

Teaching LGBTQ Competence in Schools of Social Work

The quality of care provided to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (“LGBTQ”) youth and their families within child welfare systems in large part hinges on how well prepared social workers and other child welfare professionals are to address LGBTQ issues. Schools of social work are the training grounds for future child welfare practitioners. It is the obligation of these schools to ensure that the social workers they train are equipped to work competently and compassionately with LGBTQ young people. Schools of social work have a unique responsibility to fill the gaps in knowledge and understanding on LGBTQ issues and thereby increase the capacity of child welfare systems to support LGBTQ people.

ENSURE THAT EVERY STUDENT IS PREPARED TO WORK COMPETENTLY AND PROFESSIONALLY WITH LGBTQ CLIENTS.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), leading organizations that set the standards of practice and education for social workers, both recognize the importance of expanding the concepts of cultural competency within schools of social work to include training and education on sexual orientation and gender identity. Every social worker must be prepared to serve clients from diverse populations, and schools of social work are responsible for ensuring that all graduates can effectively work with LGBTQ clients.

- “Social workers shall advocate for and participate in educational and training programs that help advance cultural competence within the profession.”

NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice, Standard 8., Professional Education.

- “Social workers understand how diversity characterizes and shapes the human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity

are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including...gender identity and expression,...and sexual orientation... Social workers recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures [and] values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power and gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups.”

CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2.1.4—Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice.

ENSURE THAT CURRICULUM CONTENT INCLUDES LGBTQ ISSUES.

Every school of social work should ensure that all relevant courses address LGBTQ issues. They should offer specific educational opportunities to build knowledge and practical skills and professional experience working with LGBTQ people and communities. LGBTQ issues should be integrated into the texts, class examples and scenarios utilized for class projects and discussions. Curriculum content should be updated and supplemented to ensure the inclusion of positive and accurate information regarding LGBTQ issues and existing best practice standards.

FOSTERING TRANSITIONS

A CWLA/Lambda Legal
Joint Initiative



- “Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to...sexual orientation...”

Code of Ethics of the NASW, 1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity.

- “[The social work] program’s commitment to diversity—including...gender, gender identity and expression and sexual orientation—is reflected in its learning environment.”

CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, Accreditation Standard 3.1—Diversity.

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO PUT INTO PRACTICE WHAT THEY LEARN ABOUT LGBTQ ISSUES.

Practical application of academic concepts is especially important in the training of social workers. Group discussions, role-playing and fieldwork experiences are all essential methods of preparing students to work effectively with individuals and families. Ensure that there are opportunities for students to gain such real-life experiences working with LGBTQ people as well as with families of origin that may be rejecting or hostile toward their child’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO DEVELOP THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF AVAILABLE LGBTQ RESOURCES AND TO BECOME INVOLVED IN RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND POLICY ADVOCACY.

Encourage social work students to develop their knowledge of supportive LGBTQ resources, including within their communities. This will help prepare them to promote community connections among LGBTQ people in order to combat the social isolation many experience. In keeping with the nondiscrimination values of the NASW and CSWE, encourage students to become active in opposing misguided legislation or policy that negatively affects LGBTQ people in their state or community.

- “Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of and discrimination against any person, group or class on the basis of...sexual orientation...”

Code of Ethics of the NASW, 6.04 Social and Political Action.

- “The purpose of social work education is to prepare competent and effective social work professionals who are committed to practice that includes services to the poor and oppressed, and who work to alleviate poverty, oppression and discrimination.”

CSWE, The Curriculum Policy Statement for Master’s Degree Programs, M3.0 Premises Underlying Social Work Education.

SUPPORT LGBTQ STUDENTS IN THEIR FIELD PLACEMENTS.

Ensure that field placement manuals include information and resources that may be of particular interest to LGBTQ students, including a list of LGBTQ-friendly field placement agencies. Provide support for LGBTQ students regarding disclosure of their sexual orientation and gender identities within their field placements and advice for navigating professional and personal boundaries.

ENCOURAGE ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON LGBTQ ISSUES.

Schools of social work should encourage and academically and financially support scholarship and research around LGBTQ issues and communities. Ensure that your school has the latest LGBTQ publications and materials. A number of publications can be ordered from the CWLA website: www.cwla.org/pubs.

ADVOCATE FOR DEPARTMENTAL AND UNIVERSITY NONDISCRIMINATION POLICIES THAT ARE INCLUSIVE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY.

If the nondiscrimination policies at your school are not inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity, advocate for their inclusion. Ensure that policies are implemented and enforced so that students and faculty truly have a safe and supportive learning environment that is inclusive of LGBTQ issues and individuals. If necessary, research what other universities and institutions are doing to understand and support LGBTQ students. Faculty Search and Student Services Committees should work together to create recruitment and retention plans to attract and keep LGBTQ students, faculty and staff at the school. School of social work faculty and staff should be visible advocates and allies to LGBTQ communities and confront covert and overt homophobic, transphobic and heterosexist comments and actions.

NATIONAL SURVEY: SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER EXPRESSION IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

In 2009, Lambda Legal and the CSWE conducted a survey study of social work programs to assess how well they are preparing students to provide competent and respectful services to LGBTQ individuals and LGBTQ youth in out-of-home care. See www.lambdalegal.org for the study findings and best practice recommendations for schools of social work.

The many other components of Getting Down to Basics offer additional support.

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.

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