



To the End of the Rainbow and Back

Resource Guide for Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth
in Human and Social Services

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Photo courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development



INTRODUCTION

To the End of the Rainbow and Back is a resource guide designed by Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI), through the generous funding of DYCD for organizations that partner with communities, including human and social services, civic and arts organizations, and others within the nonprofit sector. This toolkit can be utilized by all frontline staff, supervisors, and managers with the goal of increasing knowledge, skills, and resources to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ+) youth feel safer and more included in programming.

New York City has long been a place of refuge for many LGBTQ+ people seeking respite from their less affirming, less inclusive, and often more dangerous communities. The allure of that refuge, though, spoke mostly to the needs of LGBTQ+ adults. It wasn't until in the mid-1980's that organizations like Hetrick-Martin Institute (then The Institute for the Protection of Gay and Lesbian Youth) began to advocate on behalf of LGBTQ+ youth, and eventually other youth-serving organizations began to follow that lead.

Photo courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) is leading the effort for LGBTQ+ inclusion in the field among government funders. In 2016, HMI partnered with DYCD to create *Guidance for Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth*, a one-page guide offering direction toward inclusive and safer programs.

Now, HMI is offering an expansion of that direction with *To the End of the Rainbow and Back*, hoping to meet the growing need of providers with an in-depth, step-by-step resource guide to ensuring that the dignity of all youth, especially LGBTQ+ youth, is affirmed, nurtured, and celebrated.

Both DYCD and HMI recognize that cultivating environments of safety for LGBTQ+ youth will require providers to deeply reflect on their own understandings; politely challenge and transform policies and practices espoused by heterosexism and transphobia; and commit to educating youth and their families about the beauty and diversity of gender and sexuality, especially as youth continue to expand possibilities of being.



Photo courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and
Community Development



FRAMEWORKS AND DATA

To the End of the Rainbow and Back serves as a supplementary resource guide for practitioners whose approach is already underpinned by theories of adolescent development. It is imperative that practitioners who do not yet have familiarity with DYCD's *Promote the Positive* approach review that campaign by clicking [here](#). This resource guide also connects to DYCD's Family Engagement Toolkit which can be found [here](#).

Promote the Positive places an emphasis on improving positive outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities by focusing on protective factors, assets, and strengths. The campaign also aims to provide opportunities and supports for all participants to foster social and emotional competencies and leadership skills through the adaption of frameworks like Positive Youth Development (PYD), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and Youth Leadership.

Familiarizing oneself with the *Promote the Positive* campaign in conjunction with utilizing this resource guide will surely enhance youth-work practitioners' abilities to support LGBTQ+ youth.

Additionally, youth-work practitioners seeking to utilize *To the End of the Rainbow and Back* should also familiarize themselves with DYCD's *Circles of Support Family Engagement Framework and Toolkit*, or *CoS*.

CoS aims to help community-based organizations (CBOs) build strong communities through communication, participation, and partnership. More specifically, *CoS* underscores that respect for family culture, language, ethnicity, gender, and gender identity is paramount to doing this work. And perhaps most importantly, *CoS* helps providers to consider individuals' and families' needs, which vary across participants' developmental stages.

HMI and DYCD encourage all those seeking to build better program environments for LGBTQIA+ youth to use both this resource guide as well as the *CoS*, as they are mutually beneficial. To access *DYCD's Circles of Support Family Engagement Framework and Toolkit*, or *CoS*, click [here](#).



Photo courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

DYCD and HMI are committed to ensuring that the needs of the varying communities we serve are met in ways that are sustainable, empowering, and thoughtful. Part of that charge is to first ascertain who comprises our communities through data collection and analysis. Subsequently, HMI and DYCD develop strategies that address the unique challenges members of our communities are encountering in hopes of creating more generative and equitable outcomes.

To this end, DYCD and HMI ask that providers encourage their participants and their families to complete all parts of the *DYCD Universal Application*, including the inquiries on gender identity and sexual orientation. More specifically, we are asking that providers offer technical assistance to young people and their families who may be unsure of terminology, uncertain about why this ask is important, or express sentiments that do not align with DYCD's commitment to creating a safer, inviting space for all people, including LGBTQ+ youth.



Photo courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development



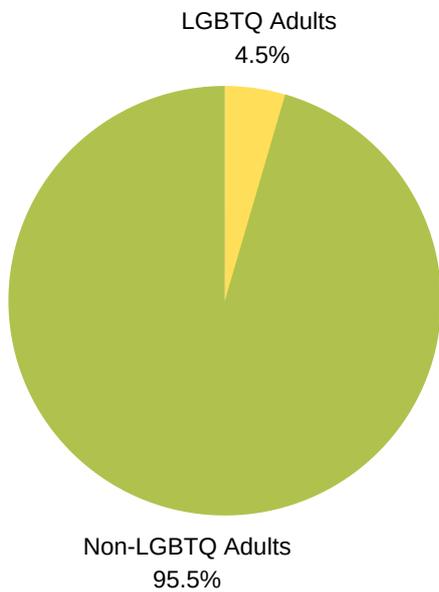
Common misconceptions about questions related to gender identity are to be expected. This will be particularly true for communities in which the English language is not the primary mode of communication.

Thus, providers should utilize this resource guide to deepen their understanding of gender and sexuality with the hopes of strengthening their abilities to help youth and their families to feel comfortable and confident in answering these questions.

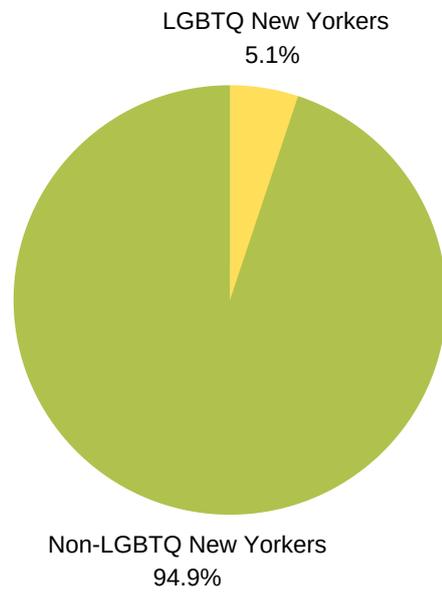
Additionally, developing a system for adjusting responses is paramount for youth who do not feel safe enough to answer these questions honestly. Research from The Trevor Project estimates that upwards of 33 percent of youth fear disclosing their LGBTQ+ identity to their parents or guardians, so it stands to reason that initial responses to these questions may shift upon creating opportunities to answer truthfully outside the supervision of their caretakers.

