



**Sexual Orientation and
Gender Identity &
Expression (SOGIE):
A Guide for Foster Caregivers**

A Connecting Workbook Supplement

*Connecting is a prevention-focused program
specifically for foster parents and relative
caregivers and teens in foster care.*



Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in Foster Care

Developing and testing a training module for
caregivers and social workers

Kevin P. Haggerty, PhD

**Emeritus Professor,
University of Washington, School of Social Work**

Leah F. Rankin, MSW

**Quality Assurance and Data Information Manager
Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence**

This module was developed by Susan Barkan, Janice Cole, Jessica Colito, Madeline Furlong, Kevin Haggerty, Kristin McCowan, Bailey Noell, and Amy Salazar in collaboration with input from many caregivers and young people formerly in foster care. This work was done in collaboration with Washington State DCYF

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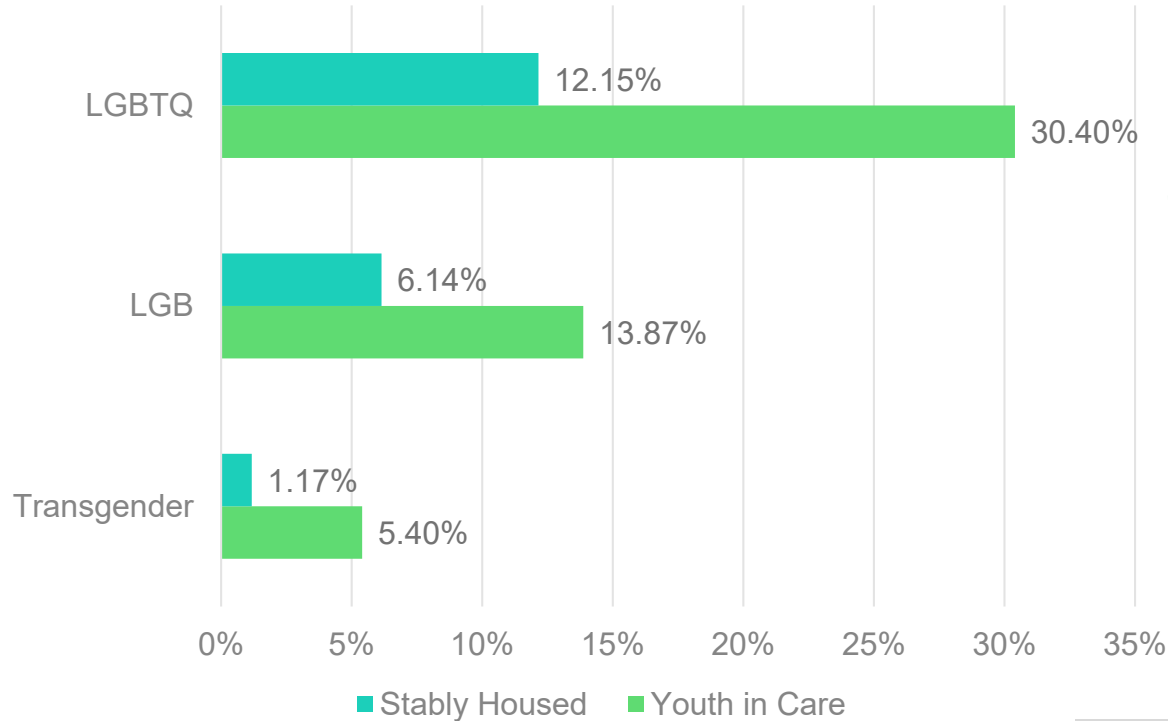
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Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES



Overrepresentation of LGBTQ+ youth in foster care



Discrimination and Rejection in the Child Welfare System

Challenges



Harassment from peers, staff, and caregivers



Rejection and exclusion



Double standards

Outcomes

Permanency options



Risk for homelessness



“I was told that foster families didn’t want a gay kid in their home, so I grew up in group homes and residential centers where I was abused sexually, physically and emotionally.”

