



### 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.

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

As a foster parent, it is important to be “open, accepting and a good listener,” according to Jones. Create an atmosphere within your home that allows the child to feel safe

and comfortable to speak to you about any subject, including sexuality.

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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 often face LGBTQ youth and adults.

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

Find a local support group through organizations such as PFLAG (Parents, Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays), or LGBT community centers (<http://center.convio.net/site/PageServer>).

If there is not a local organization, develop and create one. See [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org) or [www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/GSA/safegl.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/GSA/safegl.html) 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.

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## Advocating for LGBTQ Youth, continued

### 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.
- 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 home environment for the youth, both 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 FCARC Lending Library:

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

<http://wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/advancedsearch.asp>

"Two Birthdays for Beth" by Gay Lynn Cronin (child's book).

<http://wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/advancedsearch.asp>

"Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens" by Kelly Huegel

<http://wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/advancedsearch.asp>

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

<http://wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/advancedsearch.asp>

More resources continued on the next

## Advocating for LGBTQ Youth, continued

### Other Resources

#### Organizations

- PFLAG (Parents, Friends and Families for Lesbians and Gays): [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)
- Child Welfare League of America at [www.cwla.org/programs/culture/glbqtq.htm](http://www.cwla.org/programs/culture/glbqtq.htm).
- Ambiente Joven ([www.ambientejoven.org](http://www.ambientejoven.org)) is a project of Advocates for Youth and is dedicated to the gay, lesbian and transgender Latino/a youth community in the U.S. and Latin America, with the goal of providing information about sexual and mental health, as well as general cultural information.
- Youth Resource ([www.youthresource.com](http://www.youthresource.com)) is created by and for LGBT young people 13 to 24 years old, and it takes a holistic approach to sexual health by offering support, community, resources and peer-to-peer education about issues of concern to LGBTQ young people:
- National Center for Lesbian Rights ([www.nclrirights.org](http://www.nclrirights.org)) is a national legal resource center with a primary commitment to advancing the rights and safety of lesbians and their families through a program of litigation, public policy advocacy, free legal advice and counseling and public education
- OutProud, the National Coalition for gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Youth, serves the needs of these young men and women by providing advocacy, information, resources and support. Its goal is to help queer youth become happy, successful, confident and vital LGBT adults: [www.OutProud.org](http://www.OutProud.org).
- The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, or GLSEN, is working to ensure safe and effective schools for all students: [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

#### Written Resources

- *Opening Doors: Exploring Attitudes about LGBYQ Youth in Foster Care* by Mimi Laver, from Child Law Practice: <http://www.childlawpractice.org>
- *Caregiver tips, LBGTQ Facts, Personal and School Safety Assessments*, from The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Support Project: [www.hcsm.org/glys/tools.htm](http://www.hcsm.org/glys/tools.htm)
- *Beyond the Binary: A tool Kit for Gender Identity Activism in Schools* from The Gay Straight Alliance: [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org).
- *Gay Straight Alliances, A Student Guide* from Massachusetts Dept. of Education: [www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/GSA](http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/GSA)
- *Supporting LBGTQ Youth and Families: Focus on Foster Care, December 2006* from Casey Foundation: [www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/FFC\\_LBGTQ.htm](http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/FFC_LBGTQ.htm)
- *Six Simple Strategies for Including Gay and Lesbian Youth* from ETR Associates: <http://www.etr.org/recapp/freebies/freebie1199.htm>
- *Foster Parents Caring for LGBTQ Youth and Families Supporting an LGBTQ Youth* from Lambda Legal: [www.lambdalegal.org/take-action/tool-kits/getting-down-to-basics/](http://www.lambdalegal.org/take-action/tool-kits/getting-down-to-basics/)
- *Tips and Strategies for Meeting the Needs of Transgender* from Advocates for Youth: [www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/frtp/transgender\\_needs.htm](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/frtp/transgender_needs.htm).
- *No longer Alone: A Resource Manual for Rural Sexual Minority Youth and the Adults Who Serve Them* from National Youth Advocacy Coalition: [www.nyacyouth.org/docs/ruralyouth/index.html](http://www.nyacyouth.org/docs/ruralyouth/index.html)