



Creating LGBTQ-Affirming Agencies Video Guide

Welcome to the discussion and facilitation guide for the “Creating LGBTQ Affirming Agencies” video. This guide is designed to help public child welfare agencies understand the purpose of and context for the “LGBTQ-Affirming Agencies” video and how the video can be used to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or questioning (LGBTQ) children, youth, and families involved in the child welfare system. It also includes additional resources and discussion questions that agencies may use to facilitate presentation of the video.

A script of the video’s narration is included in **Appendix 1** of this guide for reference during discussion and facilitation.

LGBTQ Affirming Agencies Video: A Tool for Cultural Competency

As the culture and laws related to LGBTQ individuals have become more inclusive in recent years, an increasing number of LGBTQ people are self-disclosing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (i.e., “coming out”) during childhood or adolescence. Additionally, the number of LGBTQ individuals coming forward to serve as temporary or permanent caregivers to children and youth in foster care has increased. As more LGBTQ-identified children, youth, and families become involved in the child welfare system, public child welfare agencies must adapt their policies and practices to address the strengths and needs of the LGBTQ community.

The “Creating LGBTQ Affirming Agencies” video is intended to help States and territories enhance their capacity to create culturally inclusive environments within child welfare agencies for LGBTQ individuals. Creating a culturally inclusive or culturally competent environment means developing a welcoming, culturally sensitive, supportive, and affirming agency for all people—regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Culturally inclusive child welfare agencies provide children, youth, and families with opportunities to:

See themselves mirrored in the agency’s art and photos

- ▶ Feel visible instead of invisible
- ▶ Fill out forms inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity
- ▶ Receive respectful treatment from support staff, frontline staff, training staff, and supervisory staff

Using the Video to Create a Culturally Inclusive Environment

Creating a culturally inclusive environment requires commitment from agency leadership at the executive level that is communicated clearly and consistently to all staff. The “Creating LGBTQ Affirming Agencies” video is one tool agencies can use to raise awareness about LGBTQ-related issues at all organizational levels and enhance an agency’s overall ability to support LGBTQ families.

Specifically, the video can be used for one or more of the following purposes:

- ▶ Recruit LGBTQ foster and adoptive parents
- ▶ Train frontline staff on how to interact with LGBTQ children, youth, and families
- ▶ Start a conversation about creating a culturally competent environment
- ▶ Encourage discussion about culturally inclusive policies and practices
- ▶ Promote change in organizational culture to become more culturally inclusive

Discussion Questions

The “LGBTQ Affirming Agencies” video presents situations and ideas that may be new to viewers, difficult for viewers to understand, or challenge the belief system of some viewers. This section includes discussion questions to help agencies anticipate and explore the complex issues presented in the video.

In addition, the questions below are designed to help viewers explore key aspects of the video that illustrate both the importance of creating a culturally inclusive environment in public child welfare agencies and how to build cultural competence.

Pictures, Symbols, Forms

- ▶ How do you feel about the religious symbols displayed at the child welfare agency in part one of the video?
- ▶ What effect do pictures and other visuals—such as magazines and art—have on children, youth, and families in the agency’s waiting room?
- ▶ How can inclusive language on an agency form influence recruitment of prospective LGBTQ parents?

Interactions with Agency Staff

- ▶ What are some of the ways agency staff communicate (or fail to communicate) affirming and supportive messages to LGBTQ children, youth, and families?
- ▶ How can interactions between LGBTQ individuals and agency staff affect the agency’s ability to serve children, youth, and families?

Overall Effect

- ▶ How can an agency’s cultural competence affect how the agency is viewed by the community?
- ▶ How can an agency improve its cultural competence and become more culturally inclusive of LGBTQ individuals?

Additional Resources

An agency can lay the foundation for a culturally competent environment by assessing its readiness to work effectively with LGBTQ individuals and families and by directly addressing the needs of LGBTQ individuals through policies, guidelines, and procedures. Accordingly, the resources in this section are divided into three categories:

- ▶ Readiness assessments
- ▶ LGBTQ policies/guidelines/procedures
- ▶ Building cultural competence

Readiness Assessments

- ▶ Human Rights Campaign (HRC), [All Children – All Families: Agency Self-Assessment](#)
- ▶ California State University, San Bernardino ScholarWorks, [Designing a Measure: Measuring Social Workers' Attitudes toward LGBT Youth in Child Welfare](#)
- ▶ National Center for Cultural Competence, [Promoting Cultural Diversity and Cultural and Linguistic Competency: Self-Assessment Checklist for Staff of Residential Programs Providing Behavioral Health Services and Supports to Children, Youth, and their Families](#)
- ▶ National Center for Lesbian Rights, [Organizational Assessment Tool for LGBTQ Cultural Competency](#)

LGBTQ Policies/Guidelines/Procedures

Policies and protections by State:

- ▶ Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), [Inventory of State Policies Concerning LGBTQ Youth](#) (September 2014)
- ▶ Movement Advancement Project, [Securing Legal Ties for Children Living in LGBT Families: A State Strategy and Policy Guide](#) (July 2012)

