

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
- The 2009 National School Climate Survey, A Report from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, www.glsen.org
- 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