

Congregate Care Providers Working with LGBTQ Youth

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (“LGBTQ”) youth placed in group homes and other congregate care facilities are significantly more likely to be subjected to harassment, discrimination and violence than their non-LGBTQ peers. Blatant hostility and verbal abuse toward LGBTQ youth are often an accepted aspect of institutional culture. Congregate care providers should be aware of these dangers and create a safe and welcoming environment for LGBTQ youth.

ENSURE THE SAFETY OF LGBTQ YOUTH IN CONGREGATE CARE.

Child welfare and juvenile justice professionals have a legal obligation to protect the physical and psychological safety of LGBTQ youth in their care, whether these youth are placed in group homes, residential treatment centers, correctional centers or other facilities. As congregate care providers, you play an important role in creating an environment that ensures the protection of LGBTQ youth from harassment and discrimination. This includes intervening in situations between youth, or when other staff harass or disparage LGBTQ youth.

TAKE IMMEDIATE STEPS TO ADDRESS ANTI-LGBTQ HARASSMENT IN THE FACILITY.

Send a clear message throughout the facility that anti-LGBTQ harassment will not be tolerated. Consistently model and communicate that message to all staff and residents. Never blame LGBTQ youth for being open about their identity when others subject them to harassment or violence, and don't allow others to blame them for their own mistreatment.

PROVIDE OR PARTICIPATE IN LGBTQ SENSITIVITY AND AWARENESS TRAINING.

Inquire whether your agency offers training that prepares staff to work effectively and appropriately with LGBTQ young people. An ideal training program includes suggestions for creating and maintaining a safe environment for LGBTQ young people, as well as strategies for responding to harassment and discrimination. If your agency does not offer training on LGBTQ issues, seek out the information and support you need from resources in your community, the Internet, books and videos.

ADHERE TO CONSISTENT POLICIES REGARDING AGE-APPROPRIATE ADOLESCENT ROMANTIC BEHAVIOR.

LGBTQ youth in congregate care should be afforded the same rights and privileges that non-LGBTQ youth have regarding dating, displays of affection and romantic relationships. It's important for LGBTQ youth to be able to express age-appropriate romantic behavior, and to feel validated and worthy.

FOSTERING TRANSITIONS

A CWLA/Lambda Legal
Joint Initiative



MAKE APPROPRIATE, INDIVIDUALIZED CLASSIFICATION AND HOUSING DECISIONS.

Don't make housing decisions based on myths and stereotypes about LGBTQ people. For example, never assume that all LGBTQ youth are more likely to engage in sexual behaviors than their heterosexual peers, or that they're all potential sex offenders.

Conversely, don't isolate or segregate LGBTQ young people, or prohibit them from having roommates, as a means of ensuring their safety. While you may have good intentions, this will only deprive LGBTQ youth of opportunities to interact with their peers and will compound their feelings of isolation.

DISPLAY LGBTQ-SUPPORTIVE SIGNS AND SYMBOLS.

By displaying LGBTQ-supportive symbols such as pink triangles, rainbows or safe zone stickers, you send the clear message to all youth and staff that you support and affirm LGBTQ youth and are open to discussing LGBTQ issues. LGBTQ youth are quick to pick up on these cues from their environment, and it often makes an enormous difference just having them displayed. LGBTQ-supportive materials are available free-of-charge online, including Lambda Legal's LGBTQ Youth in Out-of-Home Care poster, included in this tool kit and available in English and Spanish (www.lambdalegal.org).

ASSIST LGBTQ YOUTH TO ACCESS COMMUNITY RESOURCES.

Reduce the alienation and isolation LGBTQ youth often experience by providing opportunities for them to interact positively with their LGBTQ peers, and by helping them realize that they're not alone and that other people their age share their experiences.

Develop an up-to-date list of LGBTQ resources in your community and distribute it to everyone in your agency, including to youth who may wish privately to contact community resources on their own. For more information

check www.lambdalegal.org and www.cwla.org; your nearest LGBT community center (see the National Association of

LGBT Community Centers at www.lgbtcenters.org); the local chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (www.pflag.com); or the website for the National Youth Advocacy Coalition (www.nyacyouth.org).

“ I got jumped by a bunch of guys in my group home, and when I told the Director he said, ‘Well, if you weren't a faggot, they wouldn't beat you up.’ ”

– Youth in Care

The many other components of Getting Down to Basics offer additional support.

This tool kit includes additional handouts covering a variety of topics addressing the needs of LGBTQ youth and adults involved with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, such as *Foster Parents Caring for LGBTQ Youth*, *Basic Facts About Being LGBTQ*, *Case-workers with LGBTQ Clients*, *Teaching LGBTQ Competence in Schools of Social Work*, *Working with Transgender Youth*, *Information for LGBTQ Youth in Care* and *LGBTQ Youth Resources*. To order free copies of the *Getting Down to Basics* tool kit, contact Lambda Legal at 1-866-LGBTTeen (toll free) or 212-809-8585, or download it for free at www.lambdalegal.org or www.cwla.org.

“ I was placed in a co-ed group home. When I was shown to my room, I asked why I was being put on the boys' floor. They said, ‘You're not a boy? Well, we can't put you on the girls' floor looking like that.’ So they made me sleep on a couch on a landing in between the two floors. ”

– Youth in Care



Lambda Legal

120 Wall Street, Suite 1500
New York, NY 10005

866-LGBTTeen or 212-809-8585

www.lambdalegal.org



Child Welfare League of America

2345 Crystal Drive, Suite 250
Arlington, VA 22202

703-412-2400

www.cwla.org