

OPEN & AFFIRMING FOSTER HOMES

A resource on how to support LGBTQ+ foster youth

30% of foster youth identify as LGBTQ+

According to the Human Rights Campaign, **30% of foster youth in the United States identify as LGBTQ+** (an acronym that represents queer and trans identities).

LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in the American foster care system, meaning they make up a larger fraction of the foster care system than the general population.

What does this mean for LGBTQ+ foster youth?

LGBTQ+ youth already face a **higher risk of mental health challenges** and suicide than the general population.

LGBTQ+ foster youth are especially vulnerable because they explore their identity in a **turbulent system**.

According to a 2023 Chapin Hill report, **61% of foster youth** above the age of 13 experience **three or more moves in a 12-month period**. This means that LGBTQ+ foster youth may **have to come out three or more times a year**. The process of “coming out” is already difficult, but **can be dangerous for foster youth** placed in a home hostile towards their LGBTQ+ identity.

What do the statistics tell us?

According to the National Institute of Health, compared to heterosexual foster youth, LGBTQ+ foster youth:

- Have **lower academic achievement**.
- Report **feeling less safe** in school.
- Experience higher rates of **substance abuse, depression and suicidal ideation**.



How can we change these statistics?

The best way you can support the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ foster youth is by being **“open and affirming.”**

The phrase “open and affirming” means to **support and affirm** the identity of your youth. It was **coined by church congregations in the United Church of Christ** to signal their support for LGBTQ+ individuals.

According to the Trevor Project, if a LGBTQ+ youth has an open and affirming adult in their life, **they were 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt** in the previous year.

How can I support my LGBTQ+ foster youth?

The best way to be open and affirming is to **lead with love, compassion, and empathy**. This doesn't mean you have to find a new set of morals to follow or move mountains.

Ways to be open and affirming to your LGBTQ+ foster youth include:

- **Being a shoulder** to lean on
- **Offering curiosity**, not confusion
- **Staying informed** on the climate for LGBTQ+ people in your community
- **Remaining in discussion** with your youth regarding their health and wellbeing
- **Helping them build a support system** at home, school and work

You don't have to be alone while learning how to be open and affirming.

Organizations like **PFLAG** and **Free Mom Hugs** have robust networks that connect with you with more resources and fellow supportive parents and allies to the LGBTQ+ community. **Explore these organizations using the QR codes below!**



PFLAG



Free Mom Hugs



The Trevor Project

What if my foster youth changes their mind?

A common concern among parents or caregivers of LGBTQ+ youth is that the queer or trans identity of their child is a phase or that their child is too young to know who they are.

However, as any other adolescents, **LGBTQ+ foster youth need the freedom to explore their identity** and discover who they are. This freedom is often **the only aspect of their life they have control over** while in state custody.

Important Mental Health Resources

LGBTQ+ youth face intense mental health challenges that can be difficult to respond to. Resources are available to support your home.

- **Compass Behavioral Health** (Garden and Dodge City) <https://compassbh.org/>
- **LGBT+ Wichita Health Coalition** <https://wichitalgbthealth.org/select-your-county-to-see-providers-near-you/>
- **The Magnolia Institute** (Lawrence) <https://themagnoliainstitute.com>
- **Queer Affirming Therapist Guild of KC** queeraffirmingkc.com/member-directory/
- **Flint Hills Queer Affirming Therapists** (Manhattan) <https://www.fhhrp.org/mental-health>

Additional Resources

Below is a list of additional organizations that may be helpful resources for you.

GLSEN Kansas;

<https://www.glsen.org/chapter/kansas>

The LGBTQ Foundation of Kansas;

<https://lgbtqks.org/>

ACLU Kansas; <https://www.aclukansas.org/>

Equality Kansas; <https://eqks.org/>

Kansas Appleseed;

<https://www.kansasappleseed.org/>

Trans Youth Emergency Project

<https://southernequality.org/tyep/>

Sources:

NIH Study: LGBTQ Youth in Unstable Housing and Foster Care

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6398424/>

LGBTQ+ Youth in the Foster Care System

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/lgbtq-youth-in-the-foster-care-system>

Report: Kansas foster care placement instability driven by older youths with high levels of need

<https://kansasreflector.com/2023/03/31/report-kansas-foster-care-placement-instability-driven-by-older-youth-with-high-levels-of-need/>

Accepting Adults Reduce Suicide Attempts Among LGBTQ Youth

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/accepting-adults-reduce-suicide-attempts-among-lgbtq-youth/>