



#### Decreasing Risk Factors:

- LGBTQ+ youth, like all youth, need support, appropriate adult role models, care, concern, guidance, and flexibility to thrive.
- While LGBTQ+ youth are at a higher risk of suicide, depression, homelessness, and substance abuse, these risk factors can be mitigated by supportive, positive individuals being involved with the youth.
- LGBTQ+ youth who perceive strong support from their families tend to have a decreased risk of mental health concerns and lower risk of substance abuse.

#### LGBTQ+ Resources

There are resources, services, and supports available to Specialists, youth, and families. Reach out to Permanency and Youth Services.

## Engagement with LGBTQ+ Youth

### All youth deserve to be treated respectfully.

- Acceptance or rejection affects the health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth in care.
- All individuals have personal biases and see the world through a lens based on upbringing, cultural backgrounds, and life experiences. Be aware of biases and take action to ensure personal biases do not influence outcomes for young people.
- If a DCS employee observes another employee, service provider, or volunteer making negative jokes or comments, stop the behavior immediately and then communicate the incident to the appropriate department.
- If a youth-in-care is making negative jokes or comments, stop the behavior immediately and then consider what actions to take to help educate the youth to change the behavior. Include having a conversation with the youth and with the caregiver, as appropriate to your role.

### Recognizing and promoting a youth's positive attributes and strengths helps young people feel safe and supported.

- An individual's understanding of their identity can evolve over time. Give the youth time to figure out who they are and explore their identity.
- With the LGBTQ+ youth, let the youth take the lead in determining what name and pronouns they feel comfortable using. Understand youth may try several options before finding what is right and may not feel comfortable using the same name and pronouns in every situation.
- Provide the youth with opportunities to talk about gender and sexuality in a healthy way. This may include linking the youth with behavioral health services and community resources (including school-based, faith-based, and culture-specific services).
- Youth may have "chosen family," which are people not of blood relation who have stepped up to support the youth. Recognize chosen family as valuable members of the youth's life and ensure the youth determines the level of involvement these individuals have in their life.

**Affirming communication can help youth feel supported which increases positive outcomes.**

- Learn ways to discuss gender and sexual orientation with youth.
  - ▶ Ask questions, seek information from others who are comfortable with these conversations, and be honest about knowledge gaps.
  - ▶ Learn what words and terms are derogatory and what behaviors may promote discrimination so actions can be taken to recognize and address these issues.
- A youth may be reluctant to discuss their sexual orientation or gender identity, as they may be unsure how they will be viewed and/or treated. The Specialist should communicate they are there to listen and allow the youth to guide conversations.
- Anticipate concerns about confidentiality. Discuss with the youth if there are situations where they do not feel comfortable or safe being referred to by their stated name and/or pronouns.
- Regularly ask the youth about experiences at home, school, work, and with any service providers. Take time to understand if they feel safe and supported or what needs to change. Advocate on the youth's behalf.
- Connect the youth with resources to help them be aware of how they can advocate for themselves.

**All youth deserve a safe and supportive living arrangement.**

- Check in with the youth regarding what information they are comfortable sharing with a potential caregiver. Share information with the caregiver and find out what support they will need in order to create a safe and supportive living arrangement for a youth.
- During visits to the home and interactions with the caregiver, assist the caregiver to identify and develop specific behaviors that positively support the youth, such as:
  - ▶ Displaying signs of acceptance (i.e. photos of the youth with significant person, décor, media).
  - ▶ Use of inclusive and supportive language by caregivers and others in the home, such as speaking positively about the youth and using the youth's stated name;
  - ▶ Fairness and consistency in expectations about age-appropriate dress, grooming, activities, and adolescent romantic behavior. (i.e. caregiver ensuring that all youth in the home are equally able to participate in culturally and age appropriate services and activities).
  - ▶ Provision of sleeping and bathroom arrangements that are comfortable for the youth, considering privacy and safety needs.
  - ▶ Supportive of participation in social activities such as gay prom, PRIDE, groups through one-n-ten and clubs at school.
  - ▶ Provision of health care and personal hygiene products, consistent with the youth's sexual preference and gender identity/expression.
- If the youth states that they do not feel safe or supported in their current home, the Specialist should gather more information regarding the concerns and take action to address it, such as a Team Decision Making meeting, a Placement Referral, or a Vendor Performance Report.