

Guide to
Welcome
LGBTQIA+
YOUTH
& their families

ReconcilingWorks
LUTHERANS FOR FULL PARTICIPATION



Did you know that the average
**lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender,
queer, intersex, asexual/aromantic**
person comes
out at the age of **16**?

There is a high chance you will have an
LGBTQIA+
youth in your congregation.

“For faith leaders—whether youth ministry volunteers or ordained ministers—accompanying youth on this journey is a sacred task, full of potential for spiritual growth, development, maturity, and clarity about the living of one’s gender identity and expression. The process doesn’t always have a linear point-A-to-point-B progression that we imagine when we think of “coming out” stories. It is more often a process of discernment—like the discernment of a sense of call from a source that is beyond our control or volition.”

— Cody Sanders

A Brief Guide to Ministry With LGBTQIA Youth

This guide will engage your faith community and equip it to provide helpful and appropriate care to LGBTQIA+ youth.

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Why Should We Single Out LGBTQIA+ People?

Many LGBTQIA+ people have learned by experience that they are not truly welcome in faith spaces, even in ministry settings who state, “All are welcome here!” A general statement of welcome is often heard as meaning “everybody but me,” so it can take a special effort to communicate an authentic welcome to LGBTQIA+ people.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE CONVERSATION

1. People over Definitions

If you do not know which identity terms, pronouns or titles to use, ask, or avoid using gendered terms. Remember, all we really need to know about a person to welcome them is their name.

2. Curiosity Continuum

This resource is intended to help us understand the both/and nature of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. However, the curiosity continuum is one of the most important tools as we seek to extend a welcome to our LGBTQIA+ neighbors.



When getting to know someone, you are sure to have many questions. Before you inquire, you may want to ask yourself: “Why am I asking?” or “Will this question help me build relationships of mutual trust and respect?” Does your question represent “hospitable curiosity” or “lurid curiosity?” The goal of this resource is to dismantle barriers between us, and the perception that LGBTQIA+ people are exotic oddities does not serve that goal.

3. Self Care

Being an out LGBTQIA+ youth takes a tremendous amount of bold courage. As we strive to care for our youth, know that it is going to take that same bold courage.

5 Areas of Care to Consider

REGISTRATION FORMS:

Part of what it takes to feel welcome and safe, is to be seen and understood. One easy way to help LGBTQIA+ youth and their families feel seen and understood is to make sure forms are inclusive and reflect their families.

Reflection Prompts:

1. When you ask for the gender of the student do you only list male and female? Is it possible to update forms to include other options?

2. Do you ask for a person’s pronouns on a form, because not everyone’s gender expression matches their gender identity?
3. When youth fill out forms, do you ask for the contact information for a mother and father or legal guardians? Do you ask for more than one adult contact name, and if so, does that reflect a stronger value of two-parent households?

Incremental Steps:

1. When asking for a person’s gender identity consider expanding the options beyond female and male to also include gender non-conforming, or _____ for a youth to self-identify.
2. Adding the option for a youth to add their preferred pronouns allows a youth to be seen in a way that is true for them. Some examples are she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs, and ze/hir/hirs.
3. Consider removing the language of Mother and Father from your forms. Families are made up of a wide varieties of options. By removing the language of Mother and Father and replacing it with one space for Legal Guardian, it removes an opportunity for a youth to experience shame based on their family structure (not all families have two adults and some have two of the same gender).

Allowing youth to self-identify is holy. Small changes to forms can provide a tremendous amount of hospitality to youth and their families. Knowing more about your youth will give you and other adult leaders an opportunity to care for them in a more authentic way.

Examples of How to Update Forms

TITLE: Ms. Mrs. Mr. Mx.
 None _____

GENDER IDENTITY: Female Male
 Gender Non-conforming _____

PRONOUNS: She, Her, Hers He, Him, His
 They, Them, Theirs _____

“The 2013 National School Climate Survey studied a sample of 7,898 students between the ages of 13 and 21 from 2,770 school districts from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey found that 55.5 percent of LGBT students studied felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and 37.8 felt unsafe because of their gender expression. And a third avoided gender segregated areas, like bathrooms and locker rooms, because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable in these spaces.”

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RESTROOMS:

Transgender people who attempt to use public restrooms and other facilities are frequently subject to verbal harassment, physical and sexual assault, forcible removal, and at times arrest. Using public restrooms and other facilities can be an anxiety and fear inducing action for members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Reflection Prompts:

1. Do youth have access to a restroom/facility where they feel safe?
2. Do youth have access to a restroom/facility that matches their gender identity?
3. When you travel with youth, have you checked to see if your locations will have safe and hospitable restrooms/facilities for your youth?



Incremental Steps:

1. Take some time to look around your church and take an assessment of the kinds of restrooms you have in your building. Do you have any that are single stall? If you do not, consider bringing this to the attention of the Church Council asking them to help create a solution.
2. If you have a single stall restroom, think about how it is labeled. If it does not show that it is inclusive of transgender and gender non-binary people consider changing the sign to one that does. When you have an inclusive restroom and facility, make it public and well known.
3. As you prepare for youth trips, call ahead to the facilities you will be using, ask about their space and if they have restrooms that will be safe and welcoming for your LGBTQIA+ youth. If they do not have a safe and welcoming space, ask if you can work with them to create a solution. Make sure you and other adult leaders have a plan in place so youth can safely use the bathroom.

