

# Affirming and Supporting LGBTQ Children and Youth in Child Welfare



"Every couple of months, one of our kids would get killed. And it would always be a gay kid."

- *Carl Siciliano, founder of the Ali Forney Center, the nation's largest organization dedicated to homeless LGBTQ youth<sup>1</sup>*

LGBTQ youth are disproportionately represented among victims of:<sup>2</sup>

- ▶ Bullying
- ▶ Harassment
- ▶ Family rejection

LGBTQ youth make up:

- 40%** of runaway and homeless youth<sup>3</sup>
- 20%** of children and youth in the foster<sup>4</sup> care system
- 15%** of children and youth in the juvenile justice system<sup>5</sup>

Sexual or gender minority status is associated with increased:

- ▶ Psychological distress
- ▶ Mistreatment
- ▶ Discrimination

LGBTQ young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection were more than:<sup>6</sup>

- 8x** more likely to report attempted suicide
- 5x** more likely to report high levels of depression
- 3x** more likely to use illegal drugs
- 3x** more likely to report engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse

<sup>1</sup> Morris, A. (2014). The forsaken: A rising number of homeless gay teens are being cast out by religious families. *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/the-forsaken-a-rising-number-of-homeless-gay-teens-are-being-cast-out-by-religious-families-20140903>

<sup>2</sup> Mitchum, P., & Moodie-Mills, A.C. (2014, February). *Beyond bullying: How hostile school climate perpetuates the school-to-prison pipeline for LGBT youth*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BeyondBullying.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Durso, L.E., & Gates, G.J. (2012). *Serving our youth: Findings from a national survey of services providers working with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless*. The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund and The Palette Fund. Retrieved from <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Nezhad, S. (2014). *Sexual and gender minority youth in foster care: Assessing disproportionality and disparities in Los Angeles*. The Williams Institute. Retrieved from [http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LAFYS\\_report\\_final-aug-2014.pdf](http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LAFYS_report_final-aug-2014.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Durso and Gates. *Serving our youth: Findings from a national survey of services providers*.

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Campaign. (n.d.). *LGBTQ youth in the foster care system*. Retrieved from <http://hrc-assets.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com//files/assets/resources/HRC-YouthFosterCare-IssueBrief-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Mitchum and Moodie-Mills. *Beyond bullying*.

<sup>6</sup> Ryan, C., Huebner, D., Diaz, R., & Sanchez, J. Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in white and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults. *Pediatrics*, 123(1).

## Harmful Practices

LGBTQ children and youth are subjected to **harmful practices** when child welfare systems:

- ▶ Do NOT help LGBTQ children and youth find resources related to transitioning
- ▶ Do NOT provide acceptance, support, or understanding to LGBTQ children and youth
- ▶ Do NOT facilitate sexual orientation or gender identity exploration and development
- ▶ Do NOT present an unbiased view regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression
- ▶ Do NOT recognize an LGBTQ child or youth's unique sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression
- ▶ DO make attempts to change an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression or lessen an individual's same-sex sexual desires through conversion or reparative therapy

### Conversion Therapy

Conversion therapy is not supported by credible evidence and is potentially extremely harmful, particularly to children and adolescents. **One report found:**<sup>7</sup>

- ▶ Same-gender sexual orientation and variations in gender identity are part of the normal spectrum of human diversity
- ▶ Research does not support the idea that mental or behavioral health interventions can alter gender identity or sexual orientation
- ▶ Interventions aimed at a fixed outcome, such as gender conformity or heterosexual orientation, are coercive, can be harmful, and should not be part of behavioral health treatment

## Healthy Approaches

When working with LGBTQ children and youth, child welfare systems should offer developmentally therapeutic approaches that:

- ▶ Affirm sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE)
- ▶ Comprehensively evaluate identity development and exploration<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ Identify and work to reduce sources of distress for LGBTQ children and youth<sup>9</sup>
- ▶ Engage parents, guardians, and caregivers<sup>10</sup>
- ▶ Consider school and community interventions<sup>11</sup>
- ▶ Use LGBTQ-inclusive language related to family and relationship status<sup>12</sup>

### Supporting Positive Development

Child welfare systems should promote resilience and positive development in LGBTQ children and youth. Developing social support and reducing or eliminating experiences of rejection in family, community, school, and health care environments has been shown to have significant positive impacts on health and well-being.<sup>13</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2015). *Ending conversion therapy: Supporting and affirming LGBTQ youth*. Retrieved from <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Ending-Conversion-Therapy-Supporting-and-Affirming-LGBTQ-Youth/SMA15-4928>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Campaign. (2016). *All children—all families: Benchmarks of LGBTQ cultural competency*. Retrieved from <http://www.hrc.org/resources/benchmarks-of-lgbtq-cultural-competency>

<sup>13</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Ending conversion therapy: Supporting and affirming LGBTQ youth*.

For more information, visit

<https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/lgbtq/>

