

Recommendations for Training & Education on LGBTQ Issues

Education and training on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (“LGBTQ”) issues are vital first steps to ensuring that child welfare systems provide safe and appropriate care to LGBTQ young people. Everyone working or living in the system — from administrators, agency staff, caseworkers and foster parents to young people in care — should understand that LGBTQ people are entitled to safety and respect. The following recommendations and resources are intended to offer guidance in creating competent training and education programs based upon existing professional best practice standards.

TRAINING ON LGBTQ ISSUES SHOULD BE MANDATORY, COMPREHENSIVE AND ONGOING.

It should be made clear to all child welfare professionals and caregivers that negative behaviors and attitudes toward LGBTQ people cannot be tolerated. Training and education on LGBTQ issues should be integrated into the preservice and in-service training provided to child welfare professionals and foster and adoptive parents and should be mandatory for everyone working in the system. This training should address the full range of issues relevant to sexual orientation and gender identity and be provided on an ongoing basis. Educational materials on LGBTQ issues, including books and films, should be available at every child welfare agency for staff, caretakers and young people.

VALUES CLARIFICATION EXERCISES INCREASE SENSITIVITY TO LGBTQ PEOPLE.

A first step in working effectively with LGBTQ youth is to acknowledge one’s own misconceptions and negative stereotypes.

Training participants should assess their own personal beliefs and biases regarding sexuality and gender. By addressing these deeply held beliefs in a supportive environment, training participants are able to explore the cultural, religious and personal sources of their values. The purpose of values clarification exercises is not to alienate or ostracize those participants with negative beliefs, but to confront the ways in which one’s values and beliefs can create obstacles toward providing competent care to LGBTQ clients. Training on LGBTQ issues should emphasize the distinction between one’s personal opinions and the professional responsibility to provide safe, affirming and supportive care.

SKILL BUILDING SHOULD BE A CORE PART OF TRAINING ON LGBTQ ISSUES.

Essential professional skills should be cultivated through training on LGBTQ issues. For example, training should impart information and guidance on supporting a young person coming out as LGBTQ. It should offer advice for identifying the warning signs that a young person may be experiencing anti-LGBTQ mistreatment and strategies for intervening on

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behalf of victims. Training should be provided on the existence and enforcement of LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination laws and policies. It should include the definitions and appropriate contexts for the terms used to describe and talk about LGBTQ people and issues. It should explain the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. The use of respectful language should be emphasized. Training participants should also be encouraged to examine how subtle cues may impart to an LGBTQ youth that a person is sensitive or hostile. For example, training should include such practical tips as asking a young person if they are “seeing anyone” rather than whether they have a “boyfriend” or “girlfriend.” Child welfare professionals and caregivers should be provided with recommendations for creating a welcoming and supportive environment for LGBTQ people, such as by displaying LGBTQ-friendly posters and signs.

ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES

Trainers, model curricula and other educational resources addressing LGBTQ issues are available around the country. Several training resources are listed below. Contact Lambda Legal for additional information and support.

- *Moving the Margins: Training Curriculum for Child Welfare Services with LGBTQ Youth in Out-of-Home Care*, Diane Elze, Robin McHalen, National Association of Social Workers and Lambda Legal (2009).

In 2009, Lambda Legal with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) trained 40 master trainers nationwide in turn to train out-of-home care service providers to work competently with LGBTQ youth. To find master trainers in your area or to order copies of the NASW-Lambda Legal training curriculum, contact Lambda Legal at 1-866-LGBTTeen (toll free) or 212-809-8585 or download it for free at www.lambdalegal.org or www.cwla.org.

- *Getting Down to Basics: Tools for Working with LGBTQ Youth in Care*. Child Welfare League of America and Lambda Legal (2006).

This tool kit includes additional handouts covering a variety of topics addressing the needs of LGBTQ youth and adults involved with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, such as *Basic Facts About Being LGBTQ*, *Caseworkers with LGBTQ Clients*, and *Working with Transgender Youth*. To order free copies of the *Getting Down to Basics* tool kit, contact Lambda Legal at 1-866-LGBTTeen (toll free) or 212-809-8585, or download it for free at www.lambdalegal.org or www.cwla.org.

- “*Bridges, Barriers and Boundaries: A Model Curriculum for Training Youth Service Professionals to Provide Culturally Competent Service for Sexual and Gender*

Minority Youth in Care,” Robin McHaelen, *Child Welfare Journal*, Vol. 85 No. 2, March/April 2006 (CWLA).

This model LGBTQ training curriculum is available in the March/April 2006 special edition of the *Child Welfare Journal*, which is dedicated to issues related to LGBTQ youth in child welfare systems. “Bridges, Barriers and Boundaries” includes both skill building and values-clarification exercises currently used throughout Connecticut. The *Child Welfare Journal* can be purchased at www.cwla.org.

- *Out of the Margins: A Report on Regional Listening Forums Highlighting the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth in Care*, Child Welfare League of America and Lambda Legal (2006).

Between September 2003 and December 2004, CWLA and Lambda Legal organized Listening Forums in 13 cities around the country for LGBTQ youth in care and the adults who work with them, to share their experiences and identify strategies for bringing about lasting positive change in the child welfare system for LGBTQ people. It is available free of charge at www.lambdalegal.org and www.cwla.org.

- *Breaking the Silence: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Foster Youth Tell Their Stories, A Tool for Training Care Providers on Working Effectively with LGBTQ Youth*, National Center for Lesbian Rights (2006).

Breaking the Silence is a training DVD that includes 10 short autobiographical stories from LGBTQ former foster youth who speak about their experiences in care and what they think child welfare advocates and service providers can do to better support LGBTQ youth in care. It includes a CD containing over 25 additional training tools and resources. It is available free of charge at www.nclrights.org.

- *CWLA Best Practice Guidelines for Serving LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care*, Shannan Wilber, Caitlyn Ryan and Jody Marksamer, CWLA Press (2006) for purchase at www.cwla.org.

The *Best Practice Guidelines* provides direction to agencies responsible for the care of LGBT youth in out-of-home care, including the topics that should be covered in training and education for agency personnel and caregivers on LGBT issues. It can be purchased at www.cwla.org.

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