– **Kristopher Sharp**, eight years in foster care

Be informed about the reality of discrimination and personal safety for LGBTQ+ individuals



Among those asked to describe the most important problem facing their lives right now:

LGBT youth identified

1 Non-accepting families (26%)

2 School/bullying problems (21%)

3 Fear of being out or open (18%)

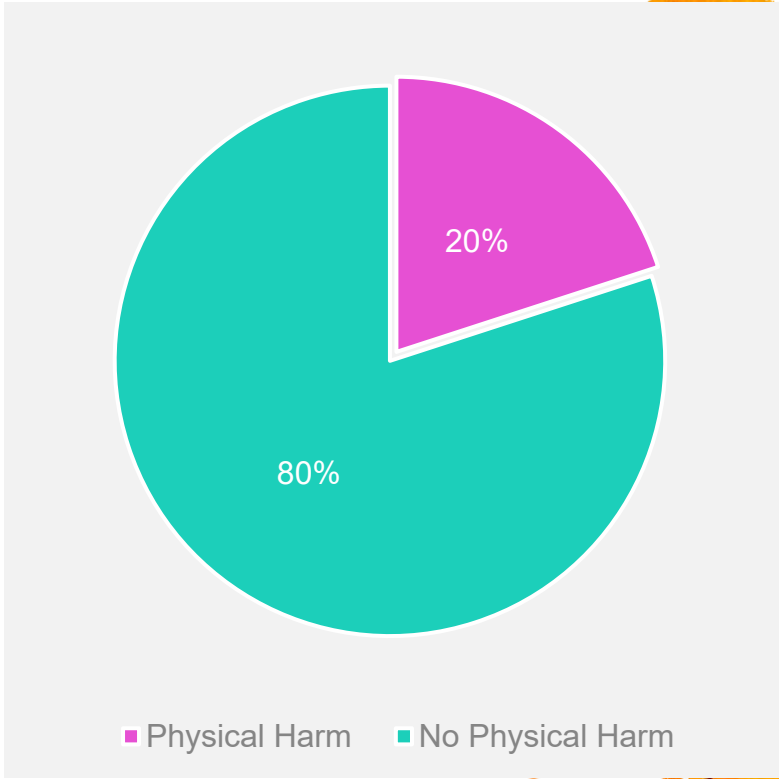
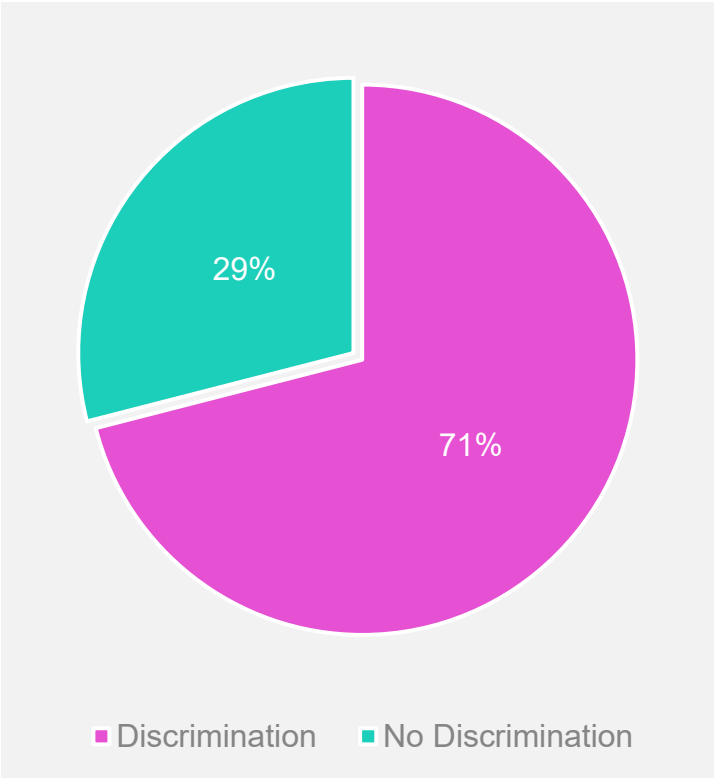
Non-LGBT youth identified

1 Classes/exams/grades (25%)

2 College/career (14%)

3 Financial pressures related to college or job (11%)

Build your teen's awareness of discrimination and personal safety



Development Procedures

- 1. Reviewed scholarly literature, other existing resources, and researcher and practitioner expertise**
 - as starting place for developing content
- 2. Conducted focus groups**
 - to explore target population's recommended strategies for building better relationships between LGBTQ+ youth and caregivers
- 3. Conducted theater test on module draft**
 - to obtain content feedback, recommendations for improvement
- 4. Development of online module through the Alliance**

Module Development Procedure:

- Goal: to explore participants' recommended strategies for building better relationships between LGBTQ+ youth and caregivers
- 3 focus groups with 28 participants
 - LGBTQ+ young adults with foster care experience (n=6)
 - Foster caregivers (n=9)
 - Child welfare case workers (n=13)
- Transcript data analyzed using conventional thematic content analysis
- Instructional Design to e-module at the Alliance

Research Question 1: What Are the Unique Challenges or Support Needs for LGBTQ+ Youth in Foster Care and the Foster Families Caring for Them?