The following data sets are examples of what DYCD and HMI hope to capture so we can begin to create more meaningful and impactful programs for the youth we serve.

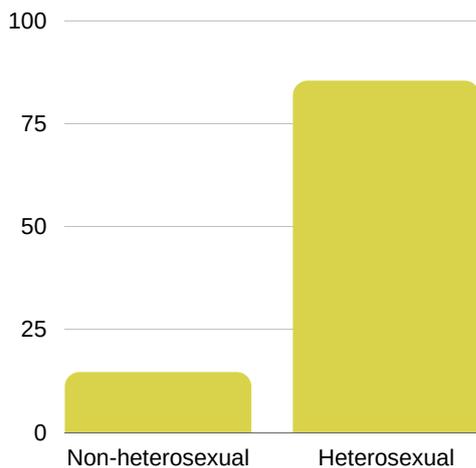
How Americans Are Identifying



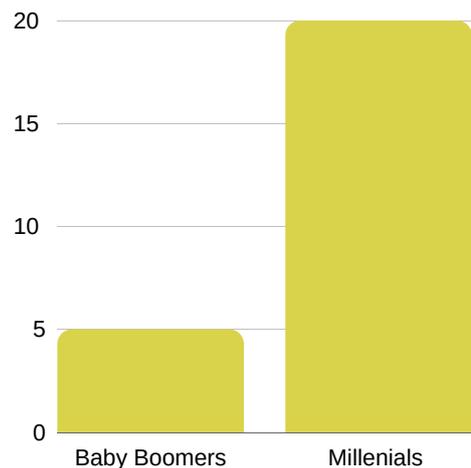
In 2019, an estimated 4.5% of adults identified as LGBTQ+, up from 3.5% in 2012. ^[1]



In 2019, 5.1% of the adult population in New York State identified as LGBTQ+, and 23% of those LGBTQ+ adults are raising children. ^[2]



In 2017, an estimated 14.6% of Generation Z identify as something other than heterosexual. ^[4]



In 2017, an estimated 20% of millennials identify as LGBTQ+ compared to just 5% of baby boomers. ^[3]

THE OVERVIEW

This resource guide contains information detailing how organizations can empower their staff and shift organizational culture to create a safer and more inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ youth and their families. Given the current self-identification trends, youth of the next generation will feel increasingly more comfortable identifying as LGBTQ+ than the preceding generations. This resource guide can prepare providers, well in advance, on how to offer relevant and meaningful support to a historically marginalized community.



"No matter what happens, no one can, not even the government, defeat a community so full of life, color, diversity, and most important, love."

Gavin Grimm
Transgender Youth Activist

This resource guide will provide information and exercises that focus on:

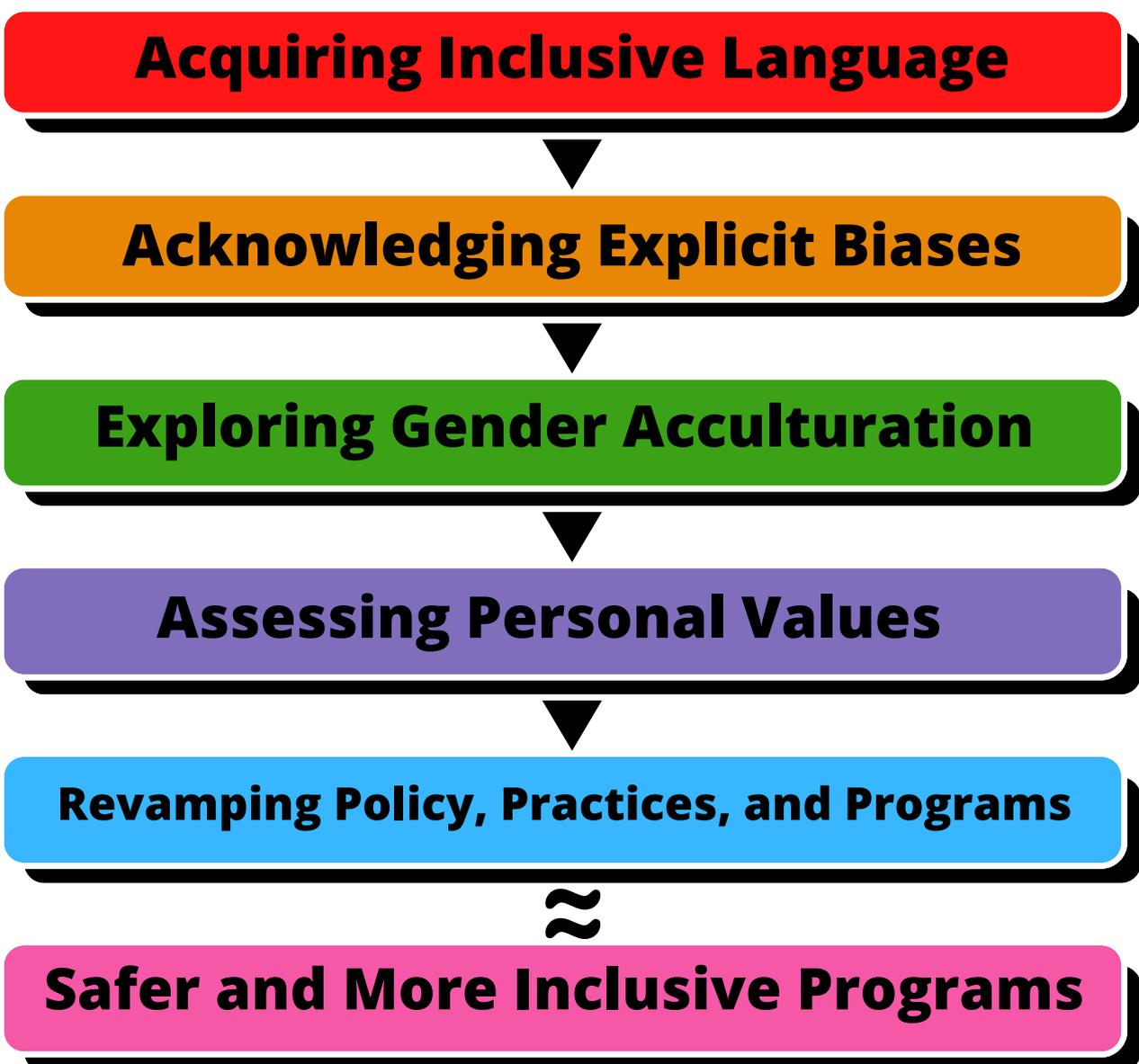
- unlearning misinformation and unpacking internalized assumptions, including information on implicit bias
- addressing how acculturation processes shape perceptions and understandings
- examining personal value systems related to gender identity and sexual orientation
- strengthening existing organizational policies that foster a safer environment for LGBTQ+ youth
- improving organizational practices that support the resilience and self-determination of LGBTQ+ youth
- improving referral strategies for providers working with LGBTQ+ youth, including tips on how to make a trauma-informed referral

The final section of this resource guide includes highlights of well-known and trusted LGBTQ+ youth-serving organizations and resources, as well as a link to *The LGBTQ Guide of Services and Resources*, New York City's most comprehensive directory of LGBTQ resources and services.

