

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression (SOGIE)

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The Issue

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children and gender non-conforming children are disproportionately represented in foster care. The ability of children to safely develop and express their sexual orientation and gender identity expression (SOGIE) has a significant impact on their safety, permanency, and well-being. Within the child welfare system, professionals must ensure that children have the support and safety to do so. Each child exiting the foster care system must do so to a safe and permanent parent committed to providing for the child's well-being – including the development and expression of their SOGIE.

Practice and policy values

- Individuals and couples should be welcomed as prospective foster and adoptive parents and be free from discrimination based on SOGIE and/or marital status. All families deserve equal access to supportive services and to be equally represented and supported by the agency. The strength and competence of GLBT persons as adoptive and foster parents is supported by virtually every professional organization related to children's health and well-being (see resources below).
- Affirmative programs designed to proactively recruit and support families across the spectrum of SOGIE are a necessary and positive addition to the array of services in child welfare – especially until such time that safe, competent and affirming services are the norm rather than the exception in child welfare.
- All children and youth in foster care, including GLBTQ youth, have an equal right to safety, permanency and well-being. Protection from discrimination or violence based on SOGIE is a non-negotiable minimum requirement of all child welfare placements.
- All children and youth deserve equal access to supportive services and to placements that proactively affirm their SOGIE. All care providers, including direct care staff, birth parents, foster parents, group home staff and adoptive parents have an obligation to provide LGBTQ-affirming and competent care, and to know the limits of their capacity to do so. (consider NYC policy, found here: <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/lgbtq-support.page>)
- All public child welfare systems have the obligation to welcome and serve the LGBTQ community and provide equitable, high quality services and supports to birth, foster, adoptive, kin families and children and youth. They must ensure freedom from discrimination based on SOGIE and/or marital or relationship status.

Additional resources and citations

All Children All Families <http://www.hrc.org/resources/all-children-all-families-about-the-initiative>

Gathering and Managing SOGIE Information

http://www.nclrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Information_Guidelines_FINAL_DRAFT_3-20-13.pdf

www.prearesourcecenter.org/sites/default/files/content/sogie_information_gathering.pdf

Child Welfare League of America <http://www.nclrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/bestpracticeslgbtyouth.pdf>

<http://www.cwla.org/improving-practice-with-lgbt-youth-and-families/>