

Helping LGBTQ Families Navigate the Child Welfare System

Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

LGBTQ Families

As the legal landscape changes to provide equal protections and rights for LGBTQ individuals and couples, increasing numbers of LGBTQ families are coming forward to provide temporary and permanent care for children and youth living in foster care. Advances in marriage equality and other legal actions, however, fall short of helping prospective LGBTQ families navigate the child welfare system. As a result, agencies must work to support these families by creating an organizational culture that is inclusive and knowledgeable about the unique needs of LGBTQ individuals.

Is your agency prepared to work effectively with LGBTQ families?

Use these questions to determine whether your agency has created an inclusive and informed culture for LGBTQ families.

- ▶ Do your policies include nondiscrimination language explicitly inclusive of applicants and parents regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression?
- ▶ Have all of your employees and partners received thorough training on working with LGBTQ people as it relates to their job function?
- ▶ Do your forms use inclusive language that is supportive, reflective, and affirming of LGBTQ families?
- ▶ Do agency trainings and parent support services address the needs of LGBTQ families?
- ▶ When your agency seeks community input, are LGBTQ voices included?

Statistics

- There are **650,000** same-sex couples in the United States.¹
- **19 percent** of same-sex couples have children under age 18 in their home.²
- Same-sex couples are **six times** more likely than their different-sex counterparts to be raising foster children.³
- More than **25 percent** of same-sex couples raising children are relative or kinship caregivers.⁴
- An estimated **2 million** LGBTQ people are interested in adoption.⁵

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *United States Census*.

² U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). *American Community Survey*.

³ Gates, G.J., Badgett, M.V., Macomber, J.E., & Chambers, K. (2007). *Adoption and foster care by gay and lesbian parents in the United States*. The Williams Institute and the Urban Institute. Retrieved from <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-Badgett-Macomber-Chambers-Final-Adoption-Report-Mar-2007.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

- Are you aware of all Federal, State, and local laws and policies that may impact LGBTQ families?

Table 1. Strategies for Meeting the Needs of LGBTQ Families

Unique Needs of LGBTQ Families	Best Practices
Concern that State laws and/or agency policies may impose barriers to being approved as foster/adoptive parents.	Be well informed about State laws and regulations that may impact LGBTQ families and have this information readily available. Whenever possible, institute agency policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
Concern that LGBTQ families will be the placement of last choice.	Be transparent about the selection process for matching prospective foster/adoptive children with families. Educate staff involved in the selection and matching process about the myths, facts, strengths, and needs of LGBTQ parents. Identify quality assurance opportunities to manage bias in the matching process.
Concern that LGBTQ families may be judged negatively and/or scrutinized differently by agency staff.	Provide cultural competency training for agency staff on best practices with LGBTQ families.
Concern about how forthcoming LGBTQ families can/should be with caseworkers.	<p>Use supportive, inclusive, and affirming language in conversations, on forms, and in home study reports.</p> <p>Anticipate and listen for reticence on the part of LGBTQ individuals and families and address these concerns in an open and affirming way.</p> <p>Ask questions that demonstrate you understand their caution and want to provide support.</p> <p>Be knowledgeable about community resources and services that are supportive and affirming.</p> <p>If possible, connect new LGBTQ families with LGBTQ families who have already navigated the system.</p>
Unique Needs of LGBTQ Families With Open Child Welfare Cases	Best Practices
Concern that being an LGBTQ family will negatively affect the status of their case.	Be well informed about State laws and regulations that may impact LGBTQ families and have this information readily available. Whenever possible, institute agency policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
Concern that if an LGBTQ family's child is placed in foster care, the foster family may be judgmental toward the family and/or their child(ren).	<p>If possible, have an ice-breaker meeting so the families can meet and get to know each other.</p> <p>If possible, connect the new LGBTQ family with an LGBTQ family who has already navigated the system.</p> <p>Provide cultural competency training for agency staff on best practices with LGBTQ families.</p>