Key:
Purple Box = Research Question
Orange Box = Theme
Green Box = Sub-Theme

1. Societal- & Institutional-Level Challenges

- Child Welfare Agency Issues
- Education & Training
- Social Forces
- School

2. Family-Level Challenges

- Demonstrating Acceptance
- Resources
- Communication Issues

3. Individual-Level Challenges

- Identity
- Self-Efficacy
- Residential Instability
- School

- Relationship Building
- Past Trauma
- Mental Health
- Physical Health

- Lack of Acceptance
- Discrimination
- Safety
- Religious Beliefs

1. Safe, Accepting
Environments for
Youth to Thrive

2. Caregiver/Youth
Interactions Around Sensitive
Topics & Youth's Identity

8. Programmatic
Strategies

Research Question 2: What Strategies
are Recommended to Build Better
Relationships Between LGBTQ+ Youth
and Their Foster Caregivers?

3. Relationship
Building Through
Shared Activities

7. Work With
People Where
They Are

4. Caregivers Interacting
With Communities and
Systems on Youths'
Behalf

6. Youth Self-
Work

5. Caregiver
Self-Work

Key:
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Module Content

Activity	Description
Youth Stories	Presents stories of two LGBTQ+ youth formerly in foster care
Know, Heard, New	Introduction to language around LGBTQ+ community
Myths & Realities	Common incorrect beliefs about gender roles and the LGBTQ+ community and scientific evidence
Roadblocks to Acceptance	Introduces common problematic conversation habits, provides ideas for more helpful alternative responses.
Conversations about Discrimination	strategies to help LGBTQ+ youth stay safe
Make a Plan	planning with LGBTQ+ youth to prepare them to stay safe in potentially dangerous situations.
Sensitive Conversation Strategies	Lists unhealthy and healthy coping mechanisms that youth often rely on to deal with trauma along with tips for conversations with youth.
Are You in Crisis?	how to recognize and respond appropriately to a youth who might be in suicidal crisis
Seeking Appropriate Healthcare	Covers challenges to finding healthcare resources for LGBTQ+ youth



Connecting: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity & Expression (SOGIE) Training for Caregivers and Kinship Providers



Connecting: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity & Expression (SOGIE) Training for Caregivers and Kinship Providers

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This training is for licensed and unlicensed caregivers and relative / kinship providers to support LGBTQ+ youth in their care.

Research shows that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and two spirit (LGBTQ+) youth are overrepresented in the foster care system. LGBTQ+ youth in out of home care face additional challenges such as discrimination, stigma and bullying. LGBTQ+ children/youth feel unsafe and face rejection from their families, schools and community. Many times, LGBTQ+ youth do not have access to appropriate health care and mental health resources.

This eLearning course was developed from *Connecting*, a prevention-focused program specifically for foster parents and relative caregivers, and teens in out of home care. *Connecting* was created using input and advice from social workers, caregivers, and LGBTQ+ foster youth.

This eLearning will provide caregivers an overview of the:

- Myths and stereotypes about LGBTQ+ children/youth and will provide facts and realities;
- Fundamental facts and terms about LGBTQ+ children/youth;
- Provide opportunities for activities for caregivers and children/youth;
- Address safety issues and develop plans for children/youth safety; and
- Learn how to promote the health, safety and well-being of the children/youth in care.

This eLearning will allow the caregiver to complete activities on their own as well as together with the LGBTQ+ children/youth in their care.

Available to anyone, free of charge, from Washington Alliance, at <https://allianceforchildwelfare.org/content/connecting-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-and-expression-training-caregivers-and>

Youth Story

This story was produced at
the Center for Digital Storytelling
www.storycenter.org

by the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project,
a program of the Bay Area Academy
of San Francisco State University.

