

Protocol for Safe & Affirming Care

Executive Summary

As a guide for professionals, volunteers, and caregivers in Washington State's child welfare and juvenile justice systems, the Protocol for Safe & Affirming Care provides the framework for providing safer and more affirming care to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth (LGBTQ+) in these systems. In doing so, it lays a foundation for improving the lives of not only LGBTQ+ youth, but all youth in these systems.

Foundation

The Foundation of the Protocol includes its purpose, vision, and principles.

Purpose: The purpose of the Protocol is to improve the safety, health, and well-being of *all* youth in Washington's child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Professionals, volunteers, and caregivers will *not* be able to improve the safety, health, and well-being of all youth unless and until they address the specific needs of LGBTQ+ youth. LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in these systems, experience unique forms of trauma, and have specific needs related to their sexual orientation and gender identity. Therefore, ensuring appropriate care for *all* youth necessitates a focused effort on behalf of LGBTQ+ youth.

Vision: Professionals, contracted providers, caregivers, and volunteers in Washington's child welfare and juvenile justice systems will support each and every youth in the development of the youth's sexual orientation and gender identity and recognize that such support is critical to the youth's safety, health, and well-being.

Principles:

1. LGBTQ+ youth exist.
2. Meeting the specific needs of LGBTQ+ youth is a matter of health, safety, and well-being.
3. The health, safety, and well-being of youth is the priority.
4. Youth have a right to self-determination.
5. LGBTQ+ youth are individuals.
6. LGBTQ+ youth are entitled to equitable services and resources.
7. Understanding LGBTQ+ youth is a core competency for every professional, volunteer, and caregiver.
8. Youth have expertise in their own lives.
9. Making assumptions is harmful.
10. Collaboration is the key to success.

Access the full Protocol at
<https://ccyj.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Protocol-for-Safe-Affirming-Care.pdf>

10 Components of Safe & Affirming Care

Based on the Foundation, the 10 Components of Safe & Affirming Care each contain model policies that further the purpose of the Protocol, as well as tools to assist professionals, volunteers, and caregivers in carrying out those policies. The 10 Components are:

1. **Protecting the Rights of All Youth:** To ensure basic, fundamental protections for all youth.
2. **Training Professionals, Volunteers, and Caregivers:** To ensure:
 - All professionals, volunteers, and caregivers have the foundational knowledge necessary to ensure the safety, health, and well-being of youth as it relates to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression; and
 - Each agency, court, and organization has at least one professional who has a high level of knowledge with regard to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and can support other professionals, volunteers, and caregivers with these issues when they arise.
3. **Creating Safe & Affirming Spaces for All:** To increase the comfort and sense of safety among youth and ensure all youth know—through verbal and non-verbal indicators—that they can talk about their sexual orientation and gender identity.
4. **Talking About Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity with All Youth:** To increase the comfort and sense of safety among youth and ensure all youth know—through verbal and non-verbal indicators—that they can talk about their sexual orientation and gender identity.
5. **Collecting Data on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression (SOGIE):** To obtain information on the sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression of *all* youth so as to better understand how sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression impacts entry into systems, experiences in systems, and outcomes after exiting systems. The purpose is also to understand how the relationship between youth's SOGIE and other demographics, such as race and ethnicity, impacts youth's experiences. Ultimately, this information will better enable professionals, volunteers, and caregivers to: prevent more youth from entering systems; improve youth's experience in systems; and ensure better outcomes upon exiting systems.
6. **Ensuring Safe & Affirming Services for LGBTQ+ Youth:** To ensure that system professionals provide services that meet the specific needs of LGBTQ+ youth and ensure contracted or partner providers do the same.
7. **Ensuring Safe & Affirming Housing for LGBTQ+ Youth:** To ensure professionals, volunteers, and caregivers meet the specific housing needs of LGBTQ+ youth.
8. **Ensuring Safe & Affirming Healthcare for LGBTQ+ Youth:** To ensure professionals, volunteers, and caregivers meet the specific healthcare needs of LGBTQ+ youth, especially transgender youth.
9. **Responding to Families of LGBTQ+ Youth:** To assess families' attitudes and beliefs towards LGBTQ+ people and the impact of any negative attitudes or beliefs, and to provide families with accurate, free, and accessible information and reconciliation services if warranted.
10. **Establishing Expectations for Professionals, Volunteers, & Caregivers:** To ensure professionals, volunteers, and caregivers provide safe and affirming care to LGBTQ+ youth and that they use data to continue to improve their systems for LGBTQ+ and all youth, with the ultimate goal of improving the health, safety, and well-being of all youth.

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