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National Resource Center
for In-Home Services

A service of the Children's Bureau, a member
of the T/TA Network

IN PRACTICE

In-Home Services With LGBT Youth and Their Families

SELF-EDUCATION AND SELF-AWARENESS

- Recognize that family, school and community stigmatization of a youth's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity diversity may underlie youths' truancy, runaway behavior, substance use, other acting out behavior, abuse and neglect and familial disruption.
- Explore your own biases, feelings, beliefs and attitudes toward diversity in sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
- Educate yourself about the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity, the diversity and complexity of sexual and gender identities, the psychosocial strengths and needs of LGBTQ youth and potential foci of interventions.
- Identify mental and physical health care professionals who specialize in serving transgender children and adolescents.

WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

- Explore with family members their reactions to the LGBTQ child's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Do not assume that family preservation efforts or reconnection with family members are destined to fail if family members react negatively to their children's sexual orientation and/or gender iden-

tity. Family members can increase their acceptance with supportive interventions.

- Educate family members about the deleterious effects of rejecting behaviors on the health and well-being of LGBTQ youth. Share and review with them the free booklet from the Family Acceptance Project™ (see Resources for Further Information at the end of this brief).
- Correct myths and stereotypes and provide psychoeducational support and information.
- Help family members decrease highly rejecting behaviors and increase accepting behaviors. Provide family members with empathic support for feelings of grief, loss, anger, fear, shame, and guilt.
- Refer family members to knowledgeable community professionals and LGBTQ-affirmative spiritual/religious leaders.
- Normalize diversity in sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity. Help family members accept their child's complexity and not pathologize their child.
- Discourage family members from seeking aversive treatments that claim to change sexual orientation and gender variant expression. Educate family members on the harmful effects of these approaches.

WITH YOUTH

- Use inclusive language with youth when exploring their romantic and sexual desires, behaviors, concerns, and identities (e.g., “partner,” “special person,” or “girlfriend or boyfriend”; “Have you been dating anyone? A girl? A boy? Girls and boys?” “Have you been feeling attracted to girls or boys, or to both?”) When discussing sexual behaviors, ask all youth, “Have you been/are you sexually active with males, females, or with both males and females?”
- Affirm, validate, and accept youths’ expressions of gender variance; same-gender attractions, desires, and behaviors; and self-identification and confusion.
- With transgender youth, respect their wishes by using their preferred names and pronouns, and do not demand or enforce stereotypical gender behavior.
- Ask LGBTQ youth about their relationships with their family members, the extent to which they are “out” to family members, and their family members’ reactions to their disclosure.
- Treat youths’ sexual orientation and gender identity the way you handle any other confidential information. If disclosure is necessary to protect or secure a benefit for the youth, disclosure should not occur without actively engaging the youth in a discussion about risks and benefits and securing the youth’s permission.
- Correct myths and stereotypes and provide psychoeducational support and information.
- Help youth find social support, build social connections, and find allies.
- Help youth build adaptive coping strategies to manage stigmatization.

- Help youth envision and plan for a positive and productive future.

ASSESS FAMILY-RELATED PSYCHOSOCIAL STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

- Explore cultural values, beliefs and meanings related to sexuality, gender roles, marriage, childrearing, and familial expectations of children, adolescents and adults.
- Explore familial awareness of the youth’s sexual orientation or gender identity (e.g., Do family members know? Were they told? By whom? Did they find out another way? How long have they known? Reactions?)
- Assess for actual or anticipated risks (e.g., violence, being thrown out of the house) and benefits (e.g., better relationships) in disclosing.
- Explore family members’ actual or anticipated attitudes.
- Ask about the presence of other LGBTQ people in the lives of family members.
- Assess for other family stressors (e.g., substance use, mental illness, family violence, financial stress, divorce).
- Explore youths’ histories of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse and/or neglect.
- Assess family members’ coping responses to crises and other challenges.

(DeCrescenzo & Mallon, 2002; Elze, 2006; Hershberger & D’Augelli, 2000; Lev, 2004; Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2009; Ryan, 2009, 2010; Ryan & Futterman, 1998; Wilber, Ryan, & Marksamer, 2006).