



Affirming Care: Best Practices for Working with LGBTQIA + Homeless Youth

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Speaker Introduction

- Dana *TherActivist* Johnson, MSW (They/ Them/ He/ Him)
- Identify as Transgender Nonbinary
- Director of Family Shelter Services, Bill Wilson Center
- PRIDE Initiative co-chair, LGBTQIA+ Commissioner, and CoastPride Board Member for County of San Mateo
- LGBTQIA+ Activist; Author & Documentary Filmmaker of *TherActivist: They/ Them/ Theirs*
- 18 years experience as Professional Development Facilitator

TherActivist: They/ Them/ Theirs

Book & Film project

- **Identity, Intersectionality, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging.** The TherActivist embodies a therapeutic activism approach, while servicing and empowering people of color, LGBTQ+ communities, and marginalized populations. For further details on empowering your "therapeutic activism," check out: TherActivist: They/Them/Theirs documentary.

www.theractivist.com



Bill Wilson Center- Mission/ Vision/ Values

Mission

Together we improve the lives of youth, individuals, families and our communities through housing, mental health care, supportive services and advocacy.

Vision

A community, built on strong connections, where everyone belongs, lives with dignity and thrives.

Values

- **Belonging**
- **Collaboration**
- **Compassion**
- **Impact**
- **Integrity**
- **Learning**
- **Perseverance**



How are you feeling today??



Understanding the Issue

- Challenges homeless LGBTQIA+ youth face (e.g., violence, mental health struggles, lack of access to services, SOGIE, navigating intersectionalities)
- Causes of homelessness among LGBTQIA+ youth (e.g., family rejection, discrimination, economic hardship, marginalized community)
- Statistics on LGBTQIA+ youth homelessness

Intersectionality

Multiple identities are interwoven into an individual's experience and cannot be examined independently of each other (Crenshaw, 1989)



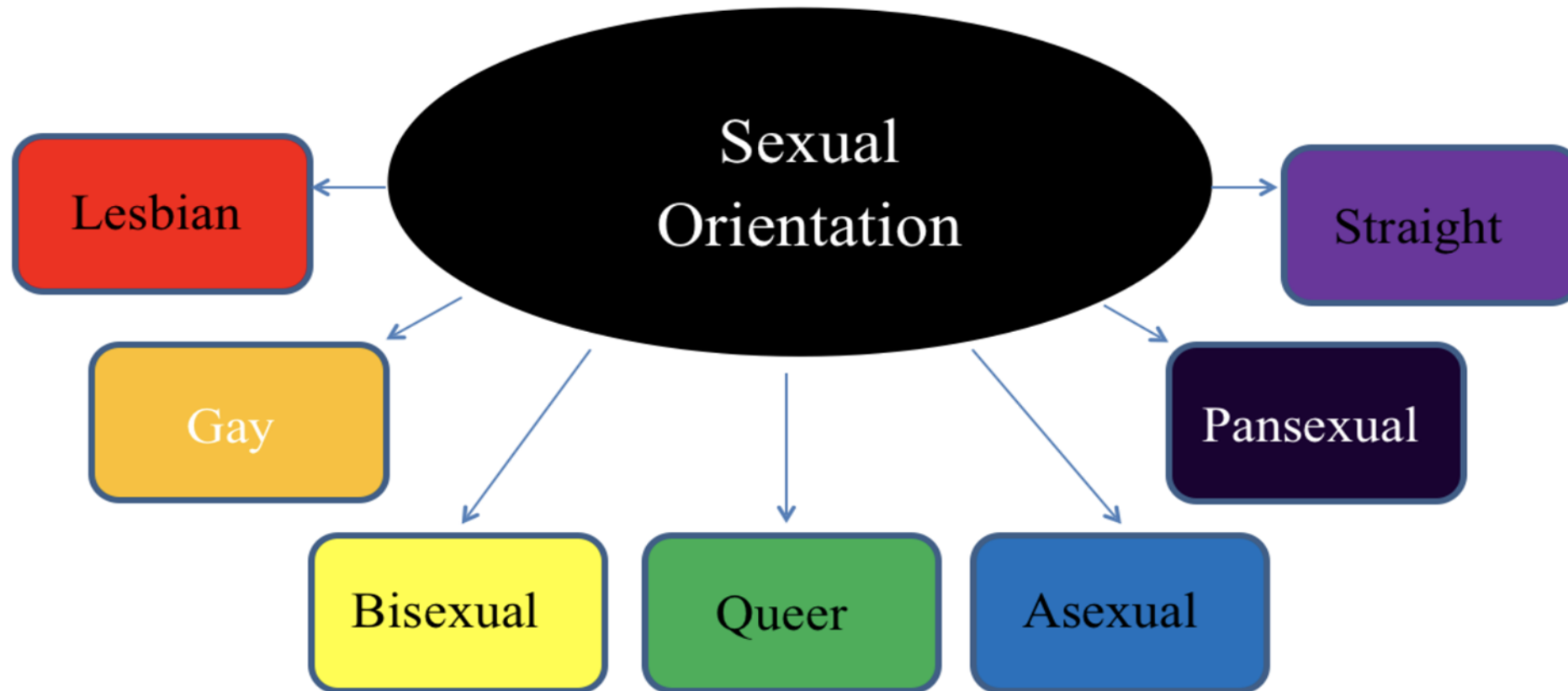
What is SOGIE??

