



Orange Grove

fostercare

support, nurture, grow

Raising a Child in Care with Pride

How to Support LGBTQIA+
Youth in Foster Care

Creating a safe space for everyone

Just like any child that comes into care, young LGBTQIA+ people need the love, guidance and support of a foster family to help them grow into healthy, happy adults. No matter how they choose to identify or what their sexual orientation is. This is why at Orange Grove we are championing Fostering with Pride.

When a child is taken into care, their world can be turned upside down. They experience loss, disruption, and likely have severe trauma from their pasts. Foster children who are LGBTQIA+ also have other potential challenges to face on top of these, such as homophobia, transphobia or generalised stigma towards the community.

That's why it's so important that foster parents know about the risks posed to young LGBTQIA+ people and how to mitigate them, as well as knowing how to provide a safe, inclusive and welcoming foster home.



What do we know about LGBTQIA+ youth in foster care?

Actually, very little. The government doesn't require local authorities to record data about LGBTQIA+ care experienced people. While we don't have a clear picture about how many children in care identify as part of this community, we can safely assume that the number will be higher than we think. According to Britain's Office for National Statistics, the number of young people who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community has doubled in the last four years. In the 2020 survey, 8% of respondents aged 16-24 said they were gay, lesbian or bisexual, compared to 4.1% in 2016.



Only 5% of local authorities in the UK claimed to have a specific policy around supporting LGBTQ+ care experienced people.

- University of East Anglia, SpeakOut study

What does LGBTQIA+ stand for?

The LGBT acronym has been in use since the 1990s, and has acted as an umbrella term for sexuality and gender identity. However, in recent years, it's expanded to be more inclusive of other ways that people identify. The '+' symbol is there to acknowledge the multiple other identities, orientations and expressions within this diverse community that aren't explicitly called out in the acronym.

L

Lesbian

A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women.

G

Gay

A man who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other men.

B

Bisexual

A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to two genders, which could be men and women or any other combination of two genders.

T

Transgender

A person whose gender identity doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, a person may be born a male, but their sense of self is inherently female.

Q

Questioning/queer

Questioning refers to a person who is currently exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity. Queer is a catch-all term that was once considered offensive, but has now been reclaimed by parts of the community to describe those who fall outside the mainstream sexual and gender expressions.

I

Intersex

A person who is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the norms of what is known as 'male' or 'female'. This could include differences in genitalia, chromosomes, internal sex organs or hormone production.

A

Asexual

A person who completely lacks or has very little sexual, emotional or romantic attraction to others. Asexuality can be considered a spectrum, as some people who identify as asexual (known as 'ace' for short) may engage in conditional sexual activity, or they may experience romantic attraction but zero desire to engage in sexual activity.

Cisgender, or cis, refers to a person whose gender matches the sex and gender assigned to them at birth.



The difference between gender and sexual identity

Gender identity refers to: the way that a person feels about themselves in terms of being masculine, feminine, non-binary, gender fluid or perhaps preferring not to define themselves with any gender at all. Gender identity is an integral part of a person's sense of who they are as a person.

Sexual identity refers to: a person's romantic, emotional and sexual attraction to other people, and there are many different orientations. Sexuality can evolve over time as someone gets to know themselves and their preferences better.

Other genders and sexual orientations you might encounter...

| | |
|--|--|
| Agender – someone with no particular gender, including people who are not their assigned sex | Abrosexual – someone whose sexual preferences or attraction change over time, which can be any number of times |
| Bigender – someone who is any two genders, either alternating between two or being two at the same time | Demisexual – someone who doesn't feel attraction towards others but can develop it where a connection is involved |
| Demiboy – someone who embraces aspects of masculinity, regardless of the gender they were assigned at birth | Greysexual – someone who feels sexual or romantic attraction very rarely, maybe only a few times in their life |
| Demigirl – someone who embraces aspects of femininity, regardless of the gender they were assigned at birth | Pansexual – someone who is attracted to people regardless of their gender identity, whether they're a man, woman, trans or non-binary |
| Non-binary – an umbrella term for people who aren't on the male/female gender binary | Polysexual – someone who is attracted to a lot, but not all, gender identities |

Challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ youth in foster care



A young person's gender and sexual orientation plays a huge role in helping them discover who they are, however it's not always easy for LGBTQIA+ youth. There is still a lot of stigma, hatred and violence targeted towards those who identify as anything other than 'straight' or cisgender. Many religions and countries still have strict laws against being gay – some even carry catastrophic consequences. In some families, it can be seen to bring shame, leading to parents disowning their own children.

