

Making a difference for LGBTI+ children and young people in care



keyassets

THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROVIDER

Introduction and purpose

While some carers may be happy, open and supportive when a child in their care comes out or begins talking about their gender identity or sexuality, we also acknowledge that others may initially feel disbelief, confronted, confused, uncertain and frustrated. This booklet has been developed with you in mind.

We live in a diverse society where people hold different personal, cultural and religious values and beliefs, and have different life experiences. We recognise that for some people these factors inform initial reactions. The aim of this information booklet is not to change these values and beliefs, but rather to promote a respectful, safe and inclusive home environment which supports and values the children in your care so they do not experience further rejection or pain. Where you feel you are struggling to understand or cope,

you are welcome to contact your Supervising Social Worker, who will provide assistance and support.

Making sure your home is welcoming to all differences including race, ethnicity, disability, religion, gender and sexual orientation, will help your home feel safe and ensure that the children and/or young people in your care are supported for who they are and grow into adults who embrace diversity in all of its forms.

Charlie's story

Charlie (8) was born a girl, Charlie's name from birth is Charlotte.

He's been in care since he was 2 and has had around 12 placements so far. He gets really angry and sometimes hits out at his carers, his teachers, classmates and his environment. Charlie doesn't feel like a girl, Charlie knows he's a boy, but no-one listens to him. He only wants to dress in boys' clothes and have his hair cut short and he wants people to call him Charlie and use him instead of her and Charlie also wants to use the boys' toilets at school.

Although Charlie has been saying these things for a while, no-one really knows what to do. Charlie's carers have conceded on the clothes and hair but are reluctant to do anything else. The Department and Charlie's biological parents are dismissing the issue and aren't supportive of exploring it further or making any changes. This leaves Charlie feeling hurt and frustrated. He wants someone to understand him and to take him seriously

Andy's story

Andy is 15, he has been living with his carers for the past 2 years.

It's been pretty stable and he really likes them. Andy is gay, he's known for the past year or so but he hasn't said anything to his carers or his friends. He's overheard his carers making negative comments about a supportive same sex marriage news story, so he doesn't want to say anything to them, or anyone who might tell them, because he doesn't want to move placements again. He's been feeling really down and wonders whether he'll ever find anyone to love him for who he is. He thinks he'll try and wait it out until he finishes school and leaves care, but if he can't wait that long, then maybe he'll just end things...

Andy's carers have been worried about him, he's been really quiet. At first they thought it was just teenage stuff, but he's really shut down.

Coming out

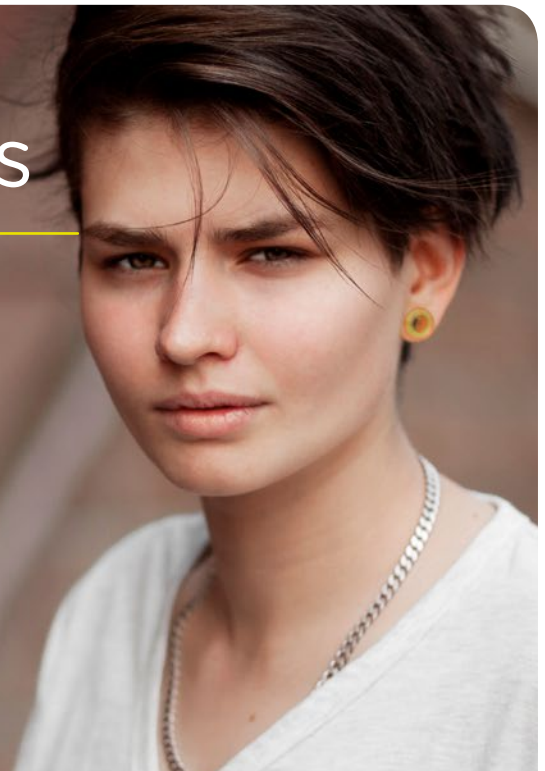
It is not easy for children and young people to come out, so when they do:

- Respond in an affirming way. "Thanks for letting me know" and "I'm glad you could talk to me about this."
- If you are unsure ask curious questions with an open and non-judgemental heart.
- Be open to learning and doing things differently. This will sometimes be confronting, but they need you to be on the journey with them.
- Stand up for them when they need you to.
- It's OK if you don't know and you don't understand. Stay in the moment and then seek support from your Supervising Social Worker to help you process the situation.
- Everyone is different – don't assume this gay/bi/queer/trans person is the same as someone you already know or have heard of. Listen to their experience and their story.