Five Steps to Creating a Safer and More Inclusive Space for LGBTQ+ Youth

The Hetrick-Martin Institute has identified just five steps for human services providers that wish to create a program environment that is welcoming, affirming, and nurturing for LGBTQ+ youth. Starting with interpersonal and culminating with structural, each cumulative step helps providers reimagine their role in both creating and maintaining generative and mutually beneficial program environments for youth, their families, and staff.

Below is a flowchart detailing the sequential steps providers can take to ensure they're meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ youth.



A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu purports that: “Language is very powerful. Language does not just describe reality. Language creates the reality it describes.” This has been true for so many organizations fighting for LGBTQ+ equality throughout the last fifty years as it has been for Hetrick-Martin Institute. But even as the nation’s oldest and largest organization serving LGBTQ+ youth and their families, HMI has made many adjustments to the language we utilize when talking about identities and communities. There will be more discussion on and skill-building activities around using inclusive language on the next page.

For the purposes of this toolkit, we will use the acronym LGBTQ+. In other resources you might read LGBT+, LGBTQIA+, LGBTQQIP2SAA+, or some other constellation of letters representing communities of people who don’t identify as cisgender or heterosexual. Here, the ‘+’ is meant to represent those aforementioned communities and is no way a reflection of erasure.

NYC-based social services providers support some of the most diverse and vibrant communities in the country. In fact, according to census data studied by American news outlet *Axios*, Queens boasts the most racial and ethnic diversity of all large counties in the United States⁵¹ Noting that, it is imperative to recognize the language used here may not reflect the same or similar language used by the LGBTQ+ youth your organization serves.



Definitions Matching Game

Trying to remember the entire gender and sexuality lexicon is futile and in practice, pointless. Definitions, especially regarding identities, are and will always be relative. However, being familiar with language is important to understand the diversity of gender and sexuality in the LGBTQ+ community. Below you'll find some of the most commonly used language to describe different aspects of gender and sexuality. Try to correctly match the terms with their corresponding definitions!

(Answers on page 35)

- (A) LGBTQ+ (B) Cisgender (C) Queer (D) Transgender
(E) ASAB (F) Non-Binary (G) Intersex (H) Gender Identity
(I) Gender Expression (J) Sexual Orientation (K) The Gender Binary

(1) Acronym meaning assigned sex at birth. Nobody gets to choose their sex assignment.

(2) A system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two, opposite categories, termed "male and female," in which no other possibilities for gender or anatomy are believed to exist.

(3) An umbrella term for all genders other than female/male or woman/man and can be used as an adjective.

(4) A term for someone who exclusively identifies as their sex assigned at birth.

(5) Describes a person with a less common combination of hormones, chromosomes, and anatomy that are used to assign sex at birth.

(6) Acronym meaning lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning/queer; the plus sign articulating other identities that aren't named.

(7) A person's physical, romantic, emotional, aesthetic, and/or other form of attraction to others.

(8) An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

(9) General term for marginalized gender and sexual populations who are not cisgender or heterosexual; this word is still sometimes used as a hateful slur so be careful with its use.

(10) The physical appearance of a person; may or may not align with their gender identity and intersects with other aspects of identity.

(11) A person's deep, internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or other gender(s).

Reframing Language as a Tool of Inclusivity

Human services providers' ability to correctly and affirmatively use terms is imperative to building a safer and more inclusive environment, especially for LGBTQ+ youth. Below are examples of how youth-work practitioners can reframe commonly held beliefs about LGBTQ+ people using the affirming, accurate, and inclusive language in the definition matching game.

Initial Statement: "Kayla was born a boy and then she became a girl last year."

Reframe: "Kayla's sex assigned at birth was male, but once she was given the space to define herself for herself, she let us know that she is in fact a girl."

Initial Statement: "Brian was born with both parts, like a hermaphrodite."

Reframe: "Brian was born intersex, and that doesn't tell us much about his body nor is it important for us to know in order for us to welcome and support him."

Initial Statement: "This group is for biological girls and transgender girls."

Reframe: "We serve all girls: both cisgender girls, or girls who were assigned female at birth, and transgender girls, girls who weren't assigned female at birth."

Initial Statement: "I'm not sure what that young person is -- a boy or a girl."

Reframe: "We can't know a young person's gender identity unless we ask and should only do so if there is a programmatic need."

Initial Statement: "I don't know why Jonovia dresses like such a boy; she's so pretty."

Reframe: "Jonovia's gender expression is perfectly fine, and how she chooses to express herself isn't a reflection of her attractiveness or worth."

Initial Statement: "How does Allen identify again? Something like an in-between?"

Reframe: "Perhaps you might want to check in with Allen again, but I have a sneaking suspicion the word you might want to use is non-binary, which simply means Allen doesn't identify within the gender binary."

Initial Statement: "I think the queer youth feel safe enough to participate in our groups now! A lot of them have been coming to my group."

Reframe: "That's great! By chance are you talking about the students who identify as LGBTQ+? If so, you might want to ask them if the word 'queer' is appropriate to use in reference to them as it can still be used as a pejorative."

Initial Statement: "Sam is into that gay thing, but the rest of our youth are straight."

Reframe: "Sam's sexual orientation, like everyone else's in this program, including youth who are gay, bisexual, lesbian, or something else, is normal."



It is important to hold all terms with “an open palm as opposed to a closed fist,” mostly because what a term means in one space or community may look different for people outside of that space or community. The following is an example of how you can support youth when they disclose either their gender identity or sexual orientation:

"Thank you for telling me. I know that took a lot of courage and I feel honored that you told me that. What does that mean for you? How can I support you with this?"

