

The Importance of Asking About and Affirming Youths' Sexual Orientation

From *Sexual Minority Youth in Child Welfare: Prevalence, Risk and Outcomes*,
University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work

DEPRESSION UP TO 3.66X

LGB youth are up to 3.66 times as likely as non-LGB peers to meet the criteria for clinical depression.

SUBSTANCE USE UP TO 4X

LGB youth are up to 4 times as likely as non-LGB peers to report use of alcohol or marijuana during their lifetime.

TRAUMA OVER 5.5X

LGB youth are over 5.5 times as likely as non-LGB peers to meet the criteria for a trauma-related disorder.

ASKING ABOUT SEXUAL ORIENTATION

DO

- Ask every youth about sexual orientation just as you would ask about age, ethnicity, gender or religion.
- Recognize that a youth may be in the process of exploring their sexual orientation. This is a normal developmental process which can occur over a number of years.
- Continually assess all youth in child welfare for mental health concerns and substance abuse. LGB youth may be at greater risk for these than their non-LGB peers.
- Refer for evidence-based, trauma-focused interventions such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TFCBT).
- Advocate for youth who are experiencing difficulties at home, in school or in placement due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

DON'T

- Make assumptions about a youth's sexual orientation, or assume that all youth are heterosexual.
- Attribute problems in LGB youths' lives to their SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression).
- Refer youth for interventions to "change" their SOGIE. These approaches, commonly known as "conversion therapy," have no research support, are prohibited in some states, and are widely recognized as harmful to the healthy development of already vulnerable youth.
- Underestimate the importance of understanding and affirming all aspects of a youth's identity when assessing their needs for safety, stability and permanence.