

# Improving Policies and Practices for LGBTQ Children and Youth: *A Strategic Planning Tool*



This tool is intended to help you to identify action steps you can take in your organizational (e.g., child welfare agency, school) and community roles to improve services and supports for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) children/youth and their families and those questioning (Q) their sexual orientation or gender identity. Although “LGBTQ” is used as an overarching acronym here, also think about other related populations such as those who may be gender diverse (but not transgender) or identify as two-spirit (an identity used by some Native American tribes).

The tool includes a table that is adapted from and organized around 10 standards of care described in *Improving Emotional and Behavioral Outcomes for LGBT Youth: A Guide for Professionals*.<sup>1</sup> These standards, which are rooted in recommended practice, provide a framework for improving outcomes and the well-being of LGBTQ young people. They can also support efforts to implement the Office of Minority Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, enhanced National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Standards in Health and Health Care, which include sexual orientation and gender identity as part of their working definition of “culture.”

Importantly, the standards are grounded in four guiding principles for service delivery. These include fostering shared responsibility and a common commitment across service systems for the well-being of LGBT youth and their families. Second, creating an inclusive organizational culture and third, implementing a family-centered approach in services and supports. Fourth, promoting positive youth development, so that all youth have opportunities to meet their basic personal and social needs while also enhancing their interests, positive relationships, and competencies (e.g., leadership skills) to effectively function in their daily lives. This last principle also focuses on building from, and expanding on, youth strengths.

## Using This Tool

You can use this tool as an individual or as part of a community/organizational team. While the latter is recommended, in particular including organizational/local leadership as part of the team, individual professionals and other community members can also use this tool to facilitate their planning and subsequently guide their cultural and linguistic competence. First, what is your system of care or organizational mission? Write that in Box 1 as a foundation for your thinking about the standards of care and related strategies.

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<sup>1</sup>Fisher, S. K., Poirier, J. M., & Blau, & G. M. (Eds.), *Improving emotional and behavioral outcomes for LGBT youth: A guide for professionals*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

**Box 1: Mission Statement (if applicable)**

Second, reflect on strengths/supports and challenges/needs that LGBTQ youth and their families experience in your organization/community. List these in Box 2.

**Box 2: Strengths and Challenges**

**Strengths/Resources**

**Challenges/Barriers**

Third, think about your vision for LGBTQ children/youth and their families within your organization/community. This vision should describe a future set of conditions that is not only important to LGBTQ children/youth and their families, but is also achievable. What is the vision that you would like to work toward achieving, either individually or as a team? What challenges/needs would you like to address? Describe your vision in Box 3.

**Box 3: Your Vision Statement**

The table on the next few pages is organized around 10 standards of care for improving outcomes for LGBTQ youth. Select the standard(s) that you think will be most useful to accomplishing your vision. For each, indicate whether it is a low, medium, or high priority, and specify who will lead each goal (this may be you). Next, identify a goal(s) related to that standard. The goal(s) should be **SMART**: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. **As you think about and identify goals, refer back to the preceding mission and vision statements. In addition, try to respond to the challenges and strengths you listed.** Then, think about specific strategies or action steps you can take to achieve these goals. Include estimated timelines for completing the action steps. Continue to plan your efforts in concrete detail, by listing the individuals or team members responsible for each item, and by specifying how you will measure whether the goal(s) is achieved.

Standards	Goals	Strategies & Action Steps	Priority	Leader	Team	Measures of Success
<p><b>EXAMPLE</b></p> <p><i>Standard 1: Assessment and Continuous Quality Improvement</i></p>	<p><i>Understand agency's strengths, needs, and areas of improvement for providing services for LGBTQ youth and their families</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Develop or find an evaluation tool (DUE DATE)</i></li> <li><i>Implement survey/tool with staff and children/youth accessing agency services (DUE DATE)</i></li> </ul>	High	Marco Smith	<p><i>Planning: Executive Director, Program Director</i></p> <p><i>Survey: All staff and children/youth receiving agency services</i></p>	<p><i>Data on organizational capacity and needs are available leading to implementation of new practices.</i></p>
<p><b>Standard 1: Assessment and Continuous Quality Improvement</b></p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess organizational policies, staff capacities, and procedures</li> <li>Evaluate organizational progress toward identified goals</li> <li>Obtain and respond to consumer feedback to improve quality of care</li> </ul>						