Below are two of many online resources offering comprehensive lists of terms most commonly used when discussing gender and sexual orientation:

Refinery29

<https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/lgbtq-definitions-gender-sexuality-terms>

It's Pronounced Metrosexual

<https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2013/01/a-comprehensive-list-of-lgbtq-term-definitions/>



Photo courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

RESOURCES FOR ELEMENTARY-AGE YOUTH

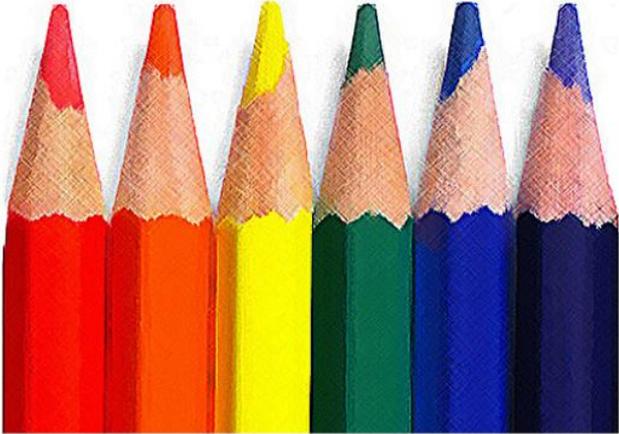
Attempting to find developmentally appropriate ways to explain the concepts of gender identity and sexual orientation is perhaps a bit more challenging for providers supporting elementary-age youth. And quite frankly, there is a dearth of readily available and accessible material to do so.

HMI recommends approaching the topic of gender identity and sexual orientation with elementary-age students by attempting to build a sense of empathy, or that other people have thoughts and feelings that are separate from their own. *Fatherly*, a digital lifestyle brand that provides news, expert advice, product recommendations, and other resources for parents, created a video about teaching youth ages 3-7 content that mirrors how HMI approaches teaching concepts of gender identity and sexual orientation. You can view that video [here](#).

Queerly Elementary, a consulting firm dedicated to creating more inclusive elementary school classrooms, offers a unique way of introducing topics related to gender identity and sexual orientation: storytelling.

Photo courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and
Community Development





QUEERLY ELEMENTARY

Creating Inclusive K-12 Schools

Former elementary school educator and founder of *Queerly Elementary*, Olivia Higgins, approaches educating younger adolescents about sexual orientation by first getting them to explore their own feelings and ideas about families, using family membership as a reference point.

For example, in one of her activities Olivia asks students to recall who is in their immediate families (e.g., mom, dad, sister) and asks what feelings they have about their families (e.g., happiness, joy, safety). Students then compare and contrast their families to hers and one another's, highlighting similarities and differences.

She then notes that some of the differences are about the sexual orientations of the parents, and

introduces terminology and language used to describe different types of sexual orientations, like the terms "gay" and "lesbian."

Next, Olivia seeks to see if youth can name a few openly gay and visible popular culture stars, like George Tekai and Ellen DeGeneres, in an effort to highlight that students probably already know gay and lesbian people, as well as are fond of them.

Lastly, she explains some of the ways that LGBTQ+ people can express their pride by explaining the meaning of the rainbow flag and why many people display it in their homes, and at their places of employment and worship. She also invites youth to create their own pride flag, which you can see here in this [video](#).

A key way that youth learn about their sense of self and others is through reading stories. Though there are not nearly enough resources about gender identity and sexual orientation for younger youth, HMI has located a list of book recommendations for providers supporting elementary-age youth to peruse. Click [here](#) to see list.

ACKNOWLEDGING IMPLICIT BIASES IN YOUTH WORK



Even with the best of intentions, youth service providers can sometimes cause harm to the youth they are serving in their programs. More often than not with LGBTQ+ youth, the source of the harm comes from the provider's lack of knowledge concerning issues of gender and sexual orientation.

Providers often attend workshops on LGBTQ+ youth, but what's usually missing is meaningful discussion about implicit bias. Implicit bias, or implicit social cognition, refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and political correctness. Rather, implicit biases are not accessible through introspection. [6]

Our implicit biases impact nearly every thought we have and even the most progressively minded people possess them. These biases shape our perceptions of gender identity and gender expression. Though they don't always directly inform our value systems and declared beliefs, it is important that youth service providers take the necessary steps to unlearn these implicit biases to prevent unintended harm.

A 2015 study based on data from the Sexuality Implicit Assessment Test (IAT) found that heterosexual physicians, nurses, and other health care providers implicitly favored heterosexual people over gay and lesbian people. Not only do gay and lesbian people face such bias from others, but even people who identify as a sexual minority can internalize bias against their own group. In one IAT study, 38 percent of lesbians and gay men had implicit preferences for straight people. Many people have internalized these anti-LGBT+ biases; therefore, providers must do the work of learning where their own biases show up.^[7]

Project Implicit is a nonprofit organization and international collaborative of researchers who are interested in implicit social cognition. The mission of *Project Implicit* is to educate the public about bias and to provide a “virtual laboratory” for collecting data on the internet. *Project Implicit* scientists produce high-impact research that forms the basis of our scientific knowledge about bias and disparities. Through Harvard University, Project Implicit offers tests to assess your implicit biases.^[8]

Follow the link to participate:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>



Watch Jodi's Story Here

"Like his grandmothers before him, Penelope has made demands too -- that his voice be heard, that the world fall in line with him. Penelope, like the rest of our clan, is more than a bundle of expectations. He is more than one thing. More than what we see. And he most certainly is not a girl. His declaration of self, his total dismissal of conformity and expectation is elemental -- etched into his DNA by his ancestors."

Jodie Patterson
Activist, Author, Mom

THE ACCULTURATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Gender reflects the beliefs, notions, and behaviors that a given culture ascribes to people based upon their sex assigned at birth, or where they fit in a fixed biological category. Gender identity refers to a person's deep, internal sense of gender and is often referred to as a person's "brain sex" while gender expression describes how someone chooses to express that sense of gender. [9]

Though gender is constructed, it informs so much of what people believe and enact. Examples may include: the process of naming children; deciding what type of clothing is appropriate to wear; acceptable activities for children to engage in; suitable career aspirations and professions; hobbies; hairstyles; and so much more. It is as important to recognize how these constructs shape the social mores of a society as it is to source where those expectations stem from, particularly for those in the social services industry.

There is no universal understanding of gender (and subsequently gender identity and gender expression) because the construction of gender in any given place, at any given time, is unique.