SEXUAL ORIENTATION is a person's physical, romantic, emotional, aesthetic, and/or other form of attraction to others. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. ***Who you love or are attracted to.***

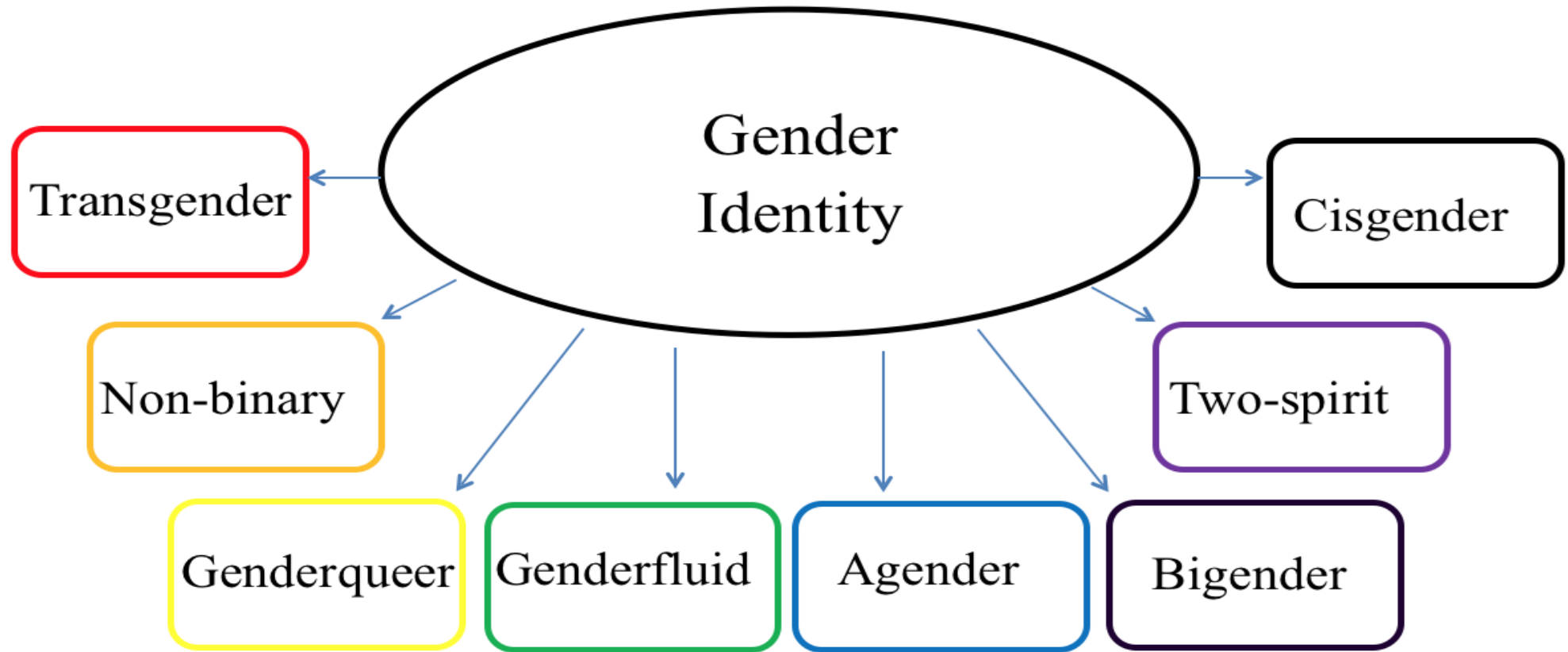
GENDER IDENTITY refers to the individual identification of a person's gender, as defined by that person, and can differ from their sex assigned at birth. It is one's internal sense of being a "man or woman", neither of these, both, or other genders. ***Deeply held sense of who you are.***

