

A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING LGBTQ+ YOUTH



DEFINITIONS

These are evolving terms, as our understanding and language around gender identity and sexual orientation expands and matures.

LGBTQ+: Many groups use the acronym LGBTQ to describe the community of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer describe someone's sexual orientation: their emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people.

Transgender: An adjective describing a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond with the gender or sex assigned to them at birth. Being transgender is not a sexual orientation: It describes someone's gender, not that person's attraction to other people. Like non-transgender people, transgender people can be heterosexual, gay, bisexual, queer or any other sexual orientation. The acronym LGBTQ often includes "plus," which is an effort to include additional gender identities.

Gender-Expansive: Individuals who do not conform to their culture's expectations for boys and girls, or men and women. Being transgender is one way of being gender-expansive, but not all gender-expansive youth are transgender. Gender expansive individuals simply don't conform to the stereotypes that the people around them hold for that sex.

Gender Non-Binary: An umbrella term for people who identify their gender as neither male nor female. These people might identify as both ("bigender"), neither ("agender"), a mix between the two ("genderfluid"), or they can be unsure of their gender ("genderqueer").

There are terms which are now seen as outdated and harmful, which should be avoided. These include "homosexual," referring to sexual orientation or gender identity as a "lifestyle," or referring to gender identity as only the way a person dresses or only by a person's physical characteristics. Under no circumstances should adults allow (or speak themselves) slang or derogatory words which refer to sexual orientation or gender identity, regardless of the speaker, the target, or the context.

OUR POLICY:

No one shall be denied rights, status or access to an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of any program or activity because of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, differing abilities, or socio-economic class. To the extent possible, all spaces and settings for programs, activities, and ministry shall be accessible.

The Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Florida seeks to support all children and youth by providing reasonable alternative arrangements regardless of state law to address safety and comfort.

OUR APPROACH:

The majority of major medical communities, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, embrace an affirming approach to youth who are LGBTQ+. This approach means focusing on what an individual says about their own gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, and allowing them to determine which forms of gender expression feel comfortable and authentic. Non-affirmative approaches such as reparative or conversation therapy (messages and actions which reject or seek to change someone's gender identity or sexual orientation) can have serious negative consequences for youth, including depression, anxiety, self-harm, and even suicide.

At Christ Episcopal Church, our approach to LGBTQ+ youth is affirming. All volunteers in Family Ministries must agree to take this approach with children and youth in our care. This includes respecting an individual's preferred pronoun and gender expression, addressing questions or comments from other children or youth which the individual may feel

uncomfortable answering (with guidance from the child or youth, and in the case of a child, his/her parents), and assuring that the individual is not criticized, ostracized, or made to feel unsafe in any way (physically or emotionally).

LGBTQ children and youth are a minority group. While we may not have many LGBTQ+ individuals in our care, the potential for lasting harm caused by adult parishioners and volunteers is significant. A non-affirming approach can cause lasting damage to the child's well-being, and turn the child away from the church for a lifetime.

IMPORTANT: It is likely that at any given time we will have children or youth in our care who are LGBTQ+ or who have family members who are LGBTQ+. Whether or not we believe we are in the presence of LGBTQ+ individuals, we must use affirming language and ensure safe spaces at ALL times.

THE BASICS:

Excerpted in part from HRC report: [Caring for LGBTQ Children & Youth](#)

- Acknowledge that children and youth in your care may be LGBTQ.
- Examine your beliefs and attitudes that might impact your ability to support LGBTQ children and youth in your care. Be aware of your own beliefs, prejudices and gaps in knowledge surrounding issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Regardless of your personal beliefs, remember that above all it's your responsibility to provide a safe, nurturing and non-judgmental environment for the LGBTQ children and youth in your care.
- Understand that being LGBTQ isn't a "choice" or something a young person can change.
- Educate yourself on LGBTQ issues.
- Know that your acceptance or rejection affects the health and well-being of the LGBTQ youth in your care.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of LGBTQ youth.
- Apply the same standards to LGBTQ youth that you apply to others for age-appropriate adolescent romantic behavior.
- Acknowledge that there's more to an individual than sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are only part of what makes an individual a whole person.
- Commit to following the guidance Christ Church staff regarding the best ways to support specific individuals.
- Commit to using affirming language, and being on guard for situations which may make LGBTQ+ youth feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

As the body of Christ, we are called to share Jesus' love with ALL children, and provide a space where they are safe at all times. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to:

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Sources:

[Supporting & Caring for Transgender Children](#), a report compiled by the Human Rights Campaign, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians

[Caring for LGBTQ Children & Youth: A Guide for Child Welfare Providers](#), a report compiled by the Human Rights Campaign.

Additional Resources:

Human Rights Campaign: www.hrc.org

The Trevor Project: www.thetrevorproject.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, LGBT Youth Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm>

GLSEN Safe Space Kit: <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/GLSEN%20Safe%20Space%20Kit.pdf>