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Subject:	Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Children & Youth	Page 1 of 8
Approved:	Karen Shea, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: 1/30/2017

Purpose

To provide a safe, healthy, and inclusive environment for all children and youth served by the division.

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Introduction


Exploring one’s sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE) is a normal part of human identity development.

The division is committed to:

- Being respectful of the dignity of all children, youth and families;
- Keeping children and youth safe while meeting their unique needs, regardless of whether these needs are related to their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression; and
- Prohibiting discrimination and bias based on a child or youth’s real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Definitions

Cis(gender): Adjective that means “identifies as their sex assigned at birth”. A cisgender/cis person is not transgender. “Cisgender” does not indicate biology, gender expression, or sexuality/sexual orientation. Note that cisgender does not have an “ed” at the end. In most cases, “trans” and “cis” by themselves are sufficient descriptors.

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Gender Identity: One’s internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or other gender(s).

Gender Expression: The physical manifestation of one’s gender identity through clothing, accessories, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. (typically referred to as masculine or feminine).

LGBTQQIAPP (abbreviated to LGBTQ): A collection of queer identities short for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, pansexual, polysexual. LGBTQQIAPP is often abbreviated to LGBT, LGBTQ, or LGBTQ+. This acronym is sometimes replaced with “queer”.

Sexual Orientation: A person’s enduring physical, romantic, emotional, and/or other form of attraction to others.

SOGIE: An acronym that stands for sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Trans(gender): An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life. Note that transgender does not have an “ed” at the end. In most cases, “trans” and “cis” by themselves are sufficient descriptors.

LGBTQ terminology changes over time to reflect individuals’ identities. The best approach is to talk to one another, listen to how people self-identify, and use language and pronouns that work best for each person. Additional terms and definitions are available here: <http://www.outrightvt.org/terms-definitions/>


Policy

All division staff are prohibited from engaging in any form of discrimination or bias based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or marital status or partnership.

Division staff shall not attempt to persuade an LGBTQ individual to reject or modify their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Staff will not impose personal or religious beliefs onto children and youth served by the division.

Identity, Name and Pronoun Preferences

Staff will not make assumptions regarding one’s identity. The only way division

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employees can know someone's sexual or gender identity is if the person shares this information. Children and youth may disclose their sexual or gender identity when they feel ready, and if a safe environment and trusting relationship has been established.

Staff will not attempt to convince or coerce a LGBTQ child to disclose or reveal their sexual or gender identity. Direct questioning may make it difficult for an individual to disclose their identity. Staff will use sensitive, gender neutral, and inclusive language to set a tone of respect and dignity.

Division staff will affirm the diversity, dignity, and identity of all children to create a supportive environment. This includes:


- Division staff will talk to children and youth in an open and understanding manner if someone discloses that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning, queer, or gender non-conforming.
- Division staff will support children and youth if they request to use a preferred first name rather than their legal name. Staff will refer to children and youth by the name and pronoun that they prefer which reflects their identity and expression.
- Children and youth will be supported in wearing gender affirming hairstyles, clothing, and accessories.
- All pertinent documentation under the control of the division (case notes, case plans, safety plans, etc.) should contain both the legal and preferred name of the child or youth, and clearly indicate which name is preferred and which name is the legal name.

It is expected that children's identities may evolve and change over time. All children and youth explore their identities and express their sexuality and gender differently. Young people may change the way they identify over time.

Case Planning with LGBTQ Children and Youth

As is true for all children and youth served by the division, LGBTQ children and youth will be encouraged to participate in decision-making and case planning activities. No single approach, accommodation, or plan will apply in all circumstances. Social workers, with the support of their supervisors, must determine the appropriate resources and supports for LGBTQ children and youth on a case-by-case basis, informed by the individual child's needs.

In instances where having information about the child's sexual or gender identity is important to making an informed case decision (which serves the child or youth's best interests and protects their safety), division staff will exercise professional discretion in

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asking for the individual’s sexual or gender identity.

