

Recommendations for Training & Education on LGBTQ Issues

Education and training on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) issues are vital to ensuring that child welfare systems provide safe and appropriate care to LGBTQ young people. Everyone working or living in the system, from administrators, agency staff, caseworkers and foster parents to young people in care, should understand that LGBTQ people are entitled to safety and respect. The following recommendations and resources are intended to offer guidance in creating competent training and education programs based upon existing professional standards.

TRAINING ON LGBTQ ISSUES SHOULD BE MANDATORY, COMPREHENSIVE AND ONGOING.

It should be made clear to all child welfare professionals and caregivers that negative behaviors and attitudes toward LGBTQ people cannot be tolerated. Training and education on LGBTQ issues should be integrated into the pre-service and in-service training provided to child welfare professionals and foster and adoptive parents and should be mandatory for everyone working in the system. This training should address the full range of issues relevant to sexual orientation and gender identity and be provided on an ongoing basis. Educational materials on LGBTQ issues, including books and films, should be available at every child welfare agency for staff, caretakers and young people.

VALUES CLARIFICATION EXERCISES INCREASE SENSITIVITY TO LGBTQ PEOPLE.

A first step in working effectively with LGBTQ youth is to acknowledge one's own misconceptions and negative stereotypes. Training participants should assess their own personal beliefs and biases regarding sexuality and gender. By addressing these deeply held beliefs in a supportive environment, training participants are able to explore the cultural, religious and personal sources of their values. The purpose of values clarification exercises is not to alienate or ostracize those participants with negative beliefs, but to confront the ways in which one's values and beliefs can create obstacles toward providing competent care to

LGBTQ clients. Training on LGBTQ issues should emphasize the distinction between one's personal opinions and the professional responsibility to provide safe, affirming and supportive care.

SKILL BUILDING SHOULD BE A CORE PART OF TRAINING ON LGBTQ ISSUES.

Essential professional skills should be cultivated through training on LGBTQ issues. For example, training should impart information and guidance on supporting a young person coming out as LGBTQ. It should offer advice for identifying the warning signs that a young person may be experiencing anti-LGBTQ mistreatment and strategies for intervening on behalf of victims. Training should be provided on the existence and enforcement of LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination laws and policies. It should include the definitions and appropriate contexts for the terms used to describe and talk about LGBTQ people and issues. It should explain the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. The use of respectful language should be emphasized. Training participants should also be encouraged to examine how subtle cues may impart to an LGBTQ youth that a person is sensitive or hostile. For example, training should include such practical tips as asking a young person if they are "seeing anyone" rather than whether they have a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend." Child welfare professionals and caregivers should be provided with recommendations for creating a welcoming and supportive environment for

FOSTERING TRANSITIONS

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LGBTQ people, such as by displaying LGBTQ-friendly posters and signs.

ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES

Trainers, model curricula and other educational resources addressing LGBTQ issues are available around the country. Several training resources are listed below. Contact Lambda Legal for additional information and support.

- **Recommended Practices to Promote the Safety and Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth and Youth at Risk of or Living with HIV in Child Welfare Settings**, Child Welfare League of Am., Am. Bar Ass'n Ctr. on Children & the Law: Opening Doors for LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care Project, Diane E. Elze, Family Acceptance Project, Lambda Legal, Legal Servs. for Children, Gerald P. Mallon, Robin McHaelen, Nat'l Alliance to End Homelessness, Nat'l Ctr. for Lesbian Rights, Nat'l Ctr. for Transgender Equality, Nat'l Network for Youth & Sylvia Rivera Law Project (2012), *available at* www.lambdalegal.org/publications/recommended-practices-youth.¹
- **A Place of Respect: A Guide for Group Care Facilities Serving Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth**, Jody Marksamer, Dean Spade & Gabriel Arkles, Nat'l Ctr. for Lesbian Rights & Sylvia Rivera Law Project (2011), *available at* www.nclrights.org/site/DocServer/A_Place_Of_Respect.pdf?docID=8301.²
- **Moving the Margins: Curriculum for Child Welfare Services with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth in Out-of-Home Care**, Diane Elze & Robin McHaelen, Nat'l Ass'n of Soc. Workers & Lambda Legal (2009), *available at* www.lambdalegal.org/publications/moving-the-margins.³

Master Trainers are available to facilitate trainings throughout the country. To find Master Trainers in your area or to order copies of the NASW-Lambda Legal curriculum, contact Lambda Legal at 1-866-LGBTTeen (1-866-542-8336) (toll-free) or 212-809-8585.

1 In 2012, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and a coalition of child welfare advocates and experts joined forces to issue this publication, which offers guidance to state and local child welfare agencies to ensure safe, appropriate care in the best interests of LGBTQ children in the child welfare system.

2 In 2011, the National Center for Lesbian Rights teamed up with the Sylvia Rivera Law Project to author a report providing comprehensive guidance about the treatment of transgender and gender-nonconforming youth in group care facilities, including detention centers, correctional facilities and group homes. The report also provides model policies and a framework for staff to ensure that all youth are given a safe and healthy living environment.

3 In 2009, Lambda Legal partnered with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) on a Train-the-Trainer initiative designed to build the capacity, awareness and skills of out-of-home care professionals serving LGBTQ youth in foster care, juvenile justice centers and homeless shelters.

- **National Recommended Best Practices for Serving LGBT Homeless Youth**, Nat'l Alliance to End Homelessness, Lambda Legal, Nat'l Network for Youth & Nat'l Ctr. for Lesbian Rights (2009), *available at* www.lambdalegal.org/publications/national-recommended-best-practices-for-lgbt-homeless-youth.⁴
- **Out of the Margins: A Report on Regional Listening Forums Highlighting the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth in Care**, Child Welfare League of Am. & Lambda Legal (2006), *available at* www.lambdalegal.org/publications/out-of-the-margins.⁵
- **Breaking the Silence: LGBT Foster Youth Tell Their Stories** (Nat'l Ctr. for Lesbian Rights DVD & Resource CD 2006).⁶
- **CWLA Best Practice Guidelines for Serving LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care**, Shannan Wilber, Caitlin Ryan & Jody Marksamer (2006).⁷
- **The Family Acceptance Project™** is the only community research, intervention, education and policy initiative that works to decrease major health and related risks for LGBT youth, such as suicide, substance abuse, HIV and homelessness—in the context of their families. For more information visit <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu>.

4 This policy brief provides an overview of homelessness among LGBT youth and gives direction to agencies and not-for-profit organizations to increase their competency in working with these youth. The recommendations include specific guidance on improving practice, organizational culture and residential services.

5 Between September 2003 and December 2004, CWLA and Lambda Legal organized Listening Forums in 13 cities around the country for LGBTQ youth in care and the adults who work with them, to share their experiences and identify strategies for bringing about lasting positive change in the child welfare system for LGBTQ people.

6 *Breaking the Silence* is a training DVD that features 10 short autobiographical stories from LGBTQ former foster youth who speak about their experiences in care and what they think child welfare advocates and service providers can do to better support LGBTQ youth in care. It includes a CD containing over 25 additional training tools and resources. It is available free of charge at www.nclrights.org.

7 The *Best Practice Guidelines* provide direction to agencies responsible for LGBTQ youth in out-of-home care, including the topics that should be covered in training and education for agency personnel and caregivers on LGBT issues. It can be purchased at www.cwla.org.

Lambda Legal

120 Wall Street
19th Floor
New York, NY 10005
866-LGBTTeen
212-809-8585
www.lambdalegal.org

Child Welfare League of America

1726 M Street NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036
202-688-4200
www.cwla.org