The process of shaping those views can be informed by the following:

- Racial Identity
- Religious Affiliation
- Region or Place of Birth
- Culture
- Age
- Educational Access
- Class or Wealth Status



Photos courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

For example, prior to the arrival of the British colonizers into what is known as present-day India, indigenous people inhabiting that land understood gender to exist outside of a binary, or a system seen with only two opposite, complementary possibilities. Some of those Indigenous communities constructed their gender models to include a third gender, Hijra, that was typically ascribed to people seen neither as completely man or woman. Soon after the arrival of the British, though, Hijras became to be seen as immoral, and eventually their identities were rendered illegal. Thankfully, in 2016, India officially recognized Hijras as the official third gender of the country.

Whereas gender is about how people understand and present themselves, sexual orientation refers to how a person experiences sexual or emotional attraction to another person.

[10]

Sometimes, that attraction can be based upon gender (gay, bisexual, lesbian) or not based upon gender (asexual, pansexual, demisexual). Orientation has also been described as less of a destination and more of a direction, meaning that people often experience attraction that exists outside of strict definitions.

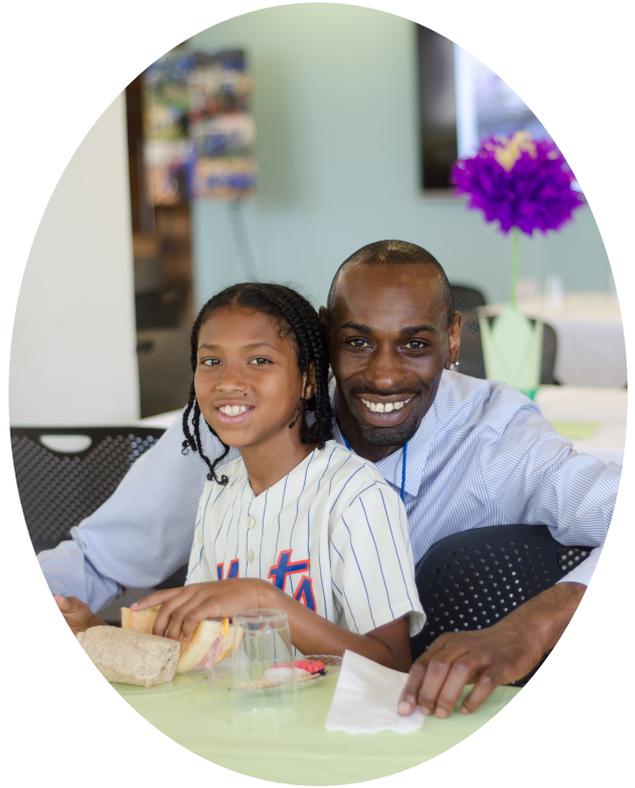
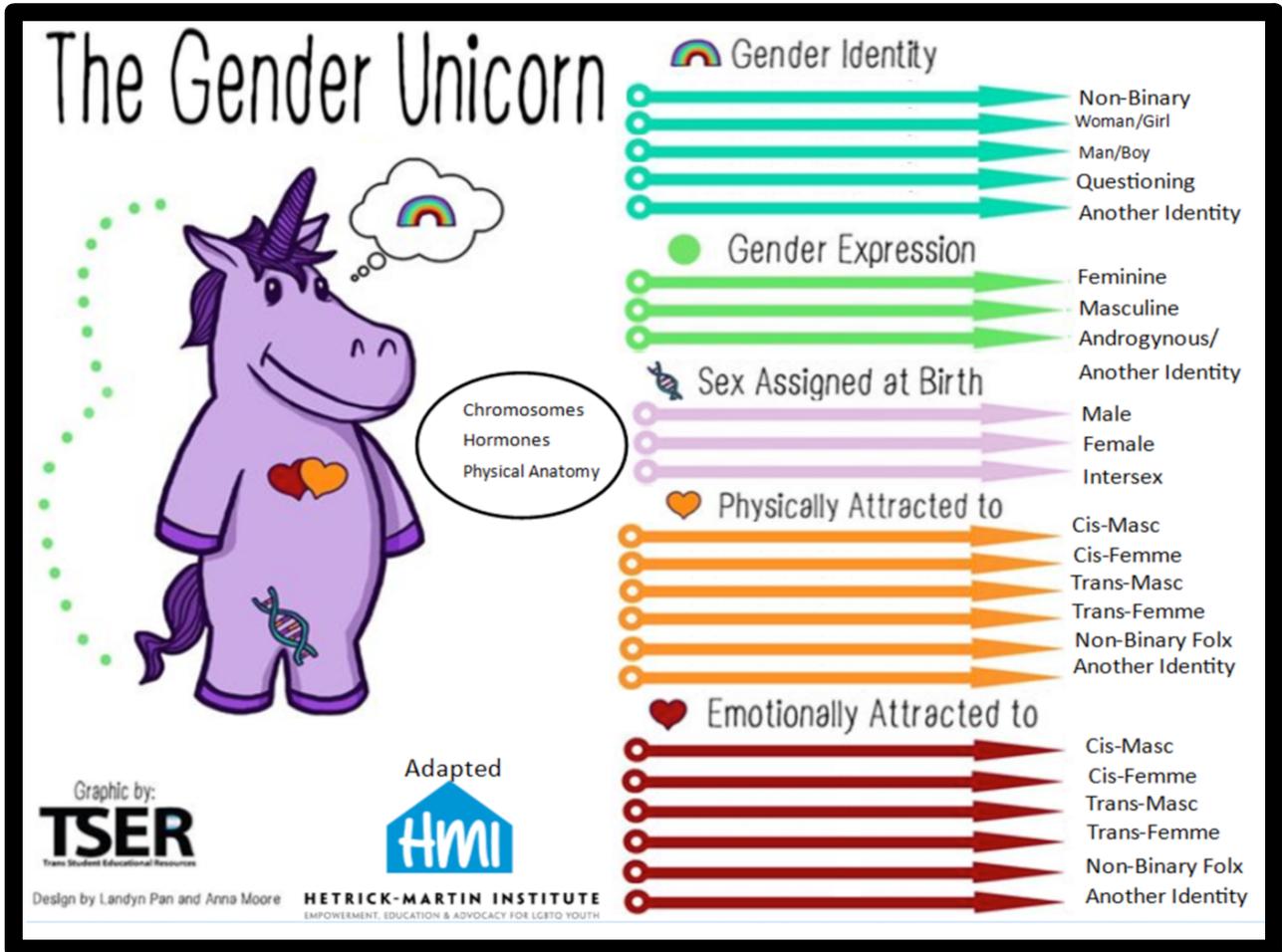


Photo courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

Early messaging about sexual orientation in the United States usually assumes heterosexuality, or that everyone is heterosexual until otherwise disclosed. The messaging typically doesn't highlight attractions that are based solely on romance or exist outside of the confines of the gender binary. This hetero-normative assumption, too, is a reflection of the aforementioned schemas like racial identity, religious affiliation, or culture. In fact, some languages such as Haitian Creole do not include affirming words to describe same-sex attraction or identity.

