

## For More Information

Child Welfare League of America, [www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

Advocates for Youth, [www.youthresource.com](http://www.youthresource.com)

Lambda Legal, [www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org).

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, [www.thetaskforce.org/issues/youth](http://www.thetaskforce.org/issues/youth)

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, (202) 467.8180 or [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

# What's YOUR region?



## find contact information on **YouthInProgress.org**

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## Need to Know Series:

# LGBTQ: Sexual Orientation Questions of Youth



## Youth In Progress

New York State Foster Care  
Youth Leadership Advisory Team

*“The mission of Youth In Progress is to enhance and advance the lives of today’s and tomorrow’s youth by supporting their sense of self and responsibility. To do this, we pledge to educate everyone involved in the various systems Youth In Progress members represent to the realities of this experience.”*

[www.youthinprogress.org](http://www.youthinprogress.org)

*There are many youth in care, including those who self-identify as other than heterosexual. The following definitions provide general information to youth who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ), youth who are perceived by others as LGBTQ, and anyone who wants to learn more about this topic.*

**LGBTQ** is an abbreviation commonly used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning individuals.

**Lesbian** refers to a female who is emotionally, romantically, and sexually attracted to other females.

**Gay** refers to a person who is emotionally, romantically, and sexually attracted to people of the same gender. Sometimes, it may be used to refer to gay men and boys only. It is preferred over the term “homosexual.”

**Bisexual** refers to a person who is attracted to, and may form sexual and romantic relationships with, males and females.

**Transgender** may be used as an umbrella term to include all persons whose gender identity or gender expression does not match society's expectations of how an individual of that gender should behave in relation to his or her gender. For purposes of protection from discrimination and harassment, transgender refers to both self-identified transgender individuals and individuals perceived as transgender. Transgender people may identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning.

**Questioning** refers to a person, often an adolescent, who is exploring or questioning issues of sexual orientation or gender identity and/or expression in his or her life. Some people who are questioning will ultimately identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender; others will self-identify as heterosexual and not transgender.

**Sexual orientation** refers to a person's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to persons of the same or different gender.

**Gender identity** refers to a person's internal sense of self as male, female, no gender, or another gender.

**Gender expression** refers to the manner in which a person expresses his or her gender through clothing, appearance, behavior, speech, etc. A person's gender expression may vary from the norms traditionally associated with his or her assigned sex at birth. Gender expression is a separate concept from sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, a male may exhibit feminine qualities, but identify as a heterosexual male.

## Facts from Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)

- 🌀 LGBTQ people live throughout the world and have lived throughout time. Approximately 5% - 10% of the general population is LGBTQ.
- 🌀 Many LGBTQ people report awareness of their orientation at a very young age. Others may not be aware until they are older adults. No one is too young or too old to self-identify.
- 🌀 Not all LGBTQ people self-identify. Some people may be perceived as LGBTQ but are not. The only way to know if someone is LGBTQ is if the person tells you.
- 🌀 Sexual orientation or gender identity should not be an obstacle to a happy, healthy, productive life.

## ALL Youth in Care Have Rights

- 🌀 You have many rights while you are in care, including the right to be treated equally, to be yourself, and to be open or private about your sexual orientation — regardless of your gender identity.
- 🌀 ALL youth deserve a safe, respectful, and discrimination-free environment.
- 🌀 The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) is committed to respecting the dignity of all youth, and keeping them safe and secure regardless of individual differences.
- 🌀 You should tell your caseworker or staff you trust if you feel unsafe.
- 🌀 The adult professionals in your life have a duty to support you and protect you from harassment and mistreatment.
- 🌀 The adults in your life should accept you for who you are, and not try to change your sexual orientation or gender identity.

### Reference

The definitions in this brochure and other information were compiled from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services' Policy & Procedures Manual “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth” (PPM 3448.00).