Standards	Goals	Strategies & Action Steps	Priority	Leader	Team	Measures of Success
<b>Standard 2: Nondiscrimination Policies</b> For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in nondiscrimination policies</li><li>• Have clear procedures for confidential reporting of concerns</li></ul>						
<b>Standard 3: Staff Knowledge and Development</b> For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build staff capacity through a mix of informal and formal learning/training opportunities</li><li>• Address areas of identified need (using assessment findings)</li></ul>						



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<p><b>Standard 4: Documentation, Data Collection, and Information Sharing</b></p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use forms and data systems that include preferred names and gender pronouns</li><li>• Establish policies and follow procedures for protecting the confidentiality of private information</li></ul>						
<p><b>Standard 5: Safe, Supportive Environments</b></p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Address bias/stigma</li><li>• Display symbols that represent the LGBTQ community</li><li>• Encourage LGBTQ youth to participate in decision-making bodies that can inform improvement efforts</li></ul>						



Standards	Goals	Strategies & Action Steps	Priority	Leader	Team	Measures of Success
<b>Standard 6: Practices That Affirm Identity</b> For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refer to youth using their preferred gender pronouns</li><li>• Use gender-neutral language when asking youth if they are dating (such as “partner” or “significant other”)</li></ul>						
<b>Standard 7: Healthy and Supportive Peer Connections</b> For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide opportunities for LGBTQ youth to socialize with other LGBTQ youth</li><li>• Foster positive relationships between openly LGBTQ youth and youth who are not LGBTQ</li></ul>						



Standards	Goals	Strategies & Action Steps	Priority	Leader	Team	Measures of Success
<b>Standard 8: Family Connections</b> For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support family acceptance and understanding of LGBT identity</li><li>• Advise families about potential effects of negative reactions</li><li>• Identify and connect families with community supports</li></ul>						
<b>Standard 9: Access to Affirming Services and Supports</b> For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create collaborative partnerships with LGBTQ-serving organizations in the community</li><li>• Collaborate with youth-serving agencies to enhance access to appropriate housing, job placement, and mental health supports</li></ul>						



Standards	Goals	Strategies & Action Steps	Priority	Leader	Team	Measures of Success
<p><b>Standard 10: Community Outreach and Engagement</b></p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Distribute lists of local and online LGBTQ resources</li><li>• Involve LGBTQ youth in efforts to build community awareness of issues such as LGBTQ acceptance, bullying, and identity formation—in particular in outreach to other youth</li></ul>						



Use this section for activities that might not directly derive from the 10 standards, but are vital to launching and sustaining an effective individual or community/organizational effort to improve services and supports for LGBTQ children and youth and their families. This could include overarching goals intended to hold the whole effort together.

Overarching Goals	Strategies & Action Steps	Priority	Leader	Team	Measures of Success

Congratulations on your commitment to improving services and supports for LGBTQ young people and their families! All professionals working in systems and settings serving children, youth, and families—whether schools, mental health settings, juvenile justice facilities, homelessness providers, or child welfare—have a tremendous opportunity to impact change.

As you embark on this journey, be sure to access the growing number of resources on the Internet. A great place to begin is the Federal Interagency Workgroup Group on Youth Programs, which offers an LGBT youth topic page at <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth>.

## Acknowledgements

This tool was extracted and adapted from:

Helfgott, K. P., & Gonsoulin, S. G. (2012). Standards of care for LGBT youth. In S. K. Fisher, J. M. Poirier, & G. M. Blau (Eds.), *Improving emotional and behavioral outcomes for LGBT youth: A guide for professionals* (pp. 141–157). Baltimore, MD: Brookes

**Suggested Citation:** Poirier, J.M. (2015). *Improving policies and practices for LGBTQ children and youth: A strategic planning tool*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

