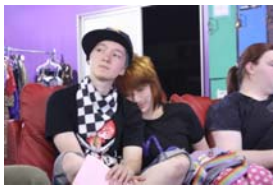
Caring for Sexual and Gender Minority Foster Youth



BRIDGE 13 + NEW AVENUES for Youth

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BRIDGE 13 + NEW AVENUES for Youth

- **Sexual & Gender Minority Youth Resource Center**
  A safe social space for youth 12-23 years old who identify as LGBTQQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, or questioning) in Portland OR
  Drop-in: Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 3:30-8:30pm
- **Bridge 13 Community Education Project**
  Educational workshops on the issues faced by LGBTQQ communities and how to better serve LGBTQ individuals.
- **PDX-Connect – New Avenues for Youth**
  Addresses the many needs of youth transitioning from foster care—from basic life-skill development and mental-health support to education, job training and placement, and more.

Terminology

Sexual Orientation

Lesbian
Gay
Bisexual
Queer

Gender Identity

~~Transvestite~~ Cross Dress
Transgender
Transsexual
Cisgender

Sex/ Physical Anatomy

~~Hermaphrodite~~
Intersex

Gender Binary System

A culturally defined code of acceptable and expected behaviors which assumes that there are men and women, who are masculine and feminine, and that there is nothing outside this system. This system is not reflective of all people's experiences.

Rules:

1. You must be on one side or the other; not neither, not both.
2. You cannot choose which side you are on
3. All traits are locked together.

MALE → MAN → MASCULINE → ATTRACTED to WOMEN

FEMALE → WOMAN → FEMININE → ATTRACTED to MEN

Studies have revealed **several disparities in the experiences of LGBTQ youth in foster care** compared to their non- LGBTQ peers in foster care.

These disparities included a higher average number of foster care placements and a higher likelihood of living in a group home setting. Research shows that LGBTQ youth are *more than twice as likely* as their non-LGBTQ peers to report being treated poorly by the foster care system.[11]

A survey of LGBTQ youth in out-of-home care in New York City found:

- 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

1 Wilson, B.D.M., Cooper, K., Kastansis, A., & Nezhad, S. (2014). Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster care: Assessing Disproportionality and Disparities in Los Angeles: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Available at http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LAFYS_report_final-aug-2014.pdf
2 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children, Youth and Families (2011). Information Memorandum on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth in Foster Care. Available at: http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/publication-db/documents/acyf-cb-im-11-03.pdf

Ways to Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQ Identified Foster Kids

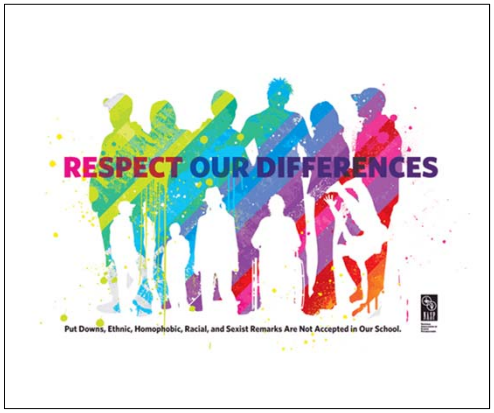
We are going to talk about some tactics you can use to create a safe and affirming home for LGBTQ foster youth

Video clip: In The Life (In the Life Media, PBS, 2012), "Foster Care's Invisible Youth" 18:06-20:04

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wn1L8M_I-Cs

Ways to Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQ Identified Foster Kids

Use passive advertising. Create a welcoming environment using posters, books, magazines, TV shows or movies, or through generic LGBTQ-affirming comments, which can communicate that your home is a safe space.



Ways to Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQ Identified Foster Kids

Do not make assumptions regarding your foster child's sexual orientation or gender identity. There is no one way to look or act like a given identity.

- Avoid heteronormative language, which is language that assumes a person (or every person) is heterosexual
- Notice your *assumptions* and where they are coming from
  - This will be a conscious effort and may be difficult
- Challenge assumptions rooted in the gender stereotypes we all grew up with
  - Not everyone falls neatly within the gender binary

Ways to Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQ Identified Foster Kids

Be understanding as your youth process their gender identity and/or sexual orientation at their own pace.

Pronouns and names may change a number of times and sexual orientation may shift between a number of identities. Coming out is not a one time event. **Allow for flexibility in identity, even if it is confusing to you.**

- If your youth is using different words to describe themselves than the did before, it's not because they were wrong or lying before. For many, gender and sexual orientation are in process.

Ways to Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQ Identified Foster Kids

A youth, simply because they are LGBTQ, does not present a danger for other children in the home. Do not assume that a youth who identifies as LGBTQ is a sexual predator or identifies with the community because of previous abuse. These are very damaging, harmful and inaccurate stereotypes.

LGBTQ youth should not have unique rules applied to them in the home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity that are not applied to the heterosexual and cisgender youth. Examples would be LGBTQ youth who are not allowed to share a room or go on dates when the similarly aged, heterosexual and cisgender youth, are allowed to.

Ways to Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQ Identified Foster Kids

Maintain a youth's confidentiality. Many youth in foster care have experienced violations of their confidentiality. You can build trust with a youth and decrease their vulnerability to experiencing a myriad of risk factors by maintaining youth confidentiality. Be up front and clear with a youth about your dedication to confidentiality, as they may not assume it to be the case.

Ways to Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQ Identified Foster Kids

If there are multiple youth in your home, **ensure that there is an expectation that everyone respects one another in light of their differences**. Do not allow youth to tease or bully one another.

- Don't wait for them to tell you if you suspect bullying is happening in your home; be proactive
- Passive advertising and being "out" as an ally from the get-go will help set this expectation
- Don't punish an LGBTQ-identified youth for being bullied

Ways to Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQ Identified Foster Kids

When it's safe, interrupt problematic language using your own strategies.

Try to be as respectful and constructive as possible when reclaiming the safety of a space. Your goal is to let all youth in your care know that you respect all people at all times, and expect the same from them. Model appropriate language and encourage them to consider the impact of their words

Questions

Any questions about anything we spoke about today?

If you think of some later, feel free to send me an email:

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