GENDER EXPRESSION refers to the way one expresses their gender identity. It is the physical manifestation of one's gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. ***How you communicate your gender to the world.***

Sexual Orientations



Gender Identities



Racial and Ethnic Disparities

Nearly half (44%) of Native/Indigenous LGBTQIA+ youth have faced homelessness or housing instability, compared to 16% of Asian American/Pacific Islander youth, 27% of White LGBTQIA+ youth, 27% of Latinx LGBTQIA+ youth, 26% of Black LGBTQIA+ youth, and 36% of multiracial LGBTQIA+ youth.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>

Gender Identity Factors

Transgender and nonbinary youth report higher rates of homelessness and housing instability, with 38% of transgender girls/women, 39% of transgender boys/men, and 35% of nonbinary youth affected, compared to 23% of cisgender LGBTQ youth.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>

Family Rejection

A significant number of LGBTQIA+ youth experience homelessness due to family rejection. Specifically, 16% reported running away from home because of mistreatment or fear of mistreatment related to their LGBTQIA+ identity, and 14% were kicked out or abandoned for the same reason.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>

Principles of Affirming Care

- Respect & Inclusion – Using correct names and pronouns
- Cultural Competency – Understanding diverse LGBTQIA+ identities
- Safety & Confidentiality – Creating a space where youth feel protected
- Empowerment – Encouraging self-expression and autonomy



Gender Pronouns

Please note that these are not the only pronouns. There are an infinite number of pronouns as new ones emerge in our language. Always ask someone for their pronouns.

Subjective	Objective	Possessive	Reflexive	Example
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking. I listened to her. The backpack is hers.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking. I listened to him. The backpack is his.
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves	They are speaking. I listened to them. The backpack is theirs.
Ze	Hir/Zir	Hirs/Zirs	Hirself/ Zirself	Ze is speaking. I listened to hir. The backpack is zirs.

Design by Landyn Pan

[t transstudent.tumblr.com](https://transstudent.tumblr.com)
[f facebook.com/transstudent](https://facebook.com/transstudent)
twitter.com/transstudent

For more information,
go to transstudent.org/graphics

TSER
 Trans Student Educational Resources

PRONOUN CHECKLIST WHEN WORKING WITH YOUTH

- ✓ Check with the individual to see how they would like to be referred to when using their pronouns.
- ✓ Follow-up with the class to create an understanding on how names and pronouns will be used.
- ✓ Allow students to share or not share based off of their own assessment of safety.
- ✓ Set an example with an introduction and explanation for your own name and pronouns.
- ✓ Check in periodically with the class to see if what you have agreed upon still works for them when using pronouns.
- ✓ Check in with student on what chosen name and pronoun to use for them when interacting with their parents.

We all Mistakes...

