

Seen, Heard, Affirmed: Culturally-Grounded Support for Black LGBT2SQ+ Youth



EVIDENCE
BRIEF

This Evidence Brief provides youth workers with six culturally-grounded approaches for supporting Black LGBT2SQ+ youth. The approaches are informed by research on intersectionality, culturally-responsive care, and youth-centered practice. Developed by Arielle Anucha and Rahma Kiongozi, Research Assistants at YouthREX.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Black LGBT2SQ+ Youth are a diverse group of young people who identify as both Black and part of the LGBT2SQ+ spectrum. They represent a range of sexual orientations, gender identities, and cultural backgrounds, including African, Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, and Afro-Indigenous communities. Their experiences are shaped by the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality.¹

Throughout this resource, the terms LGBT2SQ+ and queer may be used interchangeably. However, youth define their identities based on their personal, cultural, and social contexts.

Culturally-Grounded Support centres the cultural contexts, histories, and lived experiences of specific communities. For Black LGBT2SQ+ youth, this includes affirming cultural identity, acknowledging systemic inequities, validating diverse gender expressions, and challenging Eurocentric approaches to care and support.²

Intersectionality is a framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw³ that explains how overlapping social identities, such as race, gender, and sexuality, shape lived experiences and exposure to discrimination. For Black LGBT2SQ+ youth, these intersecting systems influence wellbeing, access to support, and experiences of marginalization.

Minority Stress refers to the psychological impact of chronic discrimination, stigma, and marginalization for members of communities experiencing marginalization.⁴ Black LGBT2SQ+ youth may experience minority stress due to the combined effects of racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

TWO KEY FINDINGS ON THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK LGBT2SQ+ YOUTH

01. Black queer existence is intersectional.

Black LGBT2SQ+ youth navigate intersecting identities shaped by race, gender, sexuality, culture, and community belonging. These identities influence their access to services, experiences of discrimination, and overall wellbeing.³

Black LGBT2SQ+ youth represent diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including African, Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, and Afro-Indigenous communities.¹ Many youth demonstrate resilience in navigating linguistic, cultural, and social barriers. For example, Francophone Black queer youth in Ontario may face additional challenges accessing services that are primarily offered in English. Youth from diasporic communities may also navigate differing cultural expectations and social norms across family, community, and institutional settings, requiring adaptability and cultural awareness.⁵

02. Black queer youth experience systemic marginalization and dual discrimination.

Black LGBT2SQ+ youth experience discrimination related to both race and sexual or gender identity across multiple settings, including schools, community spaces, and healthcare systems.^{6,7} For example, 40% of Black LGBTQ youth in the United States reported feeling pressure to prioritize either their racial or LGBTQ identity in different environments.⁸ This reflects the unique challenges of navigating multiple marginalized identities.

Research also shows that Black LGBT2SQ+ youth experience discrimination within both LGBTQ and racial or cultural communities, contributing to increased isolation and barriers to support.^{6,5} These experiences may require youth to engage in *code-switching*, or adjusting how they express their identities depending on the social context to maintain safety and acceptance.⁹

Systemic discrimination also contributes to significant material inequities. In Ontario, approximately 30% of LGBT2SQ+ youth experiencing homelessness identified as Black, despite Black youth representing a smaller proportion of the population.⁶ LGBT2SQ+ youth also experience higher overall rates of homelessness compared to non-LGBT2SQ+ youth, highlighting the role of structural discrimination in shaping housing instability.⁵

Colonial legacies and anti-LGBTQ laws introduced in many African and Caribbean countries continue to influence family and community attitudes toward sexual and gender diversity, which can affect youth experiences of acceptance and support.^{10,11}

SIX CULTURALLY-GROUNDED APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING BLACK LGBT2SQ+ YOUTH

01. Develop holistic, culturally-responsive, and youth-led supports.

Supports must recognize that Black LGBT2SQ+ youth experience intersecting forms of racism, homophobia, and transphobia, alongside structural inequities such as poverty and housing instability.⁶ Programs should affirm youth's intersecting identities and reflect their cultural and lived experiences.

