



## GETTING DOWN TO BASICS ABOUT LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER (“LGBT”) YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

### *The Facts*

- Approximately 5-10% of the general population is LGBT, and LGBT adolescents make up an even higher, disproportionate share of the foster care pool. Whether you know it or not, if you work with young people in foster care, you have worked with someone who is LGBT.
- Homosexuality is not a mental or physical disorder, and it has no “cure.” It is a core part of a gay person’s identity, just as a heterosexual orientation is for a heterosexual person. The leading professional organizations – including the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of Social Workers, and the Child Welfare League of America – have long affirmed this.
- Being transgendered is not the same as being gay, lesbian or bisexual. “Transgender” is a term for individuals whose appearance, characteristics, or sense of their own gender identity differ from traditional sex stereotypes, regardless of the individuals’ sexual orientation.
- Many LGBT youth who “come out” to their families face parental disapproval and even the outright rejection that can send these young people into foster care.
- Studies show that approximately 90% of LGBT students hear anti-LGBT comments in school, and 25% have been physically hurt by another student or teacher because of their sexual orientation. This harassment can lead to poor academic performance, truancy and dropping out.
- Unfortunately, LGBT young people often face the same disapproval and harassment in foster care.
- Fearing adults’ negative responses to their sexual orientation or gender identity, LGBT youth often are reluctant to seek medical, preventive and counseling services for sexually transmitted diseases.
- Because of the stigma and social pressures they face, LGBT youth may be at higher risk for substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices and suicide.
- The leading professional associations, including the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Social Workers, and the Child Welfare League of America, have called for unbiased and supportive care for LGBT young people.

**Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, the transgendered, and people with HIV or AIDS through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.**



## GETTING DOWN TO BASICS ABOUT LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER (“LGBT”) YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

### *What You Can Do*

- Recognize that you work with LGBT young people.
- Be aware of your own personal feelings or beliefs that might conflict with your professional responsibilities to LGBT youth.
- Educate yourself and others about LGBT youth.
- Let the youth you work with know that you are comfortable with people who are LGBT.
- Display visible signs such as posters, stickers or books that demonstrate an acceptance of LGBT people.
- Eliminate anti-LGBT slurs. Use gender neutral language when talking to young people. For example, instead of asking a teenaged boy whether he has a “girlfriend,” ask if he has “someone special in his life.”
- If a young person is letting you know that they are LGBT, don’t ignore it. Talk to them about it.
- Protect LGBT young people from bias and harassment in foster care, school and elsewhere.
- Help an LGBT young person find resources and support in your area.
- Contact Lambda Legal for more information, resources or help. Call our toll-free help-line at 1-866-LGBTTeen (1-866-542-8336), or email us at [lambdalegal@lambdalegal.org](mailto:lambdalegal@lambdalegal.org). Read Lambda Legal’s *Youth In The Margins: A Report on the Unmet Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adolescents in Foster Care* available on our website at [www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org), and use our poster affirming the rights of LGBT youth in foster care.

Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, the transgendered, and people with HIV or AIDS through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.

Lambda Legal National Headquarters 120 Wall Street, Suite 1500 | New York, NY 10005-3904 | t. 212/809-8585 | f. 212/809-0055