AFFIRM the other person, be **KIND** to yourself,
Keep **PRACTICING**, and **LEARN**

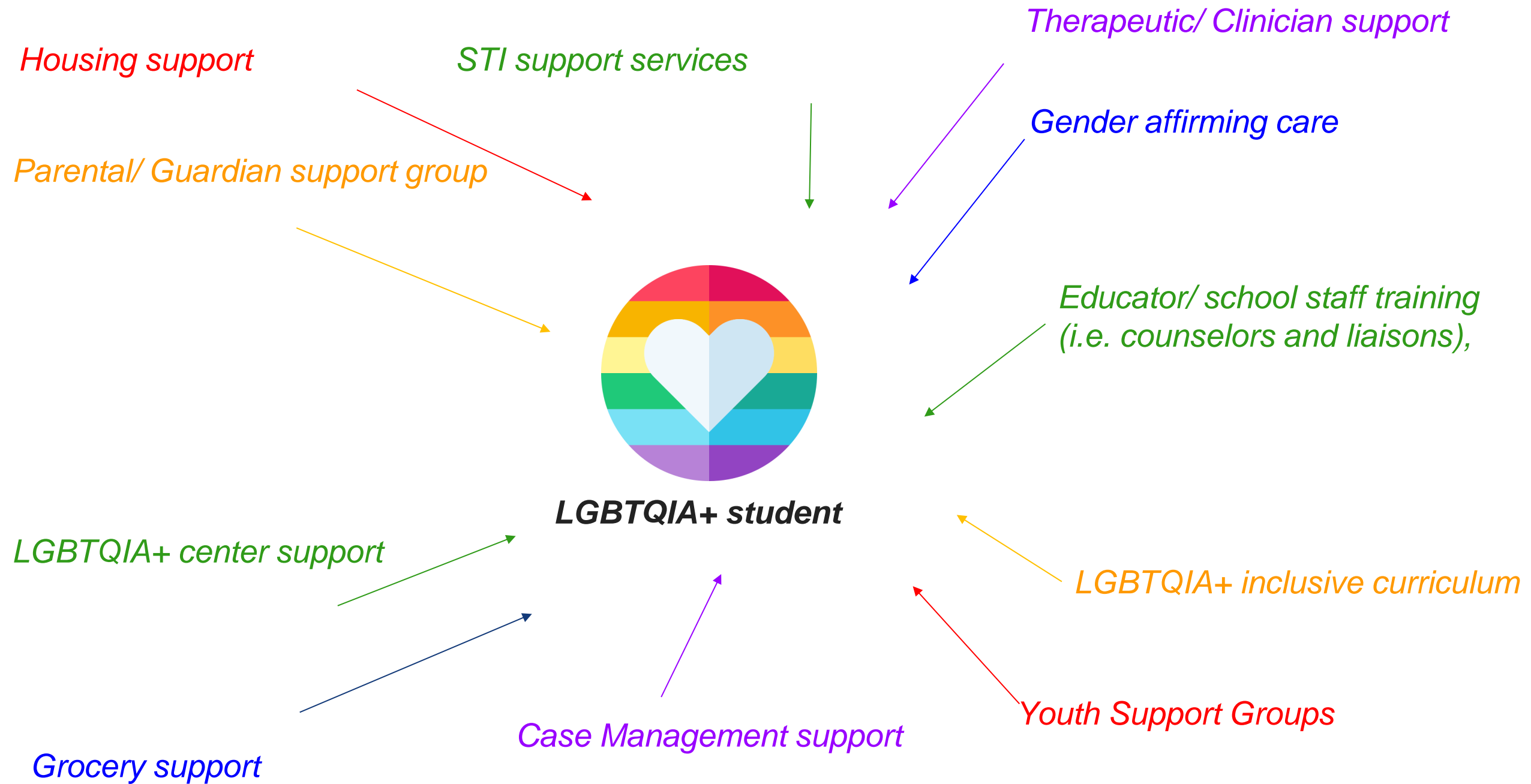
1. When you make a mistake, correct yourself briefly and move on.
2. When someone corrects you say thank you, and correct yourself.
3. Get in the habit of interrupting people with a quick correction.
4. Practice helps. Work on using pronouns and gender neutral language.
5. Try not to make people feel like a burden or responsible for alleviating your discomfort for having pronouns you are struggling with.



