nervous about feeling different from many of your peers and have tried dating members of the opposite sex, it just didn’t work for you. When you finally admit to yourself that you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender you realize that you have a series of important choices. Will the important people, family and groups in your life embrace you with open arms? Will they ignore that part of you? Will they turn their backs on you and say goodbye?
2 Friend / Non Family Member: - READ ALOUD…

Blue and Yellow: Those of you with blue and yellow stars are lucky. The first person you tell is your best friend. They are supportive. They tell you they are proud of you for living in truth and are honored to know such a brave person.

Pink: Those of you with pink stars are not quite as fortunate. The first person you decide to tell is initially very supportive, but asks you to not talk to them about it again. They do not care as long as they do not have to hear about it. They encourage you not to tell anyone else, and to reconsider your “choice.” Because this person is present in your life, but is not supportive, fold back the corner marked closest friend.

Green stars: The first person you told said that your sexual orientation was an illness. They told you to go away and not return. You have just lost your best friend. Tear off that corner of your star.
Activity introduction

Friend / Non Family Member:

3 Family Member

Community
Career
Hopes and Dreams

3 Family Member: - READ ALOUD…

Yellow stars: Because of your positive experience with your best friend, you feel supported and ready to tell your family that you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. You choose to tell the person you feel most comfortable with in your family. Again you are very lucky; your family member is very supportive and proud. Your parents join PFLAG: Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. They embrace your partner as a member of the family. You never feel awkward or unwelcome.

Blue and green stars: The person in your family that you choose to tell is somewhat supportive, although they rarely ask about your partner; they do occasionally put your partner’s name on a Christmas card. You are welcome home if you come alone and although no one forbids you from discussing your life, you feel uncomfortable. The situation is tense and you walk on eggshells trying not to rock the boat. Fold back the family corner of your star.

Pink stars: When you come out to your family, they decide to take the tough love route. They disown you until you have reformed. You are not welcome in their home. They do not call you or correspond with you are all. They are ashamed of you. Rip off that corner of your star and toss it to the ground.
4 Community: - READ ALOUD…

Blue and yellow stars: Although you have had different coming out experiences with family and friends, your experience coming out to your community has been very positive. When you told individuals in your community about your sexual orientation, you were embraced and reassured that your place was secure.

Pink stars: Your community was not exactly thrilled when you came out to them. They verbally told you they accepted your decision but asked that you keep it to yourself because they did not want to be guilty by association. Although you were not completely rejected, you never again felt as though your community supported you. Fold back that portion of your star.

Green stars: Unfortunately, your community was very judgmental and discriminatory. The process was slow at first, but eventually you were not informed of community happenings, events, and gatherings. You were made fun of and excluded from all functions. You were called names and the community made it clear that you were only welcome if you were willing to be shamed and reprimanded. Rip off that corner of your star and toss it to the ground.
Activity introduction

Friend / Non Family Member:
Family Member
Community

Career

Hopes and Dreams

5 Career: - READ ALOUD…

Blue stars: You have chosen a career in a field that traditionally embraces gay, lesbian bisexual and transgender individuals, perhaps in the arts or in a progressive company. Sexual orientation is included in your company’s non-discrimination policy, although you have never felt the need to use it. You leave a picture of your partner on your desk. Your partner and your children are always invited to company picnics. You are comfortable and safe at work.

Yellow and pink stars: Your work environment is not overtly hostile, but instead you are encouraged to be silent. Your job is not protected by company non-discrimination policies. Fold back that portion of your star.

Green stars: You have chosen a career in childhood education. Although you are an excellent teacher, a parent has found out that you are gay, lesbian bisexual or transgender. You are called into your employer’s office to “defend” yourself. Although your district recognizes your competence, they fear the negative repercussions and instead side with ignorance and you are fired. Tear off that corner of your star.
Activity introduction

Friend / Non Family Member:

Family Member

Community

Career

6 Hopes and Dreams

6 Hopes and Dreams - READ ALOUD…

Yellow stars: You have been quite lucky. You have maintained the support of your friends and family. Your community is supportive and accepting. You feel confident and consider yourself a positive contribution to society. Although you are aware that because you are gay, lesbian bisexual or transgender your rights are limited within the nation, you feel extremely fortunate to be surrounded by loving and caring people who help to soften the blow of discrimination. Your hopes and dreams feel within your reach.