According to the UK Gov's 2018 National LGBT Survey, **“at least two in five respondents had experienced an incident because they were LGBT, such as verbal harassment or physical violence... however, more than nine in ten of the most serious incidents went unreported, often because respondents thought ‘it happens all the time’.”**

Understandably, this can cause young people to live in fear of revealing their true selves. Or, if they do 'come out', they may unknowingly open themselves up to bullying, harassment or even assault.

For kids in foster care, these challenges are coupled with the turmoil that brought them into care in the first place. They could have suffered physical, emotional or sexual abuse or were neglected by their parents. Domestic violence or substance misuse could have made their home a dangerous, scary place. They might have even experienced the tragic loss of a parent. All of these are harrowing, traumatic events on their own.

But what's also important to remember is that some young people are rejected, abused or neglected by their birth family purely on their grounds of them 'coming out' as LGBTQIA+. Or, the caregivers' views and attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community pose a safety threat to the child, so they need to be taken out of the family home for their wellbeing.

This rejection and maltreatment from the ones who were meant to love them, no matter what, often has long-lasting effects on a child's psychological, social and emotional development. They might have intense feelings of shame, self-loathing, guilt or lack any sense of belonging. The thought of opening up to their new foster parent could very well fill them with worry over the possibility of being rejected yet again. This is why a supportive, affirming foster home is so crucial in helping them become confident, assured young adults.

LGBTQ+ youth who are rejected by their families because of their sexual orientation or gender identity are much more likely to develop physical and mental health problems later in life.

- Family Acceptance Project, 2010

How can foster parents create a safe and supportive home for LGBTQIA+ youth?

1. Educate yourself about the community

Knowledge is power. The more you know, the better you'll be able to communicate with the LGBTQIA+ child in your care and help them navigate who they are.

2. Don't presume gender or sexual identity

This can be harmful and prevent the child in your care from building trust with you. It can also be triggering for them to hear about themselves being spoken about in a context that doesn't feel right. For example, with an age-appropriate child, you could say 'are you dating anybody?' instead of 'do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?'

3. Ask about pronouns

It's a simple question but the sentiment behind it will go a long way. It demonstrates that you respect who they are and that you're aware of the sensitivities around gender expression.

4. Support their individual self-expression

From clothing and hair to jewellery and makeup, the way we present ourselves to the world is a huge part of our identity. If the child in your care feels more comfortable in styles that aren't typically associated with their assigned gender, ask what you can do to help them express themselves in a way that feels more authentic to them. It might be that their existing wardrobe doesn't match their gender identity, so new clothes may need to be purchased.

5. Let them know they can be themselves

From the very offset, let the child in your care know that they will be loved and cared for regardless of who they are. Knowing that your foster home is a safe space where they're free to explore who they are will do wonders for building confidence.

6. Don't steer them towards hobbies seen as typical for their presenting gender

While you may have good intentions to encourage them to do activities that will help them fit in with their peers, this can be damaging in the long-run.



7. Don't imply that this could be 'just a phase'

According to academic research, children have a stable sense of their gender identity by the age of four, and most people will have experienced their first physical attraction by the age of 10. If a young person has built the courage to Come Out, chances are, they have given it a lot of time and thought.

8. Don't pressure them into Coming Out

Coming Out is a very intimate and personal journey for young LGBTQIA+ people. When they choose to Come Out and who they choose to come out to is their decision.

9. Make your home LGBTQIA+ friendly

From the different Pride flags to activist statements and quotes, anybody new entering your home would immediately know they're in an LGBTQIA+ friendly environment.

10. Celebrate LGBTQIA+ media, art and literature

Representation in the media and arts helps young people feel seen and heard. Point them in the direction of books, films or media campaigns that are made for and by LGBTQIA+ people. This helps to reinforce positive representation and encourage them to find inspiring role models.

11. Express your intolerance of LGBTQIA+ discrimination

This could be as simple as letting your wider family know that any discriminatory jokes or slurs will not be tolerated, or if it's safe to do so, calling people out if they made an offensive comment.

12. Allow them to discuss their feelings of attraction

While a lot of teenagers prefer to keep their love lives under wraps from parents, some can be open in talking about who they fancy or who they're dating. Make sure you treat these age-appropriate conversations the same way you would with a non-LGBTQIA+ teen.

13. Respect their wishes to be called a different name

Names are a huge part of our identity, but for some LGBTQIA+ children, their birth name doesn't fit who they feel they are. It may take a while to adjust to a new name, especially if the child has been in your care long-term, but as long as you show that you're making effort and apologise when you make a mistake, your support will encourage them to live their most authentic life.



14. Stand up for them and be an ally

Unfortunately, we live in a world where bullying still exists, no matter how much we all want it to stop. Like you would with any child, if the person in your care is experiencing discrimination either at school or online, you need to show solidarity and stand up for them. When you foster with Orange Grove, you have a dedicated social worker, family support worker and many other skilled specialists on hand to help you support a child who's being bullied.

