

WHAT IT MEANS FOR ADVOCATES IN CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS

THE ROLES ADVOCATES CAN PLAY

Despite recent progress toward legal and social equality for LGBTQ* Americans, societal stigma remains and both LGBTQ youth and parents face significant challenges and disparities as they interact with child welfare systems. Advocates and other external stakeholders can play a key role in ensuring that child welfare systems are implementing best practices for serving all youth and parents well regardless of their SOGIE.*

Now — as some lawmakers work to legalize discrimination against LGBTQ youth and parents — it is perhaps more important than ever for advocates to take action. This Beginner's Guide to LGBTQ Inclusion is designed to advocates like you ideas of where to start.

- » **Increase your own understanding of the challenges faced by LGBTQ youth and parents as they engage with child welfare systems and help people you work with do the same**, especially if you work directly with

youth or parents (e.g., as a guardian ad litem/ court appointed special advocate, as a birth family liaison, etc.)

- » **Talk with the youth and parents you work with to help them understand their rights** and what they should expect from the child welfare system regarding non-discrimination — including the right to receive services free of discrimination based on their SOGIE.
- » **Familiarize yourself with the process of reporting grievances** and help the youth and parents you work with report discrimination.
- » **Make use of oversight and advising roles** (e.g., on citizen review panels, on community advisory groups, etc.) to find out how the child welfare system is addressing LGBTQ inclusion and non-discrimination and building internal LGBTQ competency. Provide feedback on both strengths and concerns and offer suggestions for ways to learn more and connect with external resources.
- » **Highlight and celebrate good practices throughout the child welfare system.** Acknowledge staff doing great work with LGBTQ

TERMS TO KNOW:

***LGBTQ:** Acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning."

Lesbian: Describes women who are attracted to other women.

Gay: Describes people who are attracted to members of their same gender.

Bisexual: Describes people who are attracted to more than one gender.

Transgender: Describes a person whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth.

Queer: Describes fluid identities and orientations, sometimes used interchangeably with "LGBT."

Questioning: Describes people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

***SOGIE:** Acronym for "sexual orientation, gender identity and expression." Everyone has SOGIE, not only LGBTQ people.

Sexual Orientation: A person's emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people.

Gender Identity: A person's internal sense of being male, female, or, for some people, a blend of both or neither.

Gender Expression: The ways people show their gender to others through clothing, haircut, roles and activities, etc.

- youth and parents and recognize systemic changes in policies and programs that build the system's capacity to be inclusive and affirming.
- » **Work with your own staff, members, and affiliates to increase LGBTQ competency** and develop more active allies to LGBTQ youth and parents, especially if you are a professional association or similar membership organization that can affect the knowledge, skills, and competency of people working in the child welfare system.
 - » **Partner with other organizations and with the child welfare agency to provide trainings for staff and resource families** on topics related to SOGIE, LGBTQ youth and parents, and effective approaches for serving LGBTQ youth and parents.
 - » **Empower youth as leaders and seek out youth perspectives,** including encouraging youth to share their insights and stories and listening to recommendations from youth.
 - » **Actively recruit LGBTQ members, volunteers, and community members** for roles in your organization.

POSITIVE INDICATORS OF CHANGE

As an advocate, you have a special perspective on whether and how a child welfare system is ensuring non-discrimination on the basis of SOGIE and improving its capacity to serve LGBTQ youth and parents. Be on the lookout for positive indicators of systemic improvements, such as:

- » Changes in **staff training** to include specific information on how to be welcoming and affirming for LGBTQ youth and parents.
- » Changes in **recruitment messaging** and materials that demonstrate efforts to reach and welcome LGBTQ prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship families and to reflect the diversity of youth in foster care.
- » Increases in **partnerships with community organizations** that have deep expertise and demonstrated competency in working with LGBTQ youth and parents.
- » Strengthened language and requirements in **requests for proposals (RFPs)** for new contracts and grants highlighting expectations for

partner organizations to ensure LGBTQ inclusion and non-discrimination.

- » Changes in **forms and images** the agency uses to increase LGBTQ-inclusion (e.g., “parent 1 and parent 2” rather than “mother and father”).

LEARN MORE

This tip sheet shares a few examples of things you can do as an advocate to influence child welfare systems' efforts to improve practice with LGBTQ youth and parents. Download the additional tip sheets in this series for more detailed information and ideas on next steps. Also check out the HRC Foundation's All Children–All Families project's innovative self-assessment tools, staff training offerings, and technical assistance for child welfare agencies at www.hrc.org/acaf.

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