September, 2005

“Captain”



Captain's story (0:00 - 3:03 mins)

<https://vimeo.com/130559696>



Know, Heard, New

a LGBTQ+ Terminology review

Biological Sex

LGBTQ+

Pansexual

Gender Expression

Heterosexual

Gender Non-Conforming

Asexual

Queer

Cisgender

Transgender

Gender Non-Binary

Gender Identity

Agender

Intersex

They/Them/Their

Two-Spirit

Terminology Review

Key:
 Know
 Heard
 New

Term	Caregiver	Teen
LGBTQ+		
Sexual Orientation		
Asexual		
Bisexual		
Heterosexual		
Gay		
Lesbian		
Pansexual		
Agender		
Biological Sex		
Cisgender		
Gender Expression		
Gender Identity		
Gender Non-Binary		
Gender Non-Conforming		
Intersex		
Two-Spirit		
Transgender		
Ally		
Affinity Group		
Queer		
Questioning		
Pronouns/Preferred Pronouns		
Safe Space		

Roadblocks to Acceptance

A Caregiver Activity

Sometimes you may do or say things unconsciously that get in the way of creating a welcoming and supportive home. It is important to be aware of the ways you might accidentally come off as unaccepting when you are trying to be supportive.

Because youth are sometimes feeling shame and isolation it is important to lead with love and convey both verbally and nonverbally that you accept, respect, care about, and are there for them. Show humility and be open to feedback and possibly getting it wrong. The following is a list of possible roadblocks to acceptance that some youth have heard from their parents, as well as some suggestions for strategies you could try that will convey love, respect, and commitment to your youth.

Instructions: Take a look at these roadblocks and see if you have ever said these or heard them said by another caregiver. Are there any that sound familiar to you? If there are, write it down in the "my roadblock" section, and think about how you might approach things differently.

Roadblock: Invalidating their experience

- Example: "It's just a phase" "You'll grow out of it" "You just haven't met the right guy/gal" "I knew it!"
- How this can block acceptance: You might accidentally assert your own perspective that this is a passing phase in your teen's development, or assert your need to be right, both of which may invalidate their experience of their identity.
- Instead try... Listen to how they are describing their experience finding their identity and reflect back to them what you hear them saying. To convey your love, respect, and support for them and their feelings you can try: "So you're feeling _____." What is important to focus on is that this disclosure is not a game, it is about your teen and their experience of their emerging identity. It's always important to remember not to speak for your youth.

Roadblock: Questioning

- Example: "But are you sure you're (_____)?" "You don't look (____)."
- How this can block acceptance: Questioning someone's experience can belittle what they are experiencing and feeling.
- Instead try... Ask more questions to better understand the experience of the teen in your care. Lead with love and ask questions that start with words like *how*, *what*, *tell me about*, or *help me understand*.

Roadblocks to Acceptance

Roadblocks to Acceptance

Questioning

Using the wrong terminology

Judging

Judging:

Instead try you can use this opportunity to remind them that you accept them for who they are. You can say something like *“I know that things might feel confusing right now, but I want you to know I’m here for you.”*

Providing Solutions:
Instead you can ask them what they think they should do. You can try saying *“What options have you considered?”* or *“How can I be helpful in solving this problem with you?”*

Invalidating their experience:
Instead try to listen to how they are describing their experience finding their identity and reflect back to them what you hear them saying. You can try saying something like: *“So you’re feeling _____.”*

Conversations About Discrimination

A Caregiver Activity


Here are some ideas for having a conversation with your teen about LGBTQ discrimination and personal safety.

- **Be informed about the reality of discrimination and personal safety for LGBTQ+ individuals**
 - LGBT people are targeted for violent hate crimes at even higher rates than Muslims, African Americans, Jews, and Latinos.¹³ Youth who experience multiple minority identities, such as being both LGBTQ+ and being a person of color, are at even higher risk of experiencing hate crimes and discrimination.¹³
 - 42% of LGBT youth say the community they live in is not accepting of LGBTQ people.¹⁴
 - LGBT youth are twice as likely as their peers to say they have been physically assaulted, kicked, or shoved.¹⁴
 - There is no federal law banning employment discrimination for LGBT individuals. As of July 2015, 28 states still allow LGBT individuals to be fired solely based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.¹²
- **Build your teen's awareness by making sure they know about discrimination and personal safety issues that LGBTQ individuals often have to face. Make sure to emphasize that this is not their fault, nor is it a reason to hide who they are, but it is an unjust and all too common reality that they should be aware of and be as ready as possible to protect themselves if and when it happens.**
 - Again, this is especially true and important for LGBTQ+ youth of color.
- **Ask what their experiences have been like related to discrimination and personal safety**
 - What you hear may be very painful—be prepared to respond in a respectful, empathetic way. It may be helpful to review the trauma-informed principles discussed in the “Trauma-Informed Parenting” section of the workbook on page 8 to help prepare for this.
 - A refresher of the Roadblocks to Communication (pages 123-124) and Active Listening (pages 133-135) sections in the “Family Communication” chapter of the workbook may be helpful here as well.