It is important to allow youth to be allowed to use the restroom of their gender identity not only for pastoral care reasons, but also care for youth's bodies. There are no records of a transgender or gender non-conforming person harming or harassing someone in a public restroom and with more and more national fear mongering happening around this topic, more and more transgender and gender nonconforming people do not feel safe using the restroom in public, which can cause a great deal of harm to one's body.

SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS:

For a youth who is transgender, gender non-conforming, or gender non-binary, sleeping arrangement accommodations are a factor in deciding to attend the event. It is important for someone's self-identified gender identity to factor into where they will sleep.

Reflection Prompts:

1. What policies do you currently have in place for sleeping arrangements on overnight trips? Are they successful?
2. How are expectations of youth behavior on a trip shared and expressed? What are the most important expectations held for youth?
3. What can be done to make sure youth have a sleeping arrangement that is comfortable and safe for them?

Incremental Steps:

1. If your policy is currently unclear about how sleeping arrangements are assigned, what can you do to clear it up?
2. When sharing your expectations for physical behavior be clear that the expectations go for individuals and couples regardless of their gender identity. Exceptions are based on behavior and not on someone's sexual orientation.

If a student is out to their guardian/parent as transgender or gender non-conforming talk with them and the youth about where they would feel most comfortable and safe for sleeping arrangements. Ask them if they have any preferred roommates who are good allies for the student. Once this conversation has happened with the guardian/parent and the youth, make sure and communicate this decision with other adult leaders to ensure they are all updated on how to best support and care for the LGBTQIA+ youth.

You may want to check with the rules of your congregation's insurance company, or rules of the camp or place you are staying, and work with them in the case of providing hospitality to a LGBTQIA+ youth might differ from the rules.

COMMUNICATION WITH LEGAL GUARDIANS/PARENT:

It is important to be proactive rather than reactive when it comes to the safety and welcome of LGBTQIA+ youth. It is also important to connect with guardians about how and why you will be doing your best to ensure their youth know they are seen, named, and cared for as a part of your community.

Reflection Prompts:

1. What do you share with a legal guardian/parent that a youth has shared with you?
2. How do you communicate with a guardian/parent about youth expectations on upcoming gatherings, events, and trips?
3. Do you provide outreach and education to the guardian/parent of your youth about your program and the content you cover?

Incremental Steps:

1. If a youth is not out to their guardian/parent it is not up to you to “out” them to their family. However, when the youth is ready, ask if you can be with them and support them when they do. This will also give you an opportunity to connect with their family and guardian/parent later.
2. If your youth group's rules are unclear to a guardian/parent, consider hosting a gathering the them to share with them the guidelines youth are asked to follow as a part of the group. Share with a legal guardian/parent the work you (and clergy and church council, who should also be present) have done to ensure youth feel seen, named, and cared for in your congregations.
3. Host a night where youth and their legal guardian/parent are invited to learn, share, and grow (with the help of a facilitator) in their understanding of what it means to live in a culture with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions and how and where they learned about their current understanding.

This is a holy and important conversation to have with guardians. Be open and honest about how youth will be treated and cared for. Being proactive and clear will help you to have honest relationships with guardians and assure them that you have their youths' best interest in mind and are working to make sure all youth are safe and welcome.

HOSPITABLE SPACE:

Safety and welcome is not only something communicated with words, but it is also communicated through images and space.

Reflection Prompts:

1. How would a new youth feel entering your space for the first time?
2. Does your youth space have images, symbols, and resources that reflect their identities?
3. What kind of language is used throughout your community? Is the language gender binary?

Incremental Steps:

1. Think about visual cues that can be used to let LGBTQIA+ youth know they are welcome in your space. Consider hanging a rainbow flag on the wall and positing a welcome statement that specifically names LGBTQIA+ people.

2. If you have resources available for youth to access, think about adding some books and materials including LGBTQIA+ people. When hanging images, have a diversity of people of all ages, races, sizes, and identities up around your gathering space.
3. Using gender binary language for the Divine can limit people's ability to see their identity as an image of God. For example pay attention to how often God is referred to as he, him, his, Lord, and King. Ask youth what their preferred pronouns are. Someone's pronouns are not determined by their visible gender expression. Consider having name tags available for people to use.

Also, think about how you speak to large groups. Do you address everyone as "guys"? When creating groups, do you divide youth into "girls" and "boys"? Instead, consider addressing a group by saying "friends", "y'all", or "everyone".

You may also think about shifting language to refer to everyone as "siblings in Christ" rather than "brothers and sisters" since not all people see themselves as male or female.



“The GLSEN Survey revealed that 74.1 percent of LGBT students were verbally harassed in the past year because of their sexual orientation; 36.2 percent were physically harassed by being pushed or shoved and 16.5 percent were physically assaulted more violently by being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon. Many LGBT students, 56.7 percent, didn’t report these activities to school staff because they believed that nothing would be done, or they thought reporting the action might make matters worse. Even more sadly, 61.6 percent of the students surveyed did report an incident, but reported that school staff did nothing in response to the report.”

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RESOURCES:

Lutheran Introduction to Out Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Neighbors.

www.ReconcilingWorks.org/resources/sogi

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Cody J. Sanders

Our Whole Lives (OWL), a comprehensive, lifespan sexuality education curricula for use in both secular settings and faith communities.

www.UCC.org/owl

Sex is a Funny Word

Cory Silverberg & Fiona Smyth

PFLAG

Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the nation’s largest LGBTQ family and ally organization. PFLAG has over 400 chapter and 200,000 members and supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas in all 50 states.

www.pflag.org



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