15. Ensure your wider support network is on board

While you yourself might be accepting of the LGBTQIA+ community, you could have family members or friends with different views. Ultimately, the wellbeing and happiness of the child in your care is the number one priority, so it's important they're not exposed to any discriminative beliefs while in your care.

16. Allow them to engage in age-appropriate romantic relationships

From educating young people on safe-sex to offering a shoulder to cry on during their first breakup, helping teenagers navigate the ups and downs of relationships is part and parcel of being a foster parent. Make sure to show interest – but not too much! – so that you're aware of what's going on and can ensure their safety.

17. Attend LGBTQIA+ events with them

So many young people in the LGBTQIA+ community often rely on their friends to be their 'surrogate' family. This is such a shame. Show your support by attending rallies and parades with them. Having a loving foster parent by their side can help them feel more secure and confident in themselves.

18. Love and care for them no matter what

It starts and ends with this. All children in care are dealing with difficult emotions and trying to make sense of the disruption around them. However they identify, whatever pronouns they use and regardless of who they're attracted to, it's your job to nurture them and give them the life they deserve – one filled with joy and happiness.



Using pronouns like a pro...

Traditionally, we've been used to she/her and he/him as the main two sets of pronouns, but as we've discussed, not everybody falls into being on this gender binary. They/them is popular amongst non-binary folk and ze/zir comes from the trans community as an alternative gender-neutral pronoun set. Please note, the child in your care may use a different pronoun as a way to identify, but it will follow the same rule of thumb.

| Pronouns | Example |
|-------------------------|--|
| SHE/HER/HERS | She is speaking. I listened to her. The book is hers. |
| HE/HIM/HIS | He is speaking. I listened to him. The book is his. |
| THEY/THEM/THEIRS | They are speaking. I listened to them. The book is theirs. |
| ZE/ZIR/ZIRS | Ze is speaking. I listened to zir. The book is zirs. |





How we support foster parents caring for LGBTQIA+ youth

When you foster with Orange Grove, you are not only one of our amazing foster parents, but you're an individual with your own qualities, character and needs. We take time to understand you and we're there for the big things, as well as the small. This strong sense of support means we're able to work as a partnership, which is crucial when caring for an LGBTQIA+ young person.

- Your own dedicated social worker who'll visit you at least once a month, more if needed. This is an important relationship and one that will develop over time. They're there to listen, advise and make sure you're getting the right support for the LGBTQIA+ child in your care.
- Access to a large multi-disciplinary team of foster care specialists which includes social workers, family support workers, education specialists, and more. We're all one big team, connected and bonding together with one aim – to help children live the lives they deserve.
- From induction to ongoing specialist training courses, we're here with a comprehensive programme of training support, helping you become the best foster parent you can be.
- 24/7 helpline so you can get urgent support, at any time of the day.
- Regular events to connect you with other foster parents from our fostering network. This helps you create valuable support groups with peers who may also have an LGBTQIA+ child in their care.
- A generous fostering allowance to help you cover the costs of caring for a child and also reward you for your hard work. If the child in your care needs new clothes or room decorations to align with their gender identity, you'll be able to ensure they get what they need to make them feel comfortable.
- As well as a healthy financial support package, you'll also get 2 weeks of paid respite per year, £100 annual birthday allowance for the child in your care and £100 annual festival allowance for the child in your care.

Resources to support LGBTQIA+ youth

Albert Kennedy Trust

Supports LGBTQIA+ youth aged 16-25 who are living in crisis

The Beaumont Society

Offers help and support for the trans community

Galop

Offers support and advice to LGBTQIA+ individuals who have experienced hate crime, sexual violence and domestic abuse

LGBT Foundation

Helps LGBTQIA+ people increase their skills, knowledge and self-confidence to improve and maintain their health and wellbeing

LGBTQ+ Youth in Care

Provides information, resources, training, help and advice for LGBTQIA+ youth and foster parents

National Trans Youth Network

Represents young trans people in the UK, with groups in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland offers mentoring, youth clubs, online counselling and other services for young LGBTQIA+ people

The Proud Trust

Offers mentoring, youth clubs, online counselling and other services for young LGBTQIA+ people

Switchboard

Provides help and advice for LGBTQIA+ people



Want to give a vulnerable child the life they deserve?

Start your journey with
Orange Grove today

Thousands of children are waiting for a safe, loving home, just like yours.

**Enquire
now**

contact us

T: 0800 369 8513

E: foster4us@orangegrovecare.co.uk

www.orangegrovecare.co.uk



Orange Grove
fostercare
support, nurture, grow