Conversations About Discrimination



92% of LGBT youth say they hear negative messages about being LGBT. The top sources are school, the Internet and their peers.



HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN_®

www.hrc.org/youth

#LGBTYOUTH

2X

LGBT youth are twice as likely as their peers to say they have been physically assaulted, kicked or shoved at



HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN_®

www.hrc.org/youth

#LGBTYOUTH

78%

REMOVED/RAN AWAY DUE TO HOSTILITY

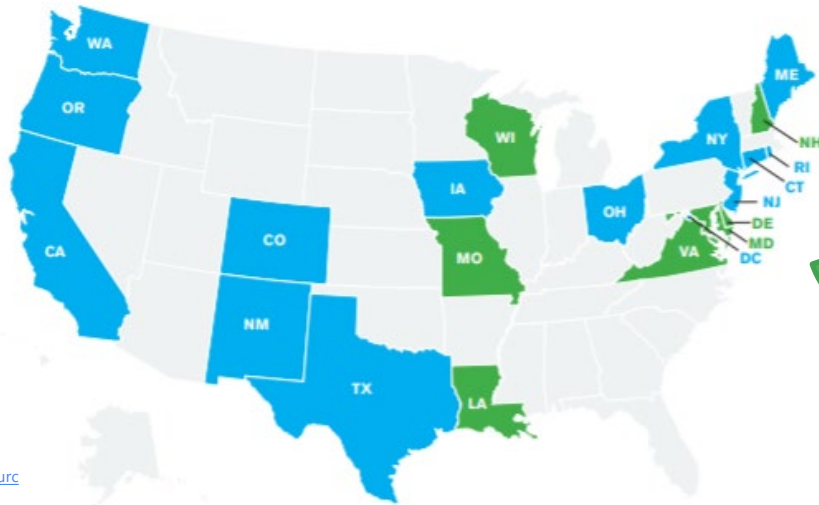
100%

VERBAL HARASSMENT IN GROUP HOME

70%

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN GROUP HOME

Are foster youth protected from discrimination based on SOGIE?



13 out of 50 protect SOGIE fy
7 out of 50 protect SO fy only

Tips on how to have a conversation about discrimination

- Be informed
- Build awareness
- Ask about experiences
- Discuss ways to respond
- Make a plan



Make a plan for what to do if they ever find themselves in an uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situation

Make sure the teen has quick and easy access to phone numbers to call in case of emergency

Encourage them to call 911 if they feel they are in immediate physical danger

Identify adults that the teen can turn to if they need help in places they spend a lot of time



BE
READY
MAKE A PLAN

Roadblocks to Good Communication

While you may have had some training or guidelines to become a foster parent/relative caregiver, you probably weren't given an instruction manual for how to be a caregiver from day to day. Effective caregiving involves learning and using a set of tools that become more effective with practice. Think of yourself as having a caregiver toolbox from which you can choose the appropriate tool for specific situations. As with other tools, the more times you use them, the more comfortable and skilled you become in their use.

Good communication skills can help you build understanding, acceptance, and respect between you and the teen in your care. When you talk with the teen in your care, you want them to hear you and to understand what you're saying. It's important to be aware of some ways you might unconsciously cut off communication. If communication gets cut off, it can weaken the bonds between you and your teen. Do any of the roadblocks below sound familiar?