Inclusive and Traditional Models of Gender and Sexuality

In an effort to shift how people understand the vastness of gender identity and human sexuality, HMI has adapted the Transgender Student Educational Resources (TSER) *Gender Unicorn*. This model is more comprehensive, but not perfect, and will continually be updated to reflect the ever-shifting landscape.



Sex Assigned at Birth

Historically, medical providers determined infants "sex" based solely upon the presence or absence of certain internal or external sex organs. Now, providers recognize that determining sex is much more complicated and is actually informed by chromosomes, hormones, and physical anatomy. Rather than a binary system, researchers find that there is more diversity regarding biological sex and therefore an infant's sex should exist along a continuum that acknowledges such diversity.

Gender Identity

This deep internal sense of how someone understands their gender exists on a spectrum and is not inherently determined by sex assigned at birth. Our inclusive model also reflects that a person may not have a sense of gender at all (represented by the open circles at the end of each continuum). Conversely, a person could feel their gender identity exists on multiple continua and at varying levels given that there is no end to how strongly a person identifies with a gender. For instance, one could identify weakly as a woman but mark themselves strongly on the questioning continuum.

Gender Expression

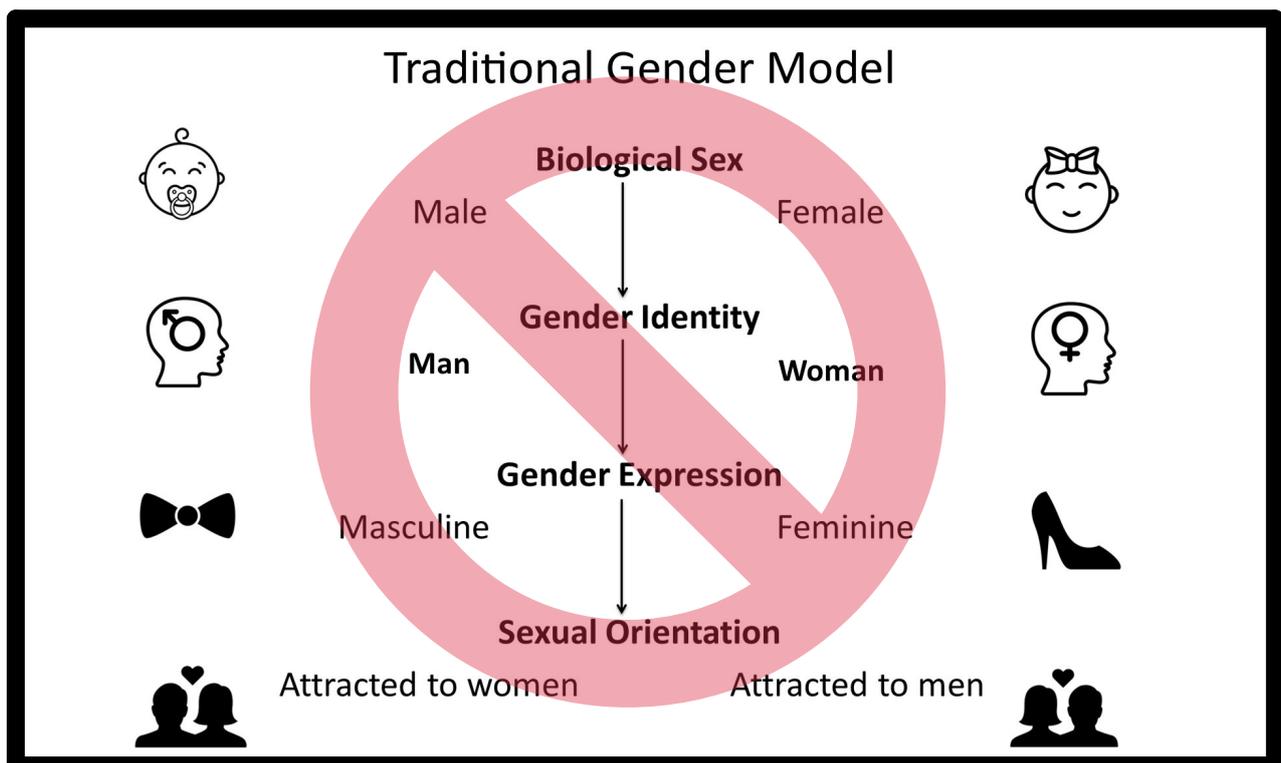
Although many people conflate gender identity and gender expression, these two components of gender are distinct, though they can inform each another. How one expresses their gender can be influenced by culture, religion, region, age, and race, among other things. Gender expression can (and probably will) change over time.

Physical and Emotional Attraction

Physical attraction and romantic attraction are not mutually exclusive. There are people who may experience physical attraction but do not experience romantic attraction, and vice versa. Additionally, there are people who experience neither physical attraction nor romantic attraction, and there are many people who experience both. Whether physical or romantic, attraction exists on a continuum, like gender identity and expression.

Interestingly, some people may experience romantic attraction for certain types of people and physical attraction for other types of people. For example, a lesbian may have both romantic and physical attraction to women, but experience occasional sexual attraction to men. Moreover, it may be noticeable that the inclusive gender unicorn model distinguishes who someone may be attracted to based upon gender identity and expression. This delineation is important, allowing for people to complicate and name their attraction in nuanced ways such as being attracted to all feminine presenting people, regardless of how they may identify.

The inclusive gender model replaces the antiquated traditional gender model (as seen below). This model is scientifically inaccurate and not inclusive of many experiences, particularly of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGTBQIA+) youth and young adults.



(RE)THINKING GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Think back to your early-to-late adolescence. Considering the unique circumstances of your own acculturation, complete the questionnaire by answering prompts as honestly as possible:

- Can you remember where you first learned about gender and sexuality?
- Who were your instructors on the subjects? What did they offer to you?
- What messaging, if any, did you hear about people who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual?
- What messaging, if any, did you hear about people who identified as transgender (or the historical language of transsexual or transvestite)?
- How were LGBTQ+ people referred to in religious and cultural spaces? In television and film? In literature or history?
- How were youth who didn't adhere to certain gender expectations (mannerisms, clothing preferences, interests, etc.) talked about at home? In school? In the community?