Examples of policies:

- ▶ Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), *Policy Manual, Chapter 30: Introduction to Volume II, 30-9: Non-Discrimination of LGBTQI Individuals* (effective May 14, 2004)
- ▶ New York City Administration for Children's Services, [LGBTQ Policy](#) (issued November 11, 2012)

Examples of guidance or standards of care:

- ▶ Allegheny County (Pennsylvania) Department of Human Services (DHS), [Standards of Practice](#) (issued August 5, 2015)
- ▶ CSSP, [Guidelines for Managing Information Related to the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression of Children in Child Welfare Systems](#) (issued January 2013)
- ▶ Child Welfare League of America, [Recommended Practices to Promote the Safety and Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning \(LGBTQ\) Youth and Youth at Risk of or Living with HIV in Child Welfare Settings](#) (issued in 2012)
- ▶ Connecticut DCF, [Working with Transgender Youth and Caregivers Practice Guide](#) (updated December 2014)
- ▶ Minnesota DHS practice guide, [Working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning/queer youth](#)
- ▶ Utah's Division of Child and Family Services, [Out-of-Home Services Practice Guidelines, Appendix B: How to Create a Climate of Safety and Convey Support for Children and Youth](#) (revised November 2012)

Building Cultural Competence

- ▶ HRC, [All Children – All Families: Benchmarks of LGBTQ Cultural Competency](#)
- ▶ HRC, [LGBTQ-Inclusive Intake Forms](#)
- ▶ The Joint Commission, [Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient- and Family-Centered Care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender \(LGBT\) Community: A Field Guide](#)

Appendix 1

Creating LGBTQ-Affirming Agencies: Narrator Script

Segment 1:

Within human services, there's a perception that social workers and other professionals are inherently empathetic "helpers" who have the training and innate sensitivity to keep bias out of the workplace. Because of this perception, you might find it hard to believe that intolerance toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning individuals happens frequently and at all levels in child welfare agencies. Whether directed toward employees, clients, or families, this nonaffirming behavior can vary from overtly hostile forms of rejection to more subtle, inhospitable behavior. Even well-intentioned professionals and agencies can make LGBTQ people feel unwelcome, misunderstood, or undervalued through body language, choice of words, and the physical environment of the agency. In this video, we will explore these issues, attempting to bring voice and perspective to the harmful effects of exclusivity.

Segment 2:

What can we learn from this couple's experience? How would you feel walking in their shoes? Some might argue that this demonstration is over the top—but is it really? Can you guarantee that biases and microaggressions like the ones demonstrated here would not occur in your workplace...not by anyone? Addressing these layers of subtle, and not-so-subtle intolerance is crucial to ensuring that all children, youth, and families feel respected and welcome. Our actions and language reflect not only on us as individuals, but on our agencies as a whole.

Segment 3:

To be an inclusive and affirming organization, agencies must have policies in place that prohibit discrimination of employees and families based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. These policies should be communicated clearly throughout the organization and understood by all administrators, employees, community partners, and families. Agencies recruiting foster and adoptive parents should have a written policy explicitly welcoming LGBTQ applicants. Having open conversations about sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression and putting nondiscrimination policies in place will communicate that the agency is committed to being a safe, inclusive, and affirming place.

Segment 4:

The imagery displayed throughout the agency—including artwork, brochures, and literature—should reflect that this organization competently serves all people. Photographs of families should include diverse family configurations. Materials and resources for LGBTQ children, youth, and families should be prominently available alongside other resources.

Segment 5:

All forms used by the organization should be assessed for LGBTQ-inclusive and -affirming language. The terms "partner" and "spouse" are more inclusive than "husband" and "wife," and "Parent 1 and Parent 2" are more inclusive than "mother and father."

Segment 6:

Researchers and experts have determined that sexual orientation does not determine one's ability to be a good, effective parent.¹ Despite this, LGBTQ individuals and couples have long since had to cope with inappropriate questions, delays in fostering and adoption, bias from within child welfare agencies, politicization of their families, and stress related to the legitimacy of their relationships. Still, thousands of LGBTQ individuals and couples are fostering or have adopted, and the LGBTQ community is a valuable resource to find loving, capable families for children and youth in care. Encouraging openness and literacy around sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression can help families and child welfare professionals build trusting, honest relationships and stable placements for children and youth.

LGBTQ couples may find it daunting to approach agencies about fostering and adopting. Couples may wonder if it will be safe to talk openly about their relationship. They may have concerns that both persons may not be legally recognized as the parents, and single LGBTQ persons may wonder if the agency will be less inclined to place a child with them because of bias. We can certainly see the basis for this type of apprehension in the first part of this video. The second part displays a culturally responsive environment, supporting and affirming LGBTQ individuals and families.

We hope your agency is inspired to create and sustain an LGBTQ-affirming agency for all children, youth, and families.



¹ Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, and Center for American Progress. (October 2011). *All children matter: How legal and social inequalities hurt LGBT families*. Retrieved from <https://www.lgbtmap.org/file/all-children-matter-full-report.pdf>