- **Roadblock 1: Giving orders; commanding**
Example: *"Wash those dishes, and wash them now!"* When you give orders, you're not allowing any input from the teen in your care. You're indicating that you don't want two-way communication at all.
- **Roadblock 2: Preaching**
Example: *"Kids today don't know how good they've got it."* When you preach, you're indicating that you're not interested in seeing things from another point of view. Rather, you've prejudged the situation.
- **Roadblock 3: Providing solutions**
Example: *"Here's what you should do..."* When you provide solutions, you're not giving the teen in your care an opportunity to become involved. Instead, you're discounting your teen's ideas.
- **Roadblock 4: Blaming**
Example: *"If you hadn't worn it there, you wouldn't have left it there!"* When you blame, you give more importance to finding fault than to solving a problem.
- **Roadblock 5: Assuming you know the other person's feelings**
Example: *"You must be really angry at him for doing that to you."* When you assume you know the other person's feelings, you cancel out any opportunity your teen has to communicate with you about them.

Roadblocks to Good Communication

Pg. 22

Giving orders; commanding

Providing solutions

Preaching

Blaming

Assuming you know the other person's feelings

Making the behavior into a character trait

“Here’s what you should do…” When you provide solutions, you’re not giving the teen in your care an opportunity to become involved. Instead, you’re discounting your teen’s ideas.

“You must be really angry at him for doing that to you.” When you assume you know the other person’s feelings, you cancel out any opportunity your teen has to communicate with you about them.



Active Listening

The Four Steps

Pg. 24

FOUR STEPS TO ACTIVE LISTENING:

Step 1: **Listen**

Step 2: **Asking Questions**

Step 3: **"I" Statements**

Step 4: **Paraphrasing**



Emergency Contact Card

Pg. 29

If I am in immediate danger..... CALL 911!!

In case of emergency, I should contact:

My Caregiver: *Lisa Smith*

Cell: *(123) 456-7890*

Work Phone: *(098) 765-4321*

My Social Worker: *Jan Parks*

Cell: *(135) 791-3579*

Work Phone: *(246) 802-4680*

If I feel unsafe, I can go to:

School (teacher's office, counselor's office, etc.):

Name and Location: *Mrs. Dawson at Vancouver High School*

Work (my caregiver's work, my social worker's office):

Name and Location: *Jan Parks at Vancouver Social Worker Office*

Friend or relative's house:

Name and Location: *Janis across the street*

C

Children and youth naturally question and explore their SOGIE

A

Acceptance and openness are critical to helping youth feel safe

R

Resources and support are available, you don't have to do this alone

E

Everyone wants to feel like they belong and are loved



some final thoughts...