Trauma-Informed Approaches

- Recognizing the impact of rejection and trauma
- Avoiding re-traumatization through affirming interactions
- Providing mental health support tailored to LGBTQIA+ experiences





Barriers to Care

- Systemic discrimination in shelters and services
- Lack of understanding and training among service providers
- Fear of disclosure and mistrust of institutions



Mental Health Impact

LGBTQIA+ youth who have experienced homelessness or housing instability are at a higher risk for mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidal ideation.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>

Impact of Affirming Environments

Transgender and nonbinary youth with access to gender-affirming resources, such as appropriate clothing and supportive communities, reported lower rates of suicide attempts.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/?utm>

Mental Health- Suicide Risk

In 2024, 39% of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered suicide, with 46% of transgender and nonbinary youth reporting such thoughts.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research/?utm>

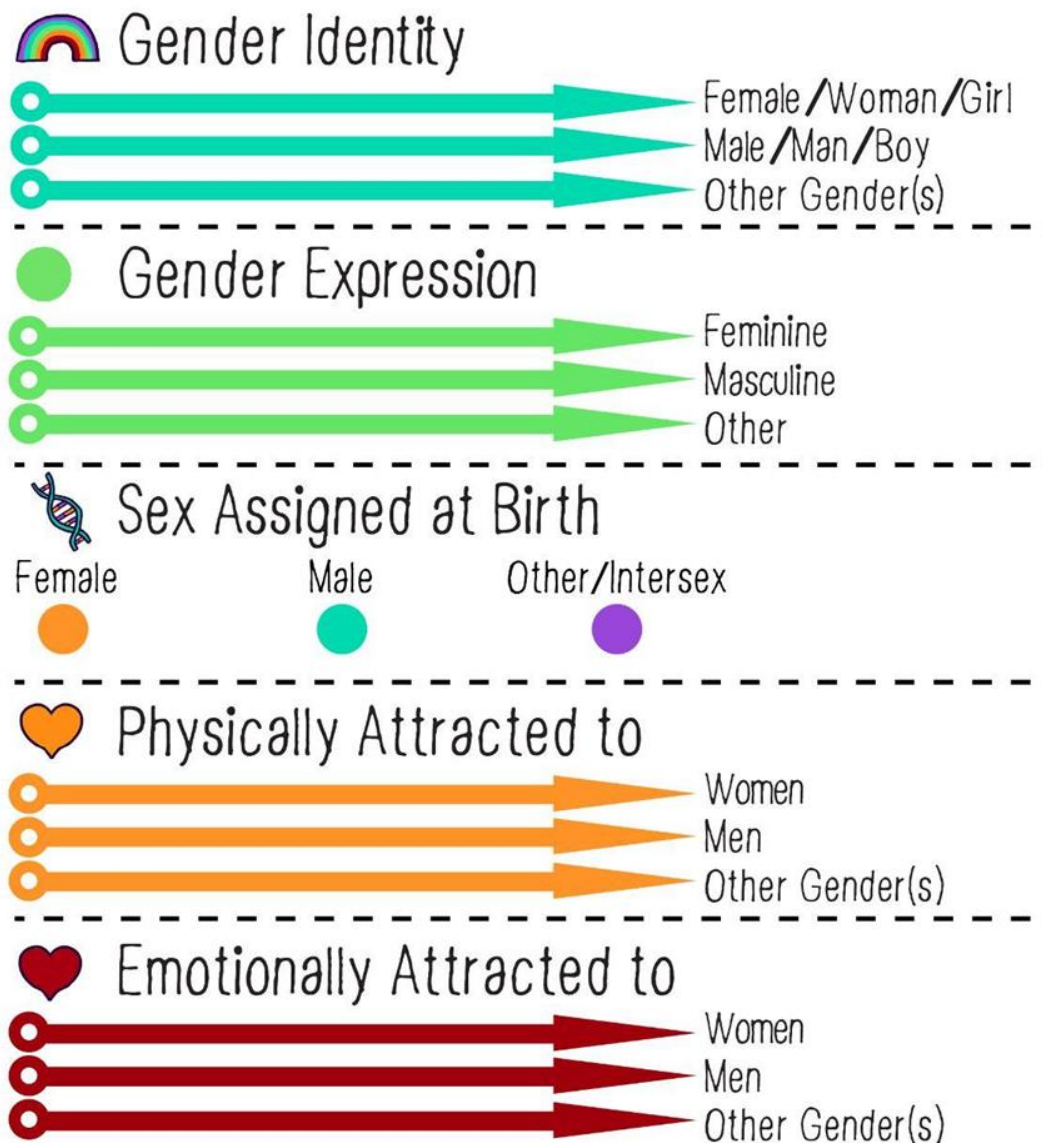
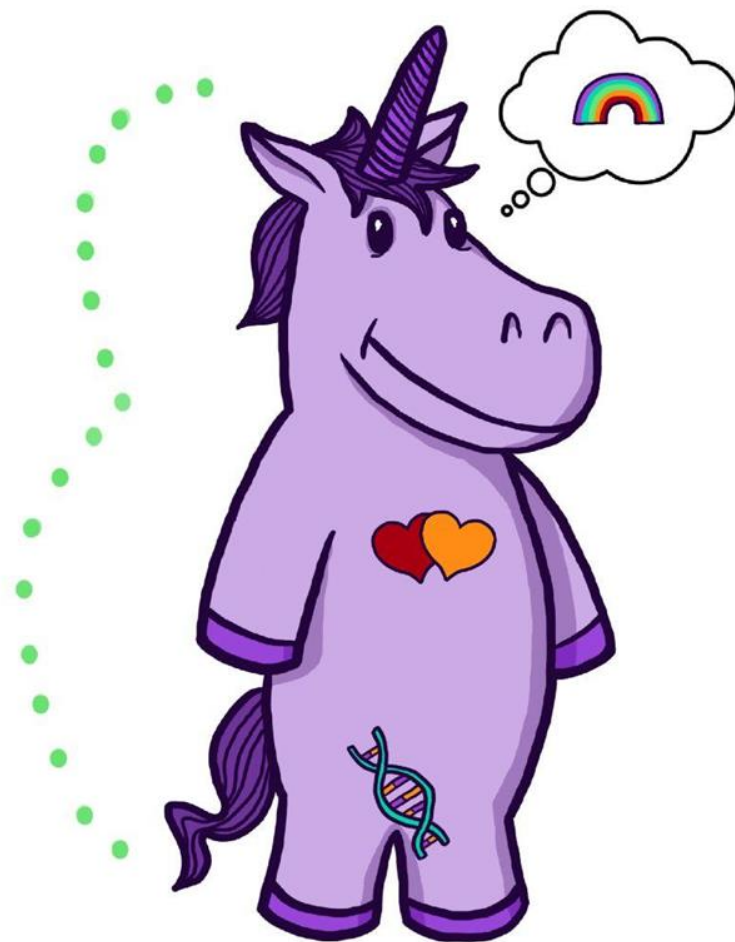
Best Practices for Service Providers

