

POINT SOURCE YOUTH ON
BEHALF OF OCFS PRESENTS:

CENTERING THE NEEDS OF LGBTQ+ YOUTH

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LGBTQ+ youth disproportionately experience housing instability, making up roughly 40% of the youth homelessness population. This training will center the needs of LGBTQ+ youth in RHY programs. Attendees will leave with an understanding of LGBTQ+ youth's experience, affirming terminology and practices, and concrete tools to working with LGBTQ+ youth in empowering ways.

Successful completion of this training meets the initial training as described in 20-OCFS-ADM-03 if provided for in your program's training plan.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Programs must ensure service provision is **safe, culturally appropriate, and accessible**.
2. When working with youth, upholding **confidentiality** and **consenting processes** is imperative, including information about LGBTQ+ identities.
3. When working on family and kinship strengthening with LGBTQ+ youth, emphasize **resources**, and provide support that is **youth-led**.

Challenges experienced by LGBTQ youth, including why LGBTQ youth disproportionately experience homelessness.

LGBTQ+ young adults experience homelessness at more than double the rate of their non-LGBTQ+ peers. There are many different factors that contribute to this crisis, including trauma, adversity and discrimination. For some young adults, rejection and unwelcoming environments at home push young people into experiences of housing instability. For many young adults, family tensions and lack of understanding around gender identity and/or sexual orientation are exacerbated by other pre-existing instabilities, including poverty and housing issues. Without adequate and accessible prevention and intervention services in place to support young adults and their (chosen) families in these situations, an overwhelming amount of LGBTQ+ young adults end up experiencing homelessness every year. As a result, opportunities for family reconnection and healing can further become strained.

For many LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness, challenges faced at home continue in inadequate service provision and outreach. On top of the difficulty of navigating already complex and often re-traumatizing services, many LGBTQ+ young adults struggle to access safe and affirming services and providers. For some, the choice is made to opt out of accessing services entirely if an agency

has a reputation for harm. Regardless of the many factors at play that have created a youth homelessness crisis, over-indexed with LGBTQ+ youth, all young people deserve to live as their most authentic, vibrant selves. Supporting LGBTQ+ young adults experiencing homelessness means first acknowledging the various systemic, structural and interpersonal forms of oppression, violence and adversity that have created a pipeline into homelessness.

Strategies to address homophobia or transphobia from other youth in programs and to create affirming environments for youth of all SOGIE.

Young people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions (SOGIE) deserve affirming, safe environments, everywhere. For agency staff, routine trainings should be standardized. Providers should be knowledgeable and trained on fostering inclusive, welcoming environments as well as navigating conflict resolution, mediation and more. Hiring practices should work to assess the level of knowledge, values and commitment to creating safe environments for young people of all SOGIE. Policies and procedures that protect young people of all SOGIE, especially LGBTQ+ young adults should be codified and accountability procedures should be noted and applied to both staff and young folks participating in agency programs.



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Unfortunately, harm is inevitable. Agencies should have written and accessible procedures in place to address homophobia or transphobia from young folks in programs and staff alike.

1. Staff should **never assume** the SOGIE of young people accessing services.

- Young people should be made aware that basic SOGIE data collection is asked of all clients and intake staff should explain that the information is used to ensure the safety and needs for all youth are met.

2. Agencies should identify **youth-centered restorative processes**.

- How will conversations be facilitated to achieve healing when harm has been caused?
- What do trauma-informed consequences look like?
- How can you work to co-create more accessible opportunities for young people to share their experiences?
- What is the process for reporting harm?

3. **Youth-centered reparative processes** are integral to creating affirming environments for youth of all SOGIE.

- What measures can be taken to help repair harm caused?

- What trainings for growth and education can you provide to young adults who cause harm?
- Be sure to affirm and uplift the needs of young people in this, ask folks who have been harmed what a path forward looks like for them and what support they need from you. Youth should never be expected to remain in unsafe, and harmful situations in order to receive services.

4. **Onboard all young people** from intake onwards about the rules, policies and procedures of your agency. Walk clients through the various trauma-informed consequences of harmful behaviors as well as the expectations of safety, compassion and community.

In summary, safe and affirming environments are built on equity, transparency, trust and accountability. From hiring to intake to service provision and beyond, agencies should work to make sure that staff and clients alike have routine access to trainings and educational opportunities, understand processes for reporting harmful behaviors, have access to restorative and reparative trauma-informed processes, and are equally held accountable for their behaviors.



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Appropriate terminology to be used with youth.

1. When working with any youth, not just those who identify as LGBTQ+, it is important to understand that terminology is an individualized and personal choice for every person. Folks can utilize sources like the [Gender Unicorn](#) to explore different sexual and gender identities with youth. It's important to recognize that sexual and gender identity do not rely on one another, and that all identities can be fluid and change.
2. Build rapport and trust with youth, and check in often to ensure you are supporting, recognizing (and never assuming) a young person's sexual orientation and gender identity. This goes for all young people of all SOGIE. Make affirming check-ins part of your everyday conversations with staff, youth, and other folks at your organization.
3. Terminology is constantly evolving! Ensure you are training your staff regularly on the most up-to-date terms and how to be a safe and supportive space for young people.