850

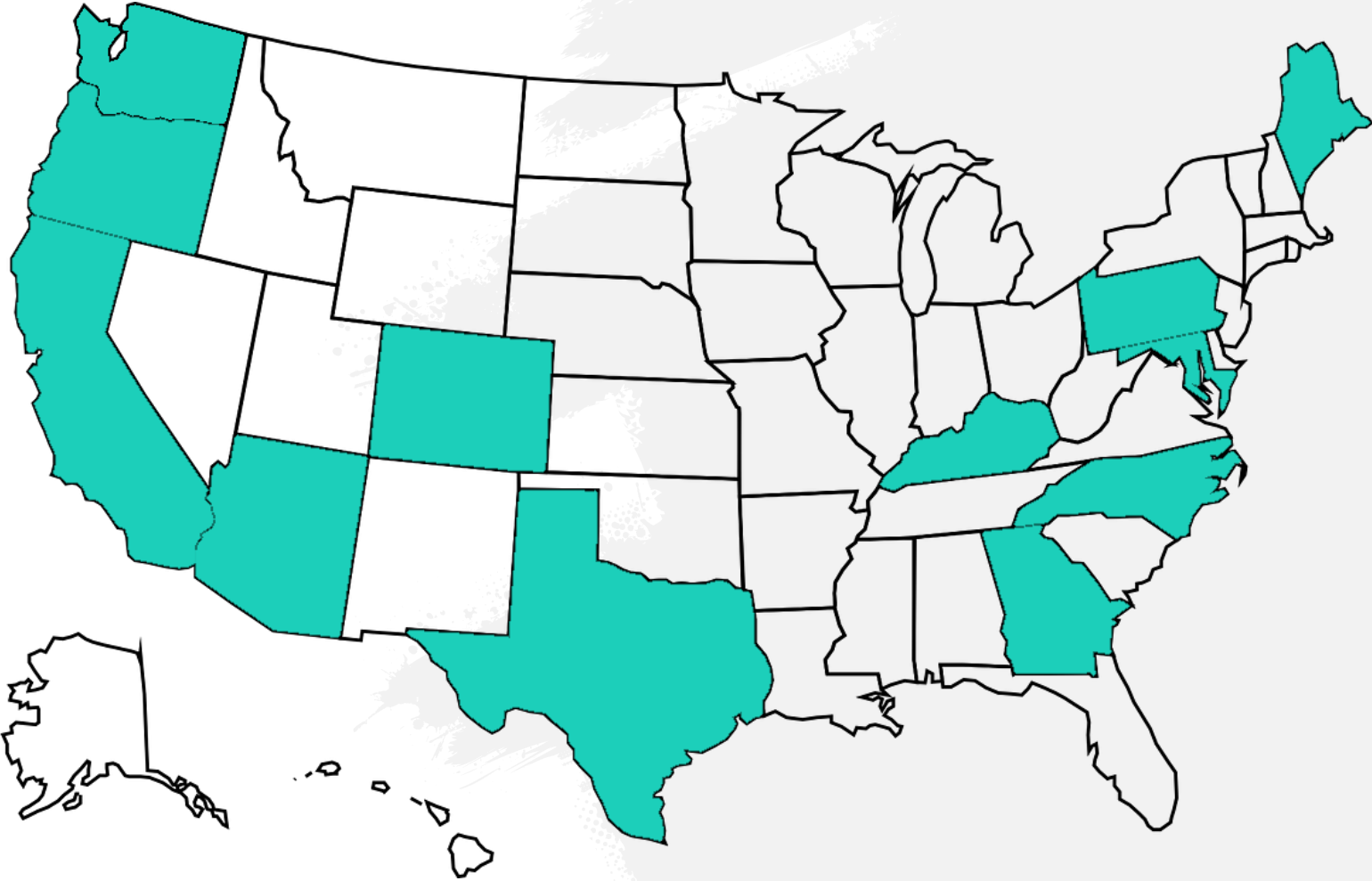
Completions

85%

Completion
Rate

47

Out of State
Completions



Evaluation Questions

(1) Who chose to participate in an optional online training of this nature?

(2) Did participants experience growth as a result of this training?

(3) Which caregivers felt best prepared to care for/support LGBTQ+ youth?

Who Chose to Participate

- 72% caregivers / 28% child welfare workers
- 72% of caregivers had 1 hour or less training in LGBTQ+ issues
- 61% of all participants had little or no experience interacting with LGBTQ+ youth
- 85% of participants heterosexual
- 98% of participants cisgender

Participant Growth

Both caregivers and social workers showed growth across all ten indicators

Caregivers (N=96)

- Recognizing the importance of learning strategies and skills to support LGBTQ+ youth
[t(122.43)=10.46, p=0.00]
- Confidence in caring for an LGBTQ+ youth
[t(160.95)=3.22, p=0.002]
- Willingness to bring an LGBTQ+ youth into their care
[mean=4.17; stdev=0.91]

Social Workers (N=35)

- Recognizing the importance of learning strategies and skills to support LGBTQ+ youth
[mean improvement of 0.37 points – mean of 4.74]
- Confidence in caring for an LGBTQ+ youth
[mean improvement of 0.71 points – mean of 4.37]
- Willingness to bring an LGBTQ+ youth into their care
(mean=4.09; stdev=0.90)

Which Caregivers Felt Best Prepared

Caregivers with more experience feeling more confident to care for an LGBTQ+ youth.

For more information

Email: haggerty@uw.edu

For more in-depth findings on this study:

- Salazar, A. M., Barkan, S. E., Rankin, L. F., Woo, C. B., Rozekova, I., Fowler, N. E., ... & Salzer, A. (2021). Evaluation of a Brief Foster Parent/Case Worker Training to Support Relationship Building Skills and Acceptance of LGBTQ+ Youth in Care. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 1-25.
- Salazar, A. M., McCowan, K. J., Cole, J. J., Skinner, M. L., Noell, B. R., Colito, J. M., Haggerty, K. P., Barkan, S. E. (2018). Developing relationship-building tools for foster families caring for teens who are LGBTQ2S. *Child welfare*, 96(2), 75–97.
- Salazar, A. M., Haggerty, K. P., Barkan, S. E., Peterson, R., Furlong, M. E., Kim, E., ... & Colito, J. M. (2020). Supporting LGBTQ+ Foster Teens: Development of a Relationship-Focused, Self-Guided Curriculum for Foster Families. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*.

