

Considerations for LGBTQ Children and Youth in Foster Care

Exploring Normalcy as It Relates to P.L. 113–183

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) children and youth deserve the same opportunities for growth and learning as their non-LGBTQ peers, yet they often face misunderstanding, discrimination, and rejection.

What is Normalcy?

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (P.L. 113–183) requires child welfare agencies to promote normalcy and well-being for children and youth in foster care. Normalcy means creating age-appropriate experiences for these youth and taking other steps to support healthy development.

P.L. 113–183 defines “age or developmentally appropriate” activities as:

“Activities or items that are generally accepted as suitable for children of the same chronological age or level of maturity or that are determined to be developmentally appropriate for a child, based on the development of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities that are typical for an age or age group.”¹

LGBTQ youth require the same opportunities for growth and learning as their non-LGBTQ peers; however, they often face misunderstanding, discrimination, and rejection that threatens normalcy. These challenges ultimately may limit development or lead to a higher risk of mental and physical health issues.

¹ Social Security Administration. 2014. Compilation of the Social Security Laws, P.L. 113–183, Approved September 29, 2014 (128 Stat. 1919): Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (sec. 111(1)). Retrieved from https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/comp2/F113-183.html

Creating Normalcy for LGBTQ Children and Youth

Research shows that adults who respond to LGBTQ children and youth with accepting behaviors promote a greater sense of well-being as compared to those that respond with rejecting behaviors.² Child welfare systems promote accepting behaviors by:

- w Training staff to be comfortable discussing sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE)³
- w Creating emotionally and physically safe spaces for LGBTQ children and youth⁴
- w Training staff to be familiar with sexuality and gender terminology and concepts⁵
- w Developing policies that address normalcy considerations for LGBTQ children and youth

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2014. A Practitioner's Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children. Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/PEP14-LGBTKIDS/PEP14-LGBTKIDS.pdf>

³ National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections. (n.d.). Twenty Things Supervisors Can Do to Support Workers to Competently Practice with LGBTQ Children, Youth, and Families. Retrieved from http://nrcpfc.org/is/downloads/TwentyThingsSupervisorsNeedtoKnow_Practice_with_LGBTQ_CYF.pdf

⁴ Girl's Best Friend Foundation & Advocates for Youth. 2005. Creating Safe Space for GLBTQ Youth: A Toolkit. Retrieved from <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/safespace.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

Table 1. Examples of LGBTQ Youth Normalcy Considerations

Normal Childhood/ Adolescent Activities	Examples of Additional Considerations for LGBTQ Youth
Field trips, camps, and sleepovers	Should the “same-sex only sleepovers” rule be modified for gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth? If so, how? Will transgender youth be allowed to stay with friends who share their gender identity rather than their sex assigned at birth? Are facilities equipped to keep transgender and gender non-conforming youth safe and comfortable? How will you keep the rules fair and consistent between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth?
Sports and extracurricular activities	Will an out, gay boy be safe and accepted on the football team? What will be his experience regarding coaches,Considss0.ng,104 99. u53yT.0y,T [5ers