**Photos courtesy: NYC
Department of Youth and
Community Development**

THE VALUES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

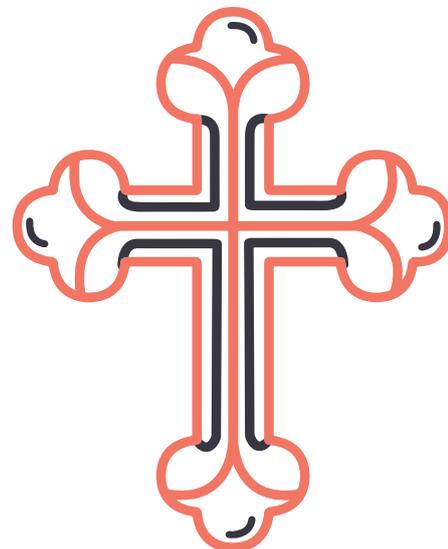
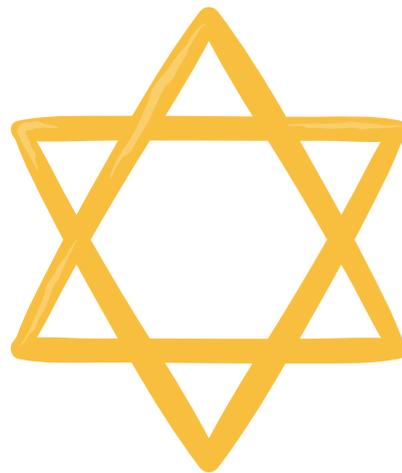
When it comes to youth, the topics of gender and sexuality typically elicit profound feelings steeped in morality and consequently judgment. Not only are most people acculturated to have a particularly rigid understanding of gender and sexuality, but a sense of right and wrong as it relates to how someone, especially a young person, embodies that gender or sexuality.



For LGBTQ+ youth, disclosure of gender identity or sexual orientation can have dire consequences if parents and other family and community members are rejecting. In fact, data suggests that LGB adults who reported high rates of parental rejection in their teens were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more likely to have had unprotected sex than LGB peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection.

[11]

Crucial to the ability to support all youth and young adults in programs, human and social service providers should take an inventory of their own values as they relate to gender and sexuality. This assessment, in conjunction with the implicit bias activities, will allow providers to see where and how they place value on gender and sexuality.



To understand your personal value system as it relates to gender and sexuality, please answer the following questions. Feel free to take all the time you need. We encourage that you write your answers down.

- How would you feel if your child or a child close to you came out to you as LGBTQ+?
- How would you feel if your mother, father, parental figure, or sibling came out to you as LGBTQ+?
- Would you allow your child or a child close to you to be mentored by someone LGBTQ+-identified? Why or why not?
- Have you ever been to an LGBTQ+ community, social, or political event? Why or why not?
- Can you think of three historical figures who were lesbian, gay, or bisexual?
- Can you think of three historical figures who were transgender?
- Have you ever laughed at or made a joke at the expense of LGBTQ+ people?
- Have you ever stood up for an LGBTQ+ person being harassed? Why or why not?
- If you do not identify as LGBTQ+, how would you feel if people thought you were LGBTQ+?
- How would you feel if a trans person expressed romantic or sexual interest in you?
- Are you committed to serving all the youth, including the LGBTQ+ youth, in your programs? If yes, how so?
- How comfortable are you offering sexual health information and resources to LGBTQ+ youth?
- Which LGBTQ+ youth-serving agencies is your organization connected with programmatically? Organizationally?



CREATING A SAFER PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT THROUGH THE P'S

It is impossible for human and social service providers to guarantee safety for any youth, especially LGBTQ+ youth. What providers can offer is the continual utilization of a safer space model by shifting their policies, practices, and programs.

A safer space model is a supportive, nonthreatening environment that encourages open-mindedness, respect, a willingness to learn from others, as well as physical and mental safety. It is a space that is critical of the power structures that impact people in their everyday lives, and where power dynamics, backgrounds, and the effects of said behavior on others are examined, while striving to respect and understand survivors' specific needs.

[12]

Everyone, including providers and youth who enter a safer space, has a responsibility to uphold the values of the space. Because not everyone experiences spaces in the same way, no one set of guidelines to create safety will meet the requirements of everyone. Providers should be alert to how complications or lapses in fulfilling such guidelines in practice will affect youth, especially LGBTQ+ youth whose sense of safety is multi-layered.



POLICY

The human and social services sector has a particularly high staff turnover rate, especially in the direct services to youth division. To ensure that LGBTQ+ youth feel safer within an organization regardless of who is employed at any given time, it is imperative that the organization adopt a general policy prohibiting discrimination, with a transparent process for investigating any complaints made by youth program attendees. It should also include a specific language prohibiting discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

Additionally, organizations need to form committees or advisory groups that are informed of major policy violations, monitor for increases or reductions in major incidents involving LGBTQ+ youth, and provide input into revising or drafting of additional or new policies.

Lastly, there should be a structured process or system for disseminating the policy to staff (inclusive of staff not directly working with youth such as facilities, communications, and security staff).



Photos courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

PRACTICE

Similar with research that correlates the correct pronunciation of a student's name and their academic performance, when people use the chosen names of transgender and non-binary youth, their rates of depression and risk of suicidal ideation decrease. By extension, using the correct personal gender pronouns may also support transgender and non-binary youth and young adults in reducing feelings of psychological distress. [13]

When youth enter into the space, staff should always introduce themselves with their name and Personal Gender Pronouns (PGPs). If the practice of asking for PGPs confuses young people, simply explain what PGPs are and why we ask for them. Responses can include:

- We don't want to make assumptions, so we give all program participants opportunities to tell us which pronouns they use and that feel affirming.
- We want to respect your right to self-identify, so we can only know your name and PGPs if you tell us (we can't assume by looking at you!).
- You do not have to share your Personal Gender Pronouns if you do not want to or do not feel comfortable doing so; your name is just fine.

ASK
ABOUT
— MY —
PRONOUNS



Organizationally, staff should put their pronouns in their email signatures. Staff can also wear pronoun buttons with their PGPs to both share theirs as well as communicate that they are supportive of exploring gender. Lastly, it may be important to have signage around program areas that explain what pronouns are, how they are used in the English language, and examples of different pronouns.

