

Steps for Advocating for LGBTQ Foster Youth in Schools

Step 1: Listen

- Ask the youth how they feel about school.
- Do they have supportive adults in the school? Friends and/or activities they like? What is their favorite class, etc.?
- Know each individual youth's experience – every child has different needs and a different story.
- Don't *overgeneralize* based on the child's SOGIE.

Step 2: Resources

- Identify resources based on the child's age.
- Early Childhood (0-36 months), pre-kindergarten, Elementary School, Middle School, High School, College, and beyond

Step 3: Your Role

- Clarify your role.
- Who makes educational decisions for youth in care?
- What are everyone's roles?
- What are the relevant laws and policies in your state?
- Does the youth have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)? What is the plan?
- Understand the importance of confidentiality.
- Can you/should you share their SOGIE status with others? With whom do you share the youth's IEP?

Step 4: Stability

- Understand the importance of stability.
- Help the youth to stay in the same school when possible.
- Maintain community connections when possible.
- If a school transfer has or will occur pay attention to:
- Enrollment, Records transfer, Credit transfer, Identifying supportive adults/resources in that school
- LGBTQ-related policies & resources

Step 5: Ongoing Advocacy

- Pay attention on a regular basis.
- Young people need adults who regularly pay attention to:
- Attendance, Discipline (if any), experiences of bullying (if any), grades and tests, extra-curricular activities, food access/nutrition (breakfast and lunch programs if needed)

Step 6: Special Education Needs

- Be willing to ask for help and seek supportive services in order to meet child's needs.
- When a child needs special services:
- Learn the process
- Who can be an education surrogate?
- What are the evaluations available and necessary for this child?
- Do they need an IEP?
- How can progress be ensured?
- How will this IEP keep them on track for a successful graduation?

Step 7: Graduation and Beyond

- Keep the big picture in mind.
- What is the youth's plan for graduation and/or transitioning out of care?
- Do they have enough credits?
- Do they have the right credits for what they want to do next?
- Timelines for applications
- College-tuition (waivers and scholarships)
- Vocational and Trade Schools

Best Practices, Resources and Support

1. Field Forward Newsletter: hrc.im/field-forward
2. Welcoming Schools Project: www.welcomingschools.org
3. Human Rights Campaign: www.hrc.org/resources/topics/schools
4. GLSEN: www.glsen.org
5. Center for the Study of Social Policy: www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/get-real
6. ABA Center on Children and Law – www.americanbar.org
7. Casey Family Program – www.casey.org
8. The Legal Center for Foster Care and Education – www.fostercareandeducation.org
9. The National Center for Youth Law – www.youthlaw.org