

Identifying LGBTQ Affirming Homes¹

An LGBTQ affirming home is one with foster parents who publicly declare that all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are welcome and encouraged to live authentically in all aspects of family life, where all children are treated with respect and dignity, and foster parents diligently work to meet their children's unique needs.

Core Competencies Meeting ACS Definition of Affirming Homes²

Welcome and encouraged to live authentically in all aspects of family life:

- Encourage LGBTQ child to speak openly and honestly about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity with family
- Welcome LGBTQ child to participate in all family activities authentically
- Invite your child's LGBTQ friends and partner to your home and to family events and activities
- Work to make your community groups (i.e. faith and/or social community groups) supportive of LGBTQ members or find a supportive community group that welcomes your family and LGBTQ child

Treated with respect and dignity:

- Treat your LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ children equally
- Require that other family members, including extended family members and close friends, respect your LGBTQ child
- Express affirmation and acceptance when your child tells you or when you learn that your child is LGBTQ
- Believe your child can have a happy future as an LGBTQ adult

Diligently work to meet unique needs of LGBTQ youth:

- Talk with LGBTQ child about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity
- Support your child's LGBTQ identity even though you may feel uncertain
- Advocate for your LGBTQ child when they are mistreated because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity
- Seek assistance from case planner or agency representative as needed to advocate for youth (i.e. school bullying, accessing competent medical/mental healthcare, etc)
- Bring your family to LGBTQ organizations and/or events

¹ For the purposes of this document, "affirming homes" includes both familial and congregate care settings for children and youth in foster care.

² From: Supportive Families, Healthy Children: Helping Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Children by Caitlin Ryan, 2009, Family Acceptance Project, San Francisco State University. Copyright 2009 by Caitlin Ryan.

- Connect your child with an LGBTQ adult role model to show them options for the future
- Support your child's gender expression, or the way they communicate their deeply felt sense of being male, female, both, or neither.
- Communicate regularly with case planner and inform them of any issues, concerns or barriers to meeting the needs of an LGBTQ youth as they occur

Homefinders' Questions to Assess LGBTQ-Affirming Homes: Pre-Service

1. How would you describe your level of comfort with speaking with a foster child about his/her sexual orientation or gender identity?
 - From one to ten, one being very uncomfortable and ten being extremely comfortable – Explain and if low what would you need to help you increase your comfort level?
2. How would you prepare your birth children, other foster care children and other family members for the arrival of an LGBTQ child?
3. Tell me about how you would challenge bias and hateful statements in the home and your community.
4. Would you welcome an LGBTQ youth's friends and partners into your home? Why or why not and please explain your answer.
5. If your foster child wants to wear clothing known to be attached to his/her gender identity, how would you handle it?
6. Describe your comfort level with using preferred names and pronouns.
 - From one to ten, one being very uncomfortable and ten being extremely comfortable – Explain and if low what would you need to help you increase your comfort level?
7. How would you go about connecting a youth to an LGBTQ organization or event? How familiar are you with ways to locate LGBTQ resources/supportive environments outside of your home?
8. An adolescent view of their own sexual orientation and gender expression can change and evolve over time. As a foster parent, how do you envision supporting a foster child in your home whose thoughts around their own sexual orientation and gender expression may develop or change as they get older?
9. What assistance/training do you think you and your family may need in order for you to better understand and offer an LGBTQ-affirming home?

Homefinders/Case Planners' Ongoing Assessment of LGBTQ Affirming Homes: In-Service

1. Homefinder to assess living space during annual reauthorization period to examine safety, permanency and well-being and determine if LGBTQ youth receives ongoing support to live authentically as described on page 1 above.
2. Case Planner or Homefinder to discuss any changes in the home that may have affected or have the potential to affect the LGBTQ youth safety, permanency and well-being.
3. Case Planner to complete the Youth Voice Questions form during the Foster Parents annual reauthorization period and discuss pre-service questions above to plan accordingly and prepare a certified foster family to more fully support and affirm a LGBTQ youth in care.³
4. Case Planner to interview foster parent and youth separately, and jointly, on a monthly basis to address family planning, safety, permanency and well-being of LGBTQ youth considering if the core competencies of an affirming home are being met as described above.

Reporting Inappropriate Housing Placements

If inappropriate housing placements for LGBTQ children and youth arise from incidents outlined below, supervisory and management staff members are required to treat all such incidents as serious and follow up promptly. In accordance with Children's Services' policy and procedures, alleged violations of the [ACS LGBTQ Policy: Promoting a Safe and Respectful Environment for LGBTQ Youth and their Families Involved in the Child Welfare, Detention and Juvenile Justice System](#) by staff, parents, or youth will be investigated promptly and, if determined to have occurred, will result in the enforcement of corrective and/or disciplinary action. All such incidents also must be reported to the assigned Family Court Legal Services attorney.

Concrete examples of incidents to report are included below. Inquiries to report include questions of reportable incidents and resource requests. For all legal-related inquiries, the assigned FCLS attorney must first be informed. When filing an incident or inquiry, please be sure to fill out *FSS 009, ACS LGBTQ Incident/Inquiry Form*, and submit it electronically to LGBTQ@dfa.state.ny.us.

- Failure of staff to make appropriate efforts to place a LGBTQ youth in an affirming home or facility that treats them with respect and works to recognize and meet the youth's specific needs.
- Failure to assess whether a prospective foster parent's attitude about the child's actual or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity will impact the child's safety or places the child at risk. Attitudes include:
 - Refusal to foster/adopt a LGBTQ youth, and only willing to accept a child who identifies as "straight," or non-LGBTQ.

³ New York State Children and Family Services, *Youth Voice Questions Form*, found at: http://ocfs.state.nyenet/admin/forms/Foster_Care/.

- Upon asking if a prospective parent would be willing to house a LGBTQ youth, the individual reacts with verbally offensive language, ridicules, or expresses negative views about LGBTQ people.
- Upon asking if a prospective parent would be willing to house a transgender or gender non-conforming youth, the parent states that they would not allow the child to dress or participate in gender-specific activities in accordance with their gender identity and/or refusal to respect their chosen name and/or gender pronouns.
- LGBTQ youth has expressed concern about a recent placement due to fear that the parent would harm them, or allow them to be harmed emotionally and/or physically because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or another reason.
- Upon disclosure of a youth's sexual orientation and/or gender identity to current foster parent, parent request to remove LGBTQ youth from home.

If you have further questions on how to identify an LGBTQ affirming home, please be sure to contact the ACS Office for LGBTQ Policy and Practice by emailing LGBTQ@dfa.state.ny.us.