



## **B2: Robert: An adolescent questioning his sexuality**

Type of Exercise: Case study

Level: basic

Length of time: 45- 60 minutes

Resources needed: Handout with the case study

Instructions: Hand out the case study and give students/workshop participants ten minutes to read the case and address the questions. Then discuss their reactions and answer to the questions in the large group or break into groups of 4-5 to discuss the case.

### *Case Study: Robert*

Robert is a 14-year old male with a history of suicidal thoughts and outbursts. He has made overtures of suicide although his attempts have been rather minor. He has been hospitalized on your child/adolescent psychiatric unit following an overdose of Tylenol.

He came home from a friend's house yesterday afternoon upset and spent the rest of the evening in his room. His parents found him around midnight in the bathroom taking a handful of Tylenol. It is suspected that he took 10 500 mg capsules. His mother called 911 and Robert was rushed to the hospital. Vomiting was induced and it was felt that very little of the drug was actually absorbed into his system. His labs are within normal limits and he was admitted to the child psych unit for further evaluation.

Robert is reserved and has said very little about the incident. You begin a conversation with Robert and he asks you about having sex. Through the conversation he tells you his best friend and he have been having oral sex for the past month. He is worried that everyone will know this and think that he is a 'faggot.'

*How do you respond to Robert? Think of at least three things that you could say that would be supportive of Robert and encourage him to be open with you.*

Another day, Robert wants to use the computer on the unit and he asks you if there are blocks on the computer. You inquire what is at the root of his question. Robert hesitates and then says he wants to do some research.



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*How do you respond to Robert? How can you ensure that he is accessing accurate information on the internet?*

In the family support group session, Robert's parents, Glen and Maria, mention that they suspected that Robert was exploring his sexuality. Maria has found a variety of explicit sexual magazines and because some of them were photos of two men she wondered if Robert might be gay. Glen was silent throughout the entire therapy session. On leaving the session, Maria asks you how she can learn more about homosexuality.

*How do you respond to her? What resources are available in your community for her?*

Glen was silent through most of the exchanges and encounters with Robert. Today he has come alone to visit his son. You encounter both in the day room, neither one talking with each other. Robert says he wants to go to his room and gets up to leave. Robert's father remains seated and turns to you with tears in his eyes, "I just don't understand him. He won't even talk to me. I can't figure out a way to tell him I don't care if he is gay."

*How do you respond to him? Suggest at least two ways that he could tell his son that he loves him.*

### *Concluding the Case Study Discussion:*

Ask participants what issues the case study raised for them.

- Could they relate to the experiences of any of the three family members?
- Have they been in a similar situation with someone coming out in their family or at work?
- Were there any areas where they felt that they lacked knowledge or skills?

### *Suggested Resources:*

- [PFLAG, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays](#)
- [Matthew Shepard Foundation](#)
- [GLSEN; Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network](#)
- [The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention LGBTQ Initiative](#)



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*Modifications:*

Have students access information from the websites above to address the case study and offer suggestions to Robert and his parents. Ask them to identify whether there is information that would help each parent, even though they had different reactions to their child's coming out. Ask them to identify whether these sources would be appropriate to recommend to a youth of Robert's age (14)? They could also be asked to access other internet sources of information on suicide and LGBT people.



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