



## LGBTQ youth in foster care

Foster parents may be surprised to realize the increasing numbers of youth in care who identify as LGBTQ, the acronym used to describe people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation. The Child Welfare Information Gateway created a factsheet for families called “Supporting Your LGBTQ Youth: A Guide for Foster Parents.” This guide pinpoints strategies foster parents can use to be supportive of LGBTQ youth in care, in addition to identifying many resources for additional information and guidance. The following information contains snippets from the factsheet; it can be viewed in its entirety at [childwelfare.gov/pubs/LGBTQyouth](http://childwelfare.gov/pubs/LGBTQyouth).

There are approximately 175,000 youth ages 10-18 in foster care in the United States. Of these youth, an estimated 5-10 percent – and likely more – are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ).

Like all young people, LGBTQ youth in foster care need the support of a nurturing family to help them negotiate adolescence and grow into healthy adults. However, LGBTQ youth in foster care face additional challenges. These include the losses that brought them into care in the first place, as well as traumas they may have suffered while in foster care. They also include stressors unique to LGBTQ youth, including homophobia or transphobia and the need to evaluate (often with little or no support) the safety of their communities, schools, social networks, and homes in order to decide whether to disclose their LGBTQ identity, when, and to whom.

Despite these challenges, LGBTQ youth – like all youth in the child welfare system – can heal and thrive when families commit to accepting, loving, and supporting them as they grow into their potential as adults. This factsheet was written to help families like yours understand what they need to know to provide a safe,

supportive, and welcoming home for an LGBTQ youth in foster care.

### Addressing Common Misconceptions

There is a lot of misinformation about sexual orientation and gender identity. Here are some things that are important for you to know about LGBTQ youth in your home:





**LGBTQ youth are a lot like other youth.** In fact, the similarities that LGBTQ youth in foster care share with other youth in care far outweigh their differences. Most, if not all, youth in foster care have been affected by trauma and loss; they require acceptance and understanding.

**This is not “just a phase.”** LGBTQ people are coming out (acknowledging their sexual orientation/gender identity to themselves and others) at younger and younger ages. Studies by the Family Acceptance Project have found that most people report being attracted to another person around age 10 and identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (on average) at age 13.

**No one caused your youth's LGBTQ identity.** Sexual orientation and gender identity are the result of complex genetic, biological, and environmental factors. Your youth's LGBTQ identity is not the result of anything you (or a birth parent, or any other person) did.

**LGBTQ youth are no more likely than other youth to be mentally ill or dangerous.** These unfortunate myths and stereotypes have no basis in truth. Gay or transgender people are not more likely than heterosexuals or gender-conforming people to molest or otherwise pose a threat to children.

**Your youth's LGBTQ identity cannot be changed.** Medical and psychological experts agree that attempting to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity does not work and often causes harm.

**Many religious groups embrace LGBTQ people.** Some people fear that they will have to choose between their faith and supporting their youth's LGBTQ identity – but this is not always the case. Many religious communities welcome LGBTQ youth, adults, and their families.

### **Creating a Welcoming Home for Youth**

Creating a welcoming foster home for LGBTQ youth is not much different from creating a safe and supportive home for any youth. Any steps you take to make your home welcoming to LGBTQ youth will benefit all children and youth in your care – both by giving LGBTQ youth the freedom to express themselves and by helping heterosexual and gender-conforming youth learn to respect and embrace diversity.







Consider the following suggestions to make your home a welcoming one, whether or not a youth in your care openly identifies as LGBTQ:

- Make it clear that slurs or jokes based on gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation are not tolerated in your house.

- Display “hate-free zone” signs or other symbols indicating an LGBTQ-friendly environment (pink triangle, rainbow flag).
- Use gender-neutral language when asking about relationships.
- Celebrate diversity in all forms.
- Let youth in your care know that you are willing to listen and talk about anything.
- Support your youth’s self-expression through choices of clothing, jewelry, hairstyle, friends, and room decoration.
- Insist that other family members include and respect all youth in your home.
- Allow youth to participate in activities that interest them, regardless of whether these activities are stereotypically male or female.
- Educate yourself about LGBTQ history, issues, and resources.

## Conclusion

If LGBTQ youth are to reach their full potential and become healthy, happy adults, they – like all youth in care – need families who can provide permanent, supportive homes during their critical adolescent years. With a little additional education and training, your family can successfully provide a welcoming home to LGBTQ youth in need.

*Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). Supporting your LGBTQ youth: A guide for foster parents. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau.*

Please visit <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/LGBTQyouth> for additional information and resources.





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## QUESTIONNAIRE

Please use a separate answer sheet for each parent completing this training.

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ License #: \_\_\_\_\_

Please read the enclosed article and answer the following questions for a half-hour training credit. If more than one person wishes to receive credit, he or she must use a separate piece of paper and have his or her own signature and legal name on that page.

To receive credit, please mail your answers in a timely manner to:

***TFI Family Services, Inc., Attn: Gayle Schwarzrock  
217 SE 4th St., Topeka, KS 66603***

- 1. True or False:** It is possible to change a person's sexual orientation.
- 2. Fill in the blanks:** There are approximately \_\_\_\_\_ youth ages 10-18 in foster care in the United States. Of these youth, an estimated \_\_\_\_ percent – and likely more – are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ).
- 3. True or False:** Any steps you take to make your home welcoming to LGBTQ youth will benefit all children and youth in your care.
4. Identify three strategies that could be used to make your home more welcoming to a youth in care who identifies as LGBTQ.
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_