Definitions and identities

Sometimes when children and young people in our care come out, we are unprepared. They may use terms that we don't understand but knowing and understanding these terms will ensure we are ready for conversations regarding this issue.



LGBTI+

An acronym which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex. The plus is to include others who identify as other than heterosexual i.e.: Queer, Asexual, genderfluid. The term sexual and gender diversity may also be used.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation relates to feelings of attraction, sexual behaviour, and personal identity. It includes a person's sexual orientation towards:

- a) persons of the same sex, or
- b) persons of a different sex, or
- c) persons of the same sex and persons of a different sex.

Some terms used to describe a person's sexual orientation include gay, lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, straight, heterosexual.

Sexual identity

This is what we call ourselves. Such labels include "lesbian", "gay", "bisexual", "bi", "queer", "questioning", "undecided", "undetermined", "heterosexual", "straight", "asexual", and others.

Homosexual

A person whose sexual attraction and feelings of love are primarily for people of the same gender. This term is largely outdated; it stems from a medical model and is based in a framework of illness. Very few people self-identify as homosexual in today's society.

Heterosexual

A person whose sexual attraction and feelings of love are primarily for people of the opposite gender.

Gay

A person whose sexual attraction and feelings of love are for the same gender. This can mean men or women, though the term tends to be used mainly for men.

Lesbian

A woman whose sexual attraction and feelings of love are for women.

Bisexual

A person whose sexual attraction and feelings of love are for both women and men.

Asexual

A person who does not experience sexual attraction.

Pansexual

A person who experiences attraction to others regardless of their gender identity or biological sex.

Takatāpui

Is the Māori word meaning a devoted partner of the same sex. The term encompasses not only aspects of sexuality and gender identity but also one's cultural identity. It has become an umbrella term to build solidarity among sexuality and gender minorities within Māori communities. Derivatives of takatāpui include takatāpui kaharua for bisexual, takatāpui wahine for lesbian and takatāpui wahine ki tāne or takatāpui tāne ki wahine for transmen or transwomen.



Sex characteristics

A person's sex includes genetic, hormonal and physical characteristics.

Gender identity

Gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation. Gender is different from physical sex. It is the personal sense of who one is and how a person sees themselves.

Queer

An umbrella term to refer to LGBTI+ people. It is also used as a political statement which advocates breaking binary thinking, and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as fluid and diverse.

Gender diversity

This is a term that includes all the different ways gender can be experienced and perceived. It can include people questioning their gender, those who identify as trans/transgender, genderqueer, non-binary, and many more.

Transgender

This is a term covering a range of identities that transgress socially defined gender norms. It may mean someone who mentally and emotionally identifies as a different gender to the one they have been assigned by society, often living their lives as that gender, and who may or may not choose to undergo any form of medical transition (hormones, surgery etc.). Or it could be a person who's gender is outside of, or between, the binary gender system altogether.

Non-binary

A person whose gender sits outside of the binary of a person being either a man or a woman. They may identify as neither, both, or something else entirely.

Trans man

A transgender person who was assigned female at birth, but who is a man (uses he/him pronouns).

Trans woman

A transgender person who was assigned male at birth, but who is a woman (uses she/her pronouns).

Brotherboy

Some Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander people who were assigned female at birth but who are a boy/man in spirit.

Sistergirl

Some Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander people who were assigned male at birth but who are a girl/woman in spirit.

Cis (cis-gender)

A person whose gender identity is aligned with that which they were assigned at birth.



Challenges for LGBTI+ children and young people

It can be difficult being a LGBTI+ child or young person due to the exclusion, harassment, abuse and discrimination which they may experience. Therefore, it is important for carers to be sensitive and considerate when caring for, and supporting LGBTI+ children and young people.

These include but are not limited to:

- Higher risk of suicide and self-harming behaviour.
- Higher rates of mental health issues.
- Higher rates of drug and alcohol misuse.
- Increased risk of homelessness.
- Intersex people are still subject to medical interventions at birth. Many intersex people report suffering the physical and emotional effects of surgery, and related shame and secrecy.