Confidentiality protections for youth in RHY programs with an emphasis on protecting confidentiality of LGBTQ+ information.

For all runaway and homeless youth programs (RHY), it is important to uphold confidentiality. Programs are now allowed to share records containing the identity

of individual youth, including names, addresses, photographs, or records of evaluation to any individual or organization without written approval and informed consent from the youth themselves. Youth also reserve the right to review their files, documents, and to correct a record or file a claim of disagreement. This includes information about their identity — which can include sexual orientation and gender identity. This is why collaborative case notes with youth, to review that what is being communicated to others is not breaching confidentiality, is so important. Encourage clients to have input for their case notes, review any updates, and correct the information in a way that is accurate and comfortable for them. It is important to be honest and direct with young people about the boundaries behind it. Explain what can be kept confidential and what cannot.

Ensure you are utilizing Release of Information (ROI) and HIPPA forms to explicitly confirm what information is allowable to share and with whom.

Strategies for how to address and work with families of LGBTQ+ youth.

1. When we work with youth, we serve the entire youth, their family system, and all the different supports they have in their lives. Identify what youth want and need and how we can use that as leverage to work with their families and support systems. It's important



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to engage these support systems, utilize best practices like motivational interviewing, trauma informed care, and positive youth development to move the conversation forward in a healthy way. Look for teachable moments and ways to advocate and reframe in the moment something that may be harmful to youth. Utilize best practice tools to help the family understand and give more positive examples of ways to interact with youth.

2. It is crucial to understand how LGBTQ+ identities can feel disruptive to families that have no history of interaction with LGBTQ+ youth. Providing tools to help families stay together while simultaneously working to dismantle generations of understanding around what it means to identify as LGBTQ+ can be very complicated. If you can restructure the ideas, educate, and create acceptance from the family in safe ways, it can ultimately be therapeutic for youth.
3. When the family is unable to accept the young person, it is important to create a safety plan. It's important to validate all supports in a young person's life - including street families, other youth, and supportive caring adults outside of the family. It is a best practice and utilizes harm reduction to accept every part of the youth and where the strengths and supports lie. To work effectively, we have to create the environment the young person would like to have at home outside of it if necessary.



Q & A

What is important terminology for service providers to know? What are some best practices around continued learning?

Ask how people want to be addressed. Whether or not you're part of the LGBTQ+ community, everyone deserves to be respected and seen how they want to be seen. Standardize always sharing your pronouns, asking clients for their pronouns, checking in on pronouns and utilizing them correctly. Even if there are no publicly-identified members of the LGBTQ+ community present in the program, using pronouns and making it part of your organizational culture makes all the difference.

What are some best practices for working with LGBTQ+ youth? What are some resources folks should know about?

Ensure that your staff is educated on working with LGBTQ+ youth clients and meeting their needs. Provide training for staff — and not just once. Trainings should be regular and accessible to all staff. Before the hiring process, ask questions that help you understand their level of knowledge and connection to supporting LGBTQ+ youth. Can this individual work and support the LGBTQ+ community without bias? It's important that the answer is definitively yes.



“You want to create a visually affirming space, and you do that with [things like] flags and posters.”

— MADDOX GUERRILLA



Actions to Take Now

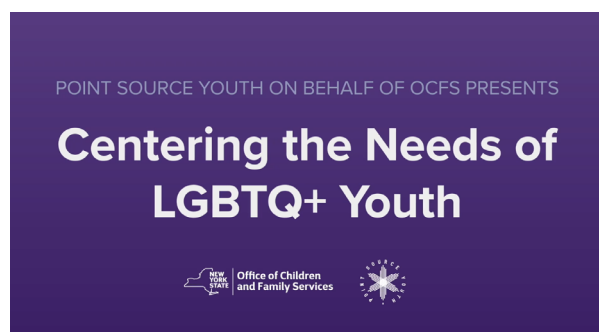
1. **Invite** young people to the conversation and center their input on what feels safe and meets their needs.
2. **Ensure** that every space is safe for queer and trans youth by using affirming language, posters, signs, and paperwork.
3. **Ask for pronouns and declare yours.** Don't make assumptions and always offer yours first.
4. **Provide** ongoing trainings for your staff on how to not only use correct terminology for LGBTQ+ youth, but also how to address internal biases.



RESOURCES

- [Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation](#)
- [Gender Unicorn - TSER](#)
- blogs.scientificamerican.com/sa-visual/visualizing-sex-as-a-spectrum
- Implicit bias self assessment: implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html
- truecolorsunited.org/our-work/training-education/network
- [OCFS Administrative Directive](#)
- [OCFS Informational Letter](#)

Access the full 60-minute training [here](#).



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