- Use gender-inclusive language
- Offer LGBTQIA+ competency training for staff
- Ensure facilities are safe and welcoming (e.g., gender-neutral restrooms, inclusive signage)
- Establish clear non-discrimination policies
- Partner with LGBTQIA+ organizations for additional resources



The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

Are there more than two genders?

Gender Binary

- a classification system consisting of two genders, male and female.
- a concept or belief that there are only two genders and that one's sex or gender assigned at birth will align with traditional social constructs of masculine and feminine identity, expression, and sexuality.

Nonbinary

- *Nonbinary* is an umbrella term to describe any gender identity that does not fit into the gender binary of male and female.
- Nonbinary gender (also sometimes referred to as genderqueer) people may, for example, identify as having no gender, fall on a gender spectrum somewhere between male and female, or identify as totally outside binary gender identities.

Non-Gendered language

Use Non-Gendered Language

When greeting others

Avoid:

ladies gentlemen ma'am sir girls guys etc.

Consider using instead:

"Thanks, **friends**.
Have a great
night."

"Good morning,
folks!"

"Hi, **everyone!**"

"And for **you?**"

"Can I get
you **all**
something?"

Why?

Shifting to gender-inclusive language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumption.

Be mindful of language

Non-Gendered Language

What to say when you don't know a person's gender identity?
(reminder unless someone tells you, don't make an assumption)

Change to

Mankind	
Chairman/Chairwoman	
Businessman/Businesswoman	
Mom/Dad	
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	
Salesman/Saleswoman	
Men/Women	
Waitress/Waiter	
Manpower	
Maiden Name	
Husband/Wife	

Non-Gendered Language

What to say when you don't know a person's gender identity?
(reminder unless someone tells you, don't make an assumption)

Change to

Mankind	Humankind
Chairman/Chairwoman	Chair/Chairperson
Businessman/Businesswoman	Representative/Businessperson
Mom/Dad	Parent/Guardian/Caretaker
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	Partner/Significant other
Salesman/Saleswoman	Salesperson/Representative
Men/Women	People/Person
Waitress/Waiter	Server/Staff person
Manpower	Workforce/People Power
Maiden Name	Family Name
Husband/Wife	Spouse/Partner

Housing & Shelter Considerations

- Creating LGBTQIA+ inclusive shelter policies
- Providing options for gender-affirming housing placements
- Training staff on conflict resolution and inclusion

- **Ensure the Physical Space is Welcoming**
 - o Inclusive signs/posters
 - o Private/Gender Neutral Restrooms/Changing Rooms
 - o Resources/books
- **Use Bias-free Language And Refrain From Assumptions**
 - o Ask for Gender Pronouns & Names (for substitutes also)
 - o Gender neutral language
- **Include & represent LGBTQIA+ people in school events – career days, health fairs, multicultural celebrations**



Coming Out Story Guidance

Instructions:

In a moment we are going to be doing an activity about coming out. Before we jump into the activity, please write down the following 5 things.

Write down a list of the following:

1. Name of a person (friend/loved one)
 2. Name of a family member or relative
 3. A hobby/passion you enjoy
 4. A material possession that you wouldn't want to lose
- A dream job

ALLY TO-DO LIST

1. Check your own **biases**: Notice your own reactions to racism, ableism, sexism, heteronormativity
2. **Continue learning** about areas that you have limited exposure to
3. **Intervene** when you observe biased language & behaviors
4. Use everyday opportunities to make change (**share pronouns, use gender inclusive greetings, “welcome everyone”, etc.**)
5. Educate yourself on appropriate **empowerment strategies** for yourself and people you work with.
6. Share your learning!



Ally Spectrum

Behold, the Straight for Equality Ally Spectrum®:

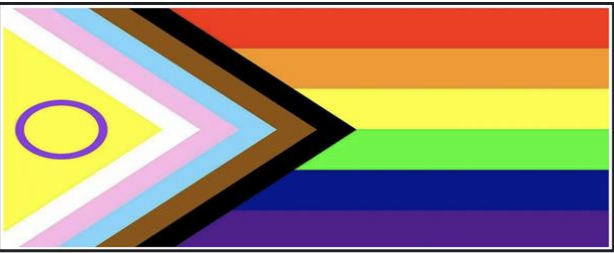


<https://www.straightforequality.org/allyspectrum>

Allyship Action Items

- What is something you want to do to educate yourself?
- What will you implement in your Instruction?
- What needs to be added to your community, school culture, conversations?
- What systems or procedures could you impact?





Servicing, Supporting and Allyship to LGBTQIA+ Homeless youth/students

- ***Written & Created By: Dana TherActivist Johnson, MSW (they/ them/ he/ him)***

Resources



- **The Trevor Project- National Runaway Safeline**
 - a. **Services: 24/7 support for youth in crisis, including LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness**
- **True Colors United- Focus: Ending youth homelessness with a focus on LGBTQ youth**
- **Bill Wilson Center – LGBTQ Transitional Living Program (San Jose)**
 - a. **Provides safe housing and supportive services for LGBTQ+ youth aged 18–24 who are experiencing homelessness or family rejection.**
- **Los Angeles LGBT Center – Youth Housing Services**
 - a. **Offers emergency and transitional housing, including 92 beds and 25 supportive apartments for youth aged 18–24. Also provides legal support and housing navigation services.**
- **Covenant House California (Los Angeles & Berkeley)- Delivers shelter, mental health care, and affirming services for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness.**

Work on Making a Commitment

1. What is one Non-Gendered Greeting I will work to adopt into my practices and learning?
2. What binary gendered statement do I sometimes use that I can commit to changing?
3. When will I share my pronouns and/or ask others for theirs as part of my practice?
4. What steps will I take to support gender expansive people?

Q&A Dialogue