Staff will respect each child, youth and family member’s right to confidentiality, which includes the information shared with parents and resource families. To support the child or youth’s health, safety and well-being, staff must be mindful when a child or youth discloses their LGBTQ identity. This information is sensitive and should be kept confidential. The decision to share this information will be guided by the child or youth’s preferences and wishes. Staff should ask children and youth to what extent they want to disclose this information and to whom.


Division staff will reinforce resilience with LGBTQ children and youth, consistent with the [Youth Thrive](#) framework, by promoting:

- **Youth Resilience** – by assisting youth in identifying and relating to the stress and trauma that they have experienced. LGBTQ youth often experience additional stress and negative behaviors from others and need assistance in overcoming and processing these experiences.
- **Social Connections** – by encouraging and assisting youth in identifying positive and permanent relationships with LGBTQ affirming caring adults. This can also be achieved by ensuring that youth and families are familiar with the resources within their community.
- **Knowledge of Child and Adolescent Development** – by understanding that child brain development is not fully developed and that their reactions, actions, and behavior may frequently change. This does not mean that a youth who identifies as LGBTQ is uncertain of their sexual or gender identity. Young people may change the way they identify over time.
- **Concrete Support in Times of Need** – by ensuring that youth’s needs are met. Social workers should facilitate opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful and strength-based activities that enable an increased sense of self-worth. The youth may desire to be connected to an organization that is relevant to their sexual or gender identity. This does not mean that all LGBTQ youth will want to be referred or connected to a LGBTQ friendly group/organization.
- **Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence** – social workers and caregivers facilitate this by using appropriate pronouns, preferred name, and allowing the youth to wear clothing and accessories of their preference.

Social workers should provide information on LGBTQ community resources to all children, youth, and families who need referrals or support.

Safety Factors & Considerations for Child Safety Interventions Specific to the LGBTQ Population

When assessing safety and risk in an environment where an LGBTQ child or youth

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resides, social workers will determine whether a parent, caregiver, or other family member’s attitude and behavior about the child or youth’s sexual or gender identity impact the safety and well-being of the child.

Interviews with parents or caregivers of LGBTQ children may include a discussion of the child’s sexual or gender identity. In instances where the child or youth has already identified openly as LGBTQ and the alleged abuse or neglect is directly related to the child’s sexual or gender identity, social workers should gather information from the caregiver about their attitudes and beliefs regarding the LGBTQ population.

The caregiver’s beliefs and attitude about the child’s sexual or gender identity, as well as the caregiver’s behaviors and actions that may stem from their beliefs or attitude, will be carefully considered when identifying dangers and risks in cases involving LGBTQ youth. Social workers should consider whether:

- The child or youth is fearful of their parent/caregiver or others living in the residence;
- The caregiver is verbally hostile when talking to or about the child;
- The caregiver has not, will not, or is unable to provide care and supervision necessary to protect the child from harm, including self-harm; or
- The caregiver is verbally abusive to the child, ostracizes the child, ridicules, or belittles the child.


Social workers may seek support from a supervisor, contact [Outright Vermont](#), or request consultation from the Commissioner’s LGBTQ Committee if additional support or guidance are needed while conducting a child safety intervention related to a child or youth’s gender or sexual identity.

As is true for all children and youth served by the division, safety planning for LGBTQ children and youth should include interventions that allow the child to be both physically and emotionally safe.

Placement Considerations for LGBTQ Children and Youth

The division is committed to making ongoing efforts to recruit, train, support, and retain resource families who are LGBTQ affirming and supporting. When LGBTQ children and youth cannot safely remain in their homes, they will be placed in an LGBTQ affirming out-of-home placement.

Youth who identify as transgender should be placed in a home or location consistent with their individualized needs and preferences (which may be based on their stated gender identity), unless there is a safety-based rationale determined in consultation

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with a supervisor and the Commissioner’s LGBTQ Committee. If a residential-level of placement is needed, social workers will consult with the residential services manager or designee, a representative from RLSI, and the director of operations. Safety-based exceptions to placement decisions shall have a specific and credible basis, and will not be solely based on a gender identity reason. This information must be documented in case notes.