Youth should be meaningfully involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services. Support youth-defined networks, including *chosen family* – those individuals who provide emotional support, acceptance, and care, often replacing or supplementing biological family relationships.^{12,13} Digital platforms can also improve access to culturally-relevant resources, particularly for youth in isolated or underserved communities.

02. Promote affirmation, representation, and belonging.

Affirming environments that recognize both Black and LGBT2SQ+ identities improve mental health and wellbeing.⁹ Programs can foster belonging by incorporating Black and LGBT2SQ+ histories, identities, and perspectives into curriculum, programming, and services. For example, teach about Marsha P. Johnson and Stormé DeLarverie alongside Harvey Milk, explore ballroom culture's origins in Black and Latinx queer communities, and ensure that discussions of civil rights movements acknowledge that Black liberation and queer liberation have always been intertwined.

Representation helps counter exclusion and supports identity development by ensuring youth see their identities reflected and valued.

03. Establish culturally-responsive mental health, housing, and economic supports.

Black LGBT2SQ+ youth experience elevated mental health risks due to minority stress and systemic discrimination.^{4,7} Mental health supports should be culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and delivered by providers trained in anti-racist and LGBTQ-affirming care. Black LGBT2SQ+ youth need mental health support that doesn't pathologize their identities or demand they choose between their Blackness and their queerness. Culturally-responsive care recognizes that healing looks different across communities – it might involve elders and spiritual practices, collective processing rather than individual therapy, or approaches that understand trauma as systemic and not just personal.

Stable housing and economic supports are also critical, as Black LGBT2SQ+ youth face disproportionate risks of housing instability, family rejection, and employment discrimination.^{6,5}

04. Foster intergenerational connections and family support.

Mentorship programs connecting youth with Black LGBT2SQ+ adults and elders can strengthen identity development, belonging, and resilience.¹⁴ These relationships provide culturally-relevant role models and reduce isolation.

Family support initiatives can also improve youth wellbeing by helping parents and caregivers better understand and affirm youth identities, within the cultural contexts they recognize.¹² Develop nuanced approaches to family support that prioritize understanding and reconciliation over separation.

05. Address systemic discrimination through intersectional approaches.

Black LGBT2SQ+ youth face discrimination across education, healthcare, employment, and social services. Institutions must implement intersectional and anti-racist policies that address these barriers.

This comprises inclusive policies, staff training, equitable service delivery, and affirming environments that recognize and support intersecting identities.⁶

06. Centre Black LGBT2SQ+ youth voices in research and program design.

Black LGBT2SQ+ youth remain underrepresented in research, limiting understanding of their needs and experiences.¹⁵ Participatory and youth-led research approaches improve program relevance and effectiveness by centering youth expertise and lived experience.¹⁶

Research justice requires not just including these youth in studies but centering their voices in research design, implementation, and analysis. Black LGBT2SQ+ youth should not be engaged as subjects to be studied, but as co-researchers who determine what questions matter, what methods are appropriate, and how findings should be interpreted and used.

Youth-led initiatives, such as those developed by [Enchanté Network](#), demonstrate the importance of community-based, culturally-grounded research and program development.

HOW DID WE COMPILE THIS EVIDENCE?

We searched YouthREX's online Knowledge Hub, Google Scholar, and Google using the following key terms: "Black LGBT2SQ+ youth", "intersectionality", "culturally-responsive care", "minority stress", and "LGBTQ youth wellbeing".

LEARN MORE

RESEARCH SUMMARY

[Examining the Role of Peer and Family Belongingness in the Mental Health of Black LGBTQ+ Youth](#) (YouthREX)

REPORT

[We're Here: Racialized 2SLGBTQ+ Youth Across Ontario Assert Needs and Experiences](#) (LGBT YouthLine)

TOOLKIT

[Black and LGBTQ: Approaching Intersectional Conversations](#) (The Trevor Project)

ACADEMIC LITERATURE

[The Black Queer Youth Initiative: Challenging Racism, Stigma & Exclusion](#) (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness)

ENDNOTES

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