Sometimes young people are selective with whom they choose to share their PGPs. This is a reflection of how youth are able to discern safety for themselves, but also a testament to their resiliency and strength. Youth are experts in their own experience so they know who is safer to share things with, so respect their decisions and follow their lead. If you're talking with a young person's family/custodian, talk with the young person beforehand around the name and pronouns you should use. Again, LGBTQ+ youth often know what will keep them safer.

Other inclusive and affirming practices include:

- organizationally driven and implemented diversity and cultural education initiatives inclusive of LGBTQ+ issues
- gender equitable, expansive, and creative dress codes
- internal and external resources tailored for LGBTQ+ youth, like groups focusing on sexual and reproductive health for transgender youth
- ensuring youth can utilize bathrooms that align with their gender identity without incident, including having an all-gender restroom if possible
- ensuring that documents that contain a young person's legal name and gender markers are kept confidential and all agency records allow for a field that denotes a young person's chosen name and PGPs



Photos courtesy: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

PROGRAMS

Human and social service providers providing programming that incorporates the unique lived experiences of LGBTQ+ youth is paramount to creating a safer and more inclusive environment for this population. Not only should programs and groups be informed by theory, but also sometimes led by LGBTQ+ youth. Organizations should be deliberate in their outreach to and empowerment of LGBTQ+ youth.

Sometimes human and social service providers are unable to meet the specific needs of a youth and refer that youth to other community organizations and resources. While necessary, providers should be mindful that LGBTQ+ youth may experience safety and comfort inside the organizations differently from other youth. To ensure that youth feel safer when accessing a new resource, consider using a trauma-informed method. The process is detailed on the next page.

Possible programming includes: groups focusing on coming out and family acceptance, family counseling, groups focused on the unique barriers faced by LGBTQ+ youth within the workforce and educational settings, and arts and culture programming that allows youth to creatively express their gender identity and sexual orientation.



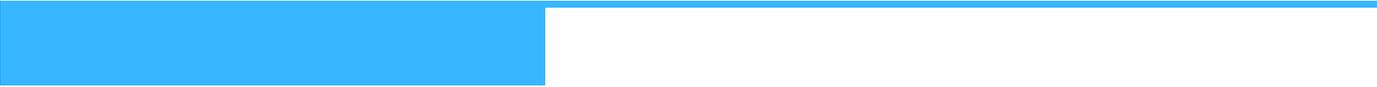
**Photo courtesy:
NYC Department of Youth and Community
Development**

MAKING A TRAUMA- INFORMED REFERRAL

LGBTQ+ youth often encounter barriers engaging and utilizing essential services, like healthcare and community-based resources. It is vital that providers begin to adopt a trauma-informed referral practice. The steps below, adapted from the ***Institute for Health Recovery***, detail how providers should approach referring LGBTQ+ youth to different community resources.

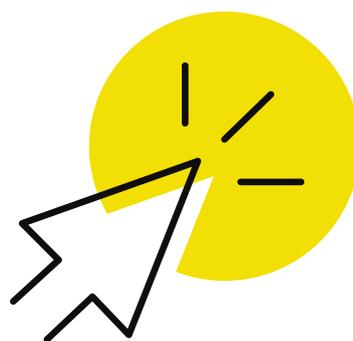
Pre-Meeting with Youth Member

- Identify eligibility requirements including required documentation, location(s) and hours of agency, services provided, childcare options, options for transportation to/from agency, cost of accessing services, insurance(s) accepted, language capacity and available translation services, etc.
- Establish a contact (with a specific name and phone number) at each agency that can be your point person for problem-solving and access issues.
- Walk through accessing the service as though you are a potential youth (*e.g., call for an appointment, go to the site, sit in the waiting room*).
- Make sure to explicitly name what the youth will need to bring with them to their appointment (*e.g., any identification or documents*).
- Share photographs of the physical location (if possible) so that the youth can feel more familiar with the referral.
- If there is an individual provider to whom you are referring, see if that provider is comfortable with making a “head shot” with their picture and name so that the young person has a visual of with whom they will be meeting.




Meeting with Youth Member

- Ask the youth what supports would be helpful for them, and what they have used previously. (*e.g., support groups, managed health care programs*).
- Explore what has and has not worked for the youth in the past when accessing services. For example, if they did not like a particular therapist, they might not be willing to go to another therapist at the same agency.
- Identify the possible agencies that meet the youth's expressed needs.
- Recognize that due to wait lists, referrals to multiple agencies offering similar services might be necessary.
- Share any information about the appropriate agency with the youth, including visual and practical information, so the youth becomes more comfortable and familiar with the referral.
- Encourage the youth to make a call to the service provider, but offer to be present when the call is made in order to provide additional support and to ensure that the youth has scheduled the appointment.
- Generate a list of questions to ask the service provider or agency with the youth before the referral call is made.
- Offer to role-play the phone call with the youth beforehand to increase their comfort level. If the youth is not comfortable making the call themselves, make the call with the youth on a speaker phone if privacy allows.
- Introduce the youth so that they feel fully involved in the process and can ask any questions in your supportive presence.



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Meeting with Youth Member

- When desired by the youth and if appropriate, schedule an initial joint appointment with the new provider for continuation of care and to help ease the transition. If an appointment is scheduled, encourage the youth to write down or put into their phone the appointment date, time, provider name, and contact information.
- Brainstorm with the youth how they will get to their appointment, if they need childcare services, if they need to apply for health insurance or bring a copay, or any other possible barriers to accessing services with the new agency.
- Follow up with youth about the appointment. This may include reminding the youth before the appointment, asking if the youth has any further questions about the referral, and following up on further appointments with the youth. If they have not kept the appointment, discuss why and try to resolve possible ambivalence or barriers.
- If the youth kept their appointment, discuss how the experience was for them. Was the process seamless? Were there unexpected issues? How were they treated by staff? Do they want to continue with the service? Would they recommend this resource to others?

Additional Resources:

The LGBTQ Guide of Services and Resources from the Office of the Comptroller of New York City is the most comprehensive directory of LGBTQ+ resources and services in New York City. For members of the LGBTQ+ community, connecting to services geared toward their needs can be a challenge. This guide is intended to help individuals better understand the resources available, from hundreds of community organizations and health care facilities to counseling and support groups, recreational clubs, and much more. **Click [HERE](#) for access.**

End Notes

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Definition Matching Game Answer Key

1.) **E** 2.) **K** 3.) **F** 4.) **B** 5.) **G** 6.) **A** 7.) **J** 8.) **D** 9.) **C** 10.) **I** 11.) **H**