Placement decisions for transgender youth will be reassessed at least monthly during the social worker’s monthly face-to-face visit, or as needed or requested by the youth, to review any threats, harassment, bullying, or safety concerns experienced by the youth.

Commissioner’s Committee on LGBTQ Issues


The DCF Commissioner has designated a committee to assist division employees in making decisions on medical treatment, situations where agreement cannot be reached by the team, and other complex case issues related to LGBTQ children and youth in DCF custody. Waiting to address the medical needs of transgender children and youth is not a neutral option.

The Commissioner’s LGBTQ Committee provides technical assistance to staff and shall be consulted about the following issues and decisions:

- Legal name changes
- Legal gender identity change
- Obtaining or changing photo identification (passports or driver’s licenses)
- Medical treatment decisions, including:
 - Puberty blockers/suspenders
 - Cross-gender hormones
 - Fertility preservation
 - Surgery (not covered by medical insurance until the age of 18)
- Residential placement decisions where LGBTQ is one aspect of the youth’s identity and complex presentation

Staff may request consultation by the Commissioner’s LGBTQ Committee on issues beyond the topics identified above. All requests for consultation with the committee will be directed to the director of operations, who will convene the committee by phone or in-person within two business days.

Representation on the Commissioner’s LGBTQ Committee may vary on a case-by-case basis. The director of operations will convene the committee and a representative of [Outright Vermont](#) will always be invited to participate. The case and topic to be discussed will determine other participants. Examples include:

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- Individuals close to the youth
- Foster parents
- A pediatrician or physician
- A therapist or mental health clinician
- The assigned policy and operations manager for the district
- The residential services manager or a client placement specialist
- A representative from Residential Licensing and Special Investigations (RLSI)
- A domestic violence specialist
- The co-chairs of the LGBTQ Workgroup

Additional Resources

[CWLA's Best Practice Guidelines for Serving LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care](#)

[NCLR's A Place of Respect: A Guide for Group Care Facilities Serving Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth](#)

Outright Vermont: <http://www.outrightvt.org/>

The Vermont Human Rights Commission: <http://hrc.vermont.gov/>

Human Rights Campaign: <http://www.hrc.org/>

GLAD: <http://www.glad.org/>

Youth.gov: <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth>

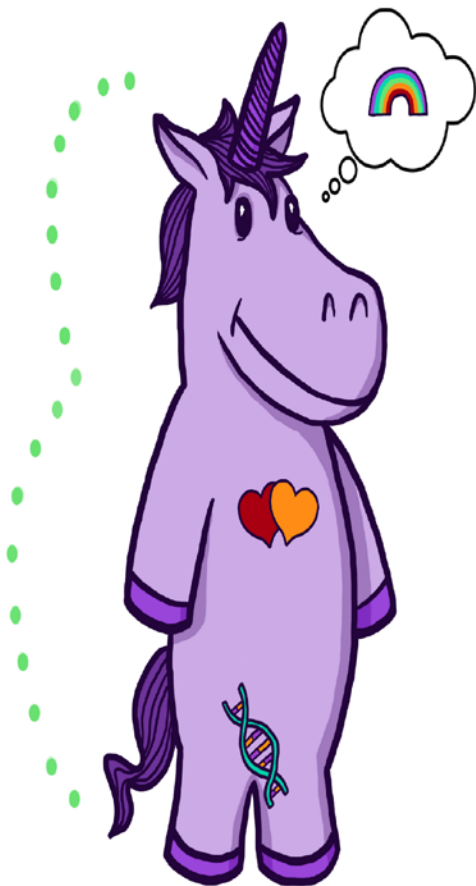
Appendix I

The Gender Unicorn <http://www.transstudent.org/gender>

The Gender Unicorn was developed by the Trans Student Educational Resources, which is a youth-led organization dedicated to transforming the educational environment for trans and gender non-conforming students through advocacy and empowerment.

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore