

7 Tips for CASA/GAL Programs on Working with LGBTQ Youth

The following tips were compiled from interviews with 25 CASA staff members and volunteers, youth formerly in foster care, parents and national experts on the needs of LGBTQ youth.

1. **Train for success**—Prepare volunteers to be open and accepting in their manner and to leave any biases at home. Volunteer training should also include how to intervene in cases of bullying, defaming language, discrimination and other harassment—whether it comes from peers, family members or other service providers.
2. **Collaborate**—Discuss issues of sexuality and gender identity with other child welfare stakeholders, including judges, social services departments and other service providers. Form a taskforce or collaborate on joint training for staff and volunteers.
3. **Look at policies**—If you haven't already done so, adopt nondiscrimination and inclusion policies that cover sexual orientation and gender identity of staff, volunteers, board members and families served. This direction from the board and program director will set the example of inclusion from the top and make staff and volunteers feel supported in the effort.
4. **Learn what's out there**—Take advantage of valuable resources on serving LGBTQ youth in care that have been developed in recent years (see Resources sidebar).
5. **Don't forget the parents**—Research and train volunteers about national and local resources for supporting parents on their journey to acceptance. Remember that rejection can soften over time.
6. **Engage the gay community**—Recruit and support members of the LGBTQ community as volunteers. Use them as a resource, but don't alienate them by limiting them to serving only LGBTQ youth.
7. **Maintain confidentiality**—The unique confidentiality issues of LGBTQ youth should be addressed in training and supervising volunteers. When dealing with safety issues, there is a fine line between working on a plan with the youth's buy-in and outing a youth against his or her will, which can have dire consequences.