CWLA Best Practices in Serving LGBT Youth

1. Create and maintain an inclusive organizational culture respecting the worth and dignity of every person and treat every person fairly
   - Adopt and implement policies
   - Provide training
   - Display indicators of inclusivity
   - Dialogue
   - Intervene when anyone behaves disrespectfully
   - Treat everyone equally

2. Work with LGBT youth and caregivers to promote permanent healthy adult connections
   - Provide information to families
   - Reunify LGBT youth with families when possible and safe to do so
   - Find permanent connections for youth who cannot go home

3. Promote positive adolescent development for LGBT youth
   - Allow LGBT youth to be “out” in their placements where they are accepted and receive affirming support
   - Allow them to express their gender identity
   - Prevent double standards – rules that limit romantic relationships should be applied equally
   - Validate transgender youth
Prohibit attempts to change youth in their orientation or gender expression

- **Best Practices**

4. Protect the confidentiality of LGBT youth
   - Educate staff on confidentiality laws and policies
   - Do not disclose information about the youth’s sexual orientation or gender identity without their permission (don’t “out” them)
   - Disclosure of any information should be limited to specific benefit to the youth

- **Best Practices**

5. Place LGBT youth in supportive settings
   - Involve the youth in decision making process
   - Find the most family-like setting
   - Ensure the caregivers are accepting
   - Reach out to the community for resources for LGBT youth
   - Support caregivers with training and resources
   - Respond promptly when problems arise
   - Work with caregivers who may initially reject a youth when they come out to them

- **Best Practices**

6. Ensure that LGBT youth in group settings are safe and treated equally
   - Do not segregate them as a form of “protection”
Do not prohibit them from having a roommate but also do not place them with a roommate who is openly homophobic.

Respond to incidents quickly and appropriately.

Staff should model respectful behavior toward all people.

7. For Transgender youth specifically

Make housing decisions ensuring emotional and physical safety of the youth.

Provide additional privacy for the youth if necessary to ensure their safety in their room, bathroom, or shower.

8. Ensure LGBT youth receive quality health and education services

Ensure health and mental health services are competent to serve LGBT youth.

Provide comprehensive sexuality education that addresses health risks and provides relevant information.

Notify schools immediately if a youth is harassed.

Advocate for youth to be safe at school.
Rights of Children and Youth in Texas Foster Care

“4. To be free from abuse, neglect and exploitation

5. To fair treatment, whatever my gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, disability, medical problems, or sexual orientation

6. I will not receive remarks that make fun of me or my family or any threats of losing my placement or shelter”

Excerpted from: “Rights of Children and Youth in Foster Care,” Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

• References


• Out of the Margins, A Report on Regional Listening Forums Highlighting the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth in Care, 2006

• CWLA Best Practice Guidelines, Serving LGBT Youth in Out of Home Care, 2006