

CREATE SAFE ENVIRONMENTS FOR LGBT PEOPLE IN CARE SETTINGS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CARE SECTOR

LGBT Youth Scotland Care Experienced Youth Commission

This resource was developed by LGBT Youth Scotland's Care Experienced Youth Commission. In 2019 they carried out **peer research** with **42** care experienced young people and based on these findings they developed the following recommendations.

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR LGBT PEOPLE

A large, white number '1' inside a white circle, with several short lines radiating from its top-left corner, suggesting a lightbulb or a bright idea.

Only 52% of people had come out in a care setting and many of those said their experience of coming out in care was negative.

Participants said that not **coming out** had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Others described the negative impact of stigma, discrimination, and homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. We know from previous research that the LGBT community faces high rates of mental illness (**Life in Scotland, 2018**), in part due to the impact of discrimination and abuse. This risk is increased for care experienced LGBT people. One participant said that a staff member made jokes about them appearing “dykey” and didn't feel comfortable to report it as they had concerns about safety.

There's lots you can do to create safe spaces, including:

- Have clear and concise policies for reporting abuse and discrimination.
- Be explicitly accepting of LGBT identities, including transgender identities, by making your acceptance visible (through inclusive posters, rainbow lanyards, activities etc.)
- Ensure you and your staff stay up to date on LGBT Awareness Training.
- Ensure that LGBT people who report abuse/discrimination are safeguarded and protected.



TRAIN STAFF AND CARERS IN LGBT ISSUES

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78% of people said they felt staff and carers didn't have the knowledge to support them.

Some said that they had even heard homophobic, biphobic or transphobic comments from staff and carers. When asked if there was anyone that they felt able to talk to about being LGBT, many participants responded that there was nobody. Several respondents said that when attempting to speak about the discrimination and stigma they were facing, they were dismissed.

It is important that all young people have the opportunity to explore their identity and express themselves. In order to do so, they need supportive and understanding adults around them that they can feel safe and confident in. For LGBT young people in care, this is often not the case. How you can help:

- If you work with care experienced young people or a carer, you can help by engaging in or arranging LGBT Awareness Training.
- If you are a policy maker and manager you can ensure there is a minimum level of LGBT awareness training made mandatory for all staff and carers.
- Ideally residential homes, schools and local authorities should aspire to meet the standards set out in LGBT Youth Scotland's **LGBT Charter**.



RESPECT OUR PRIVACY

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Article 16 of the UNCRC makes it clear that children and young people have the right to privacy.

The only circumstances under which this may be disregarded are when there are child protection concerns. Being LGBT is not a child protection issue, so this information should only be recorded or shared with a young person's knowledge or agreement. Only **39%** of respondents said they had control over who knew about their LGBT identity. The remaining **61%** of respondents' privacy - their right to keep their personal identity private - was not explicitly respected. A young person who attended one of our events reported that information about their LGBT identity being shared impacted on their ability to trust the adults in their life.

Here's what we'd recommend:

- If you think it would be helpful for other people in their lives to know about young people's LGBT identity, speak to the young person about this, listen to their views and seek their agreement.

Remember, sharing information about young people's LGBT identity without their agreement (often called 'outing') can be distressing and even dangerous for them.



BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS



Coming out can be a significant moment for any LGBT person. For care experienced young people it's key that they are able to build relationships with those involved in their care and have someone they trust to come out to when they are ready.

The people closest to young people in care are likely to already understand this. However, only around half of the LGBT people we spoke to have come out in care. When asked about their experience of coming out in a care setting, one person said they felt as if they were “keeping it in” and were “struggling to cope with it”. Those that did come out, described it as being a relief and often talked about one person who they trusted and with whom they had a positive relationship. Here's what we'd recommend:

- If you are a policy maker, ensure young people and their carers have the opportunity to build and maintain consistent, caring and trusting relationships.
- If you are a carer, or involved in a young person's care, take time to get to know them and give them space to talk about themselves. Show you are welcoming and supportive of people coming out by talking positively about LGBT people in your life or in the media.



TAKE HOMOPHOBIC, BIPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING SERIOUSLY



43% of care experienced young people said they had experienced homophobia, biphobia or transphobia in a care setting.

Of those **62%** did not report it and **the same number** that they would not be comfortable talking about their experience of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia with staff or carers involved in their care. A young person described how they experienced homophobic name calling and when they complained to staff the response from staff was “we can't get everyone in the house into trouble bar you”.

We recommend that you:

- Tackle bullying as and when it happens and explain why this is not acceptable.
- Listen to the young person and find out what they want to happen next.
- Remember you have a duty of care and bullying can have a long-term impact on young people and follow them into adulthood. You can find more information in LGBT Youth Scotland's resource [Addressing Inclusion](#).



ADDRESS JOKES AND NEGATIVE COMMENTS ABOUT LGBT PEOPLE



Regardless of the intention, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic “jokes” or “banter” have a negative impact on LGBT young people.

In our peer research a young person said that after coming out, staff in their care had commented on how they dressed and were “making jokes about how I shouldn’t be trusted alone with other female young people in the residential home. This kind of damaged my self-confidence a little bit”. Comments such as these can impact young people’s self-esteem. One person might think it’s a joke or funny but in reality, it is bullying behaviour. Treating LGBT people in this way increases stigma and can lead to further prejudice and discrimination.

We recommend that:

- Staff and carers model respectful behaviour towards LGBT young people.
- Staff and carers explain that while someone might find it funny it is not acceptable in any situation and everyone should be respectful.

Making jokes about LGBT people is never OK, even as banter!



ABOUT THE YOUTH COMMISSION

LGBT Youth Scotland's Care Experienced Youth Commission was a group of young LGBT people aged 13-25 who identified as care experienced. Throughout the 2-year life span of the commission, 9 young people contributed to the project in some way. We valued the input of every youth commissioner and thank them for the time, hard work and expertise they devoted to making care settings in Scotland better for young LGBT people. We are also grateful for the approximately 50 other care experienced LGBT people from all across Scotland who shared their views and experiences with the youth commission.

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