



Safe, Seen, and Supported: Strategies for Equitable Housing for LGBTQ+ Youth

Dana “TherActivist” Johnson, MSW
(They/ Them/ He/ Him)
Director Family Shelter Services, BWC
Advocate, Author, Documentarian,
Professional Development Facilitator



African Ancestry Land Acknowledgment

Sankofa Ancestral Acknowledgment

We acknowledge and thank the people of African ancestry who were stolen from their homelands and brought to this country and whose free labor played a major role in the formation and economic wealth of this country. We also honor the contributions of African American ancestral scientists, inventors, and entrepreneurs whose contributions were stolen or never acknowledged due to white supremacy. We honor and will not forget the thousands upon thousands of lives lost at the hands of enslavers, vigilantes, law enforcers and other forces of hatred in this country, generation after generation for the singular crime of being black, indigenous, or people of color. We affirm and uplift those of African ancestry living in this country today as living testaments to the strength, love, faith, and fortitude of a resilient people.



Speaker Introduction

- Dana *TheActivist* