



Best Practices for Relating to and Working with Youth in LGBTQ+ Communities

FAST FACTS

General Information:

- LGBTQ youth are disproportionately represented among victims of bullying, harassment, and family rejection.
- Sexual or gender minority status is associated with increased levels of psychological distress, mistreatment, and discrimination.
- LGBTQ youth make up:
 - 40% of runaway and homeless youth
 - 20% of children and youth in the foster care system
 - 15% of children and youth in the juvenile justice system
- LGBTQ young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection were more than:
 - 8x more likely to report attempted suicide
 - 5x more likely to report high levels of depression
 - 3x more likely to use illegal drugs
 - 3x more likely to report engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse

(source: childwelfare.gov)

- LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the foster care system (approx 1.5-2 times the rate of their heterosexual counterparts)
- LGBTQ youth also face disparities in the care they receive once in the foster care system
 - 78 percent of LGBTQ youth were removed or ran away from their foster placements as a result of hostility toward their sexual orientation or gender identity.
 - 100 percent of LGBTQ youth in group homes reported verbal harassment.
 - 70 percent of LGBTQ youth reported physical violence in group homes.

(source: Human Rights Campaign report 'LGBTQ Youth in the Foster Care System.')

Consider: Although LGBTQ youth enter the foster care system for many of the same reasons as non-LGBTQ youth, many LGBTQ youth have the added layer of trauma that comes with being rejected or mistreated because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

How to support a LGBTQ+-identified youth in your life (or work):

1. Interact from the basic assumption that however the youth chooses to identify, it's a natural and healthy variation of sexual and gender identity/expression.
2. Affirm the youth's sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. We don't need to understand something or someone in order to respect it. If your own feelings/values are getting in the way of your ability to be affirming, seek support of affirming friends or a therapist. Do NOT process your feelings with the youth. That is inappropriate and potentially harmful.
3. Comprehensively evaluate identity development and exploration. Meaning: see the youth as a whole person, not just as their sexual orientation or gender identity. What are other developmental markers and events happening at this time?
4. Identify and work to reduce sources of distress for LGBTQ youth. Look again at the statistics at the top of this sheet to keep an eye out for potential sources of stress and be sensitive to environments that are unsupportive of the youth's identity.
5. Use LGBTQ-inclusive language and terminology. Use the identity labels the youth uses to describe themselves. This will likely require you to do some learning. Good thing there are a ton of resources available out there! See below for some places to get started.
6. The number one way we can be supportive of folks in our lives who have different identities is to do our own work! Check our assumptions and our privileges, be open to making mistakes and doing better the next time and educating ourselves via good resources—not making it the responsibility of the other person to educate us.
7. Be knowledgeable about resources in the community to potentially connect them to. And if you don't know of any, learn together. Help them connect to the resources they need to feel supported.

Resources:

Allyship/support in general:

<https://pflag.org/allies>

<http://www.guidetoallyship.com/>

<https://www.pflag.org/publication/guidetobeingatransally>

Resources specifically around trans/gender nonconforming identities:

<https://pflag.org/resource/transgender-reading-list-adults>

www.imatyfa.org/

www.genderspectrum.org/

<http://transparenthood.net/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIMj25-nkhE>

Trans-Kin: A Guide for Family and Friends of Transgender People (book)

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