Blue stars: Although you have trouble with your family, you have found an alternate support network. You are surrounded by a supportive community and loving friends. Your work environment is accepting and your livelihood is secure.

Pink stars: Your family has completely abandoned you. You still are involved with your friends and your community, yet you must pretend you are someone else. You live your life in secret. The support you do have is minimal. In your place of employment you also feel as if secrecy and silence are the best policy. Fold back hopes and dreams.

Green stars: Your friends and your community have abandoned you. Your family does not talk to you about your life, instead they pretend you are heterosexual and consistently ask about that person of the opposite sex/gender you sit next to at work. You cannot tell them that you have been fired. Without any support system, you are lonely and lost and wondering what to do next.
Processing And Facilitation

Discussion Questions

• How did this activity make people feel?

• For those of you who lost more than one point, did losing each point feel the same?

• What was most surprising about this activity?

• For the green stars, what do you think the effects are on their life?

• What are some of the positive elements of coming out?

• Did anybody feel nervous, anxious, disempowered, etc.?

• How did people feel about the activity and about their star before I read the first situation? After the last situation?

• Can people think of experiences they have had in the past where they have not wanted to share portions of their identity? (Academic ability, cultural heritage, religion, political affiliation, marital status, etc.)
  - How did this effort make you feel?
    - Do you feel that this experience is similar in any manner to the constant coming out choices that LGBT individual make on a daily basis?

• Is there a “coming out” process for people who identify as straight or predominantly heterosexual? Is it different?

• What are some of the limitations of this activity?
Facilitation Points

• Coming out is an ongoing process with no distinct beginning or end – constantly making decisions about how much to disclose.

• Each individual experiences a unique coming out process and needs to be evaluated based on their values and life situation.
  o Avoid stereotypes - coming out is not an inherent good for everybody and everybody who is not out is not a “closet case”
  o Coming out is always a cost-benefit decision

• Star activity has limitations – focuses on the very real and very traumatic negative side of coming out.

• Link to prevalence of suicide in young LGBT population.

• Feelings of guilt as people look at other stars.

• Some individuals recognize that though many of the points are gone, the central portion with their name remains.

• Feelings of anxiety and loss of control.
  o People don’t get to choose which star points they loose.
  o “Quality” v. “quantity” — losing one point may be harder than losing many points based on the importance of that relationship
    ▪ (i.e. – participant comment that she would feel the confidence to rebuild other portions of her life so long as her family supported her)
    ▪ further reflects uniqueness of individual experiences
  o Potential anxiety over coming out in the future after a negative initial experience.

• Straight / Hetero- individuals also have a coming out process – generally less chance for targeted prejudice, still a process of questioning and acknowledging sexual orientation.
Challenges for Facilitators

- Do not assume that your entire group is straight. Be prepared for the fact that somebody may list a same sex partner as the most important family member or best friend. Try to avoid forcing people to disclose the names on their Star unless they so desire.

- Be aware of the fact that some people in your group may identify as LGB and be in the closet. This activity can have a very strong emotional effect on those people.

- Decide in advance how to handle situations where a participant suggests that “this is what gay and lesbian people have coming for living an immoral lifestyle”.

- Avoid focusing on the negative experiences of coming out. It is a difficult process, but do not let the discrimination dictate the identity. See the section below on “Creating New Beginnings” and/or discuss the limitations or the activity.

- Use the activity to foster empathy, not pity.

- Be aware of the fact that this activity looks very easy on its face, but in reality can be a challenging (but by no means overly difficult) and emotional facilitation experience.
Creating New Beginnings (optional)

Materials: Tape and Blank Star Points

1) At an appropriate time in the facilitation pass out tape and blank star points (or blank stars) to people, allowing them to “rebuild” portions of their star.

2) Processing:
   - Symbolizing new opportunities for genuine relationships that are a positive result of coming out – not just a negative exp.
   - Does not supplant the relationships lost, takes time and work to fill in the blank star - Ultimately represents hope for the future.
   - Allow people to rebuild star with new points – full star but different