

Advocating for LGBTQ Youth

All youth rely on their parents for guidance, support, nurturance, and unconditional acceptance. Foster and adoptive parents are important allies and advocates for youth. If we provide guidance, support, nurturance, and advocacy for LGBTQ youth, we will be instrumental in their successful development.

Approximately 5% to 10% of the general population is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTQ). LGBTQ adolescents are estimated to make up a disproportionate share of the youth who are in foster care according to the Child Welfare League of America and the Lambda Legal Joint Initiative.

Fear Factor

Many young people fear the negative reactions that come from revealing that they are LGBTQ. Many youth in care may not have acknowledged or “come out” to share that they identify as LGBTQ.

LGBTQ youth are also often victims of physical, sexual, and verbal abuse and often have a high rate of suicide attempts, binge alcohol use, and drug use. They often experience insecure feelings and emotional

trauma due to being subjected to bullying.

Allies and Advocates

An important aspect of advocating for all youth is acceptance with an open heart and mind when a young person instills their trust by informing you of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Barbara Jones, an experienced Wisconsin foster parent, has had placement of LGBTQ children. She suggests that often we lack knowledge or exposure to LGBTQ issues, so we may shut down or have prejudice toward LGBTQ foster youth.

She goes on to suggest that we educate ourselves; we will be more open and accepting to work with children and adults of varying sexual orientations.

As a foster parent, it is important to be “open, accepting and a good listener,” according to Barbara. Create an atmosphere within your home that allows the child to feel safe and comfortable to speak to you about any subject, including sexuality.

“Kids need a chance to talk openly,” says Barbara. “We also need to be sensitive to their need for privacy.”



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Supporting Youth in Care by Educating Ourselves

Education is the key to becoming more knowledgeable about the needs of youth. By attending workshops and getting books and videos, you can learn about the issues that LGBTQ youth and adults often face .

You may also benefit by meeting with other foster or adoptive parents who care for LGBTQ Youth.

Find a local support group through organizations such as Parents, Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), or LGBT community centers.

If there is not a local organization, develop and create one. See [Gay-Straight Alliance Network](#) for tips to get started. You may also want to encourage your licensing agency to provide training to foster and adoptive parents about LGBTQ issues.

How to Support LGBTQ Youth in Care

Our own family, personal histories, and experiences can affect our ability to work with or be sensitive to the needs of others. Take the time to explore your own personal beliefs and values about LGBTQ issues. *Will our thoughts, feelings and behavior toward LGBTQ people have a positive or negative impact on our relationship with the youth?*

- Appreciate diversity and accept individuals for who they are.

- Be aware that your reaction to your child's orientation will have a major impact on your child's life; either positively or negatively.
- Examine your beliefs and attitudes that might impact your ability to support LGBTQ youth in your care.
 - Do not try to change your child's sexual orientation or gender identity and support the child that is questioning their orientation.

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- Educate yourself about the realities of LGBTQ individuals and avoid unfounded myths and negative stereotypes.
- Acknowledge that LGBTQ is a healthy expression of human sexuality, and it is not a choice.
- Recognize that sexual orientation and gender identity make up only part of the individual.
- Choose and use inclusive language such as “partner” and “significant other.”
- Respect and be sensitive to the youth's right to privacy and confidentiality.
- Advocate for the youth in care by informing and educating the community about LGBTQ issues.
- Create an open, accepting, and safe

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home environment for the youth, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

- Protect young people from verbal, emotional and physical harassment and mistreatment in your home, school and community.
- Respect a transgender young person's choice of name and gendered pronouns that best reflects their sense of self as female or male.
- Become familiar with the resources available to LGBTQ young people in your community

Successful Connections with LGBTQ Youth

By identifying our attitudes and beliefs toward LGBTQ youth and educating ourselves as well as others, foster and adoptive parents will have an incredible and affirming impact on the lives of LGBTQ young people.

Remember that you have the opportunity to make a positive connection with youth who need you to be their ally and their advocate.



Resources Available from the Coalition Lending Library

Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents tell it Like it Is, by Abigail Garner

Breaking the Silence: Lesbian Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Foster Youth, (DVD) by the National Center for Lesbian Rights

Two Birthdays for Beth, (children's book) by Gay Lynn Cronin

Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens, by Kelly Huegel

Youth In the Margins, by Colleen Sullivan, Susan Sommer, and Jason Moff

How it Feels to Have a Gay or Lesbian Parent, by Judith E. Snow, MA

Beyond Diversity Day: A Q&A on Gay and Lesbian Issues in School, by Arthur Lipkin

In the System and in the Life, by Youth Communication