LGBTI+ children and young people also experience challenges in relation to:

- Invisibility and lack of awareness – it's hard to talk about how you feel and what is going on when no-one notices or opens up conversations.
- Shame – internalising the negative stories and messages about LGBTI+ people can lead to significant feelings of shame.
- Fear – LGBTI+ young people can experience significant fear of the consequences of coming out to the people around them.
- Attachment and connection – to peer and social supports, family and friends, especially when they feel so different.
- Risk of placement breakdown – due to lack of understanding or acceptance.
- Getting their needs met - especially for gender diverse children and young people.
- Not automatically having an advocate and safety net.
- Powerlessness within the system – e.g.: if a child or young person wants to change their sex assigned at birth, there are many layers of a system to convince and seek permission from.
- Ensuring they are in placements that support the needs of their whole self – how do we appropriately match LGBTI+ children and young people when we might not know their true identity and needs?
- Residential care is mostly not safe for LGBTI+ young people – keeping them in foster care is of utmost importance.
- Layers of discrimination – young, in care, trauma background, LGBTI+.

What can we do to support LGBTI+ children & young people?

As an organisation, we believe that everybody counts. The children in our care and our foster carers are important to us and as such, we will provide the necessary support to ensure a safe and stable home environment when a child comes out. To achieve this safety and stability in our homes, we need to respect our children as they are. We believe we can make positive and lasting outcomes in the lives of the children and young people who are in our care by:

- Being aware of our own opinions and value positions regarding LGBTI+ people and communities as this will help us to not impose negative opinions and value positions onto the children and young people in our care;
- Listening to understand and focusing on seeking a connection with the children and young people;
- Trusting young people to know themselves and giving them the opportunity to safely explore their feelings;
- Celebrating and respecting their identity. Understanding that it is not a phase but it may change over time. You can't change it.
- Using inclusive language – i.e.: is there anyone special in your life?
- Respecting their space as young people, not pressuring them, but rather focusing on developing a strong relationship with them;
- Providing visible support by matching our actions and words;
- Respecting their confidentiality and speaking with them about how and when they want to let others know. Allowing them to come out in their own time;
- Ensuring that we do not shame or punish young people because of them coming out about their sexual orientation and gender identity;
- Allowing them to be themselves – clothes, jewellery, hair style, names, pronouns, room decoration.
- Help them stay safe in online environments and to navigate their responses to any bullying or discrimination.
- Allowing their LGBTI+ friends to visit them in our homes and showing acceptance to their friends as well;
- Ensuring that we do not make assumptions and loosely use language, terms and labels which may otherwise offend the children and young people, create a division between us and perhaps even confirm their fears of coming out;
- Ensuring that we do not impose our own beliefs and value positions as to what the child can and cannot wear, do or feel based on their sex/ gender. Allowing them to participate in activities that interest them regardless of whether they are typically male or female type activities;
- Validating the child's position and expression and ensuring that our relationship with the child is not revolving around their sexual orientation and/ or gender identity but seeking out and reinforcing their many other interests and strengths;
- Supporting young people to manage and negotiate cultural and religious barriers, by helping them find safe people within their community.
- Knowing where to go for support and connecting them to other LGBTI+ organisations, resources, events and activities;
- Working with the system – being an advocate, challenging judgement, misunderstandings and hostility.
- If this issue is confronting for you, please access support and guidance through your Supervising Social Worker.

At Key Assets, we believe that it is fundamental for our carers, children and young people to receive the support which they need because people matter to us. Resources and support services are available through various organisations across the country. To locate a service near you, start with the following links:

NSW

Twenty10

A non-profit, state-wide organisation working with and supporting young LGBTI people through case work, accommodation, drop-in services, counselling and group activities.

twenty10.org.au

QLD

Open Doors

An LGBTI youth service that provides drop-in services, counselling, support and group activities.

opendoors.net.au

VIC

Minus18

Provides mental health, peer mentoring and events to support same-sex attracted and gender-diverse young people.

minus18.org.au

WA

Freedom Centre

A hangout and resource location for LGBTI youth based in Northbridge, Perth.

freedom.org.au

PFLAG

A website for parents and carers of LGBTI people.

pflagaustralia.com.au

SA

Shine SA

A not-for-profit organisation providing sexual health education, early intervention, health promotion, clinical services and therapeutic counselling.

<https://www.shinesa.org.au/community-information/sexual-gender-diversity/support-services/>

TAS

Working It Out

Tasmania's gender, sexuality, and intersex status support and education service.

workingitout.org.au

Auckland NZ

Rainbow Youth

RY offers a bunch of different services and support for queer and gender diverse young people, their friends, whānau and those that work with them.

ry.org.nz

Canterbury NZ

Qtopia

An interactive social support network for LGBTI+, takataapui & fa'afafine. It also provides a safe, friendly and interesting space for queer youth to meet.

qtopia.org.nz

➤ To contact your nearest Key Assets office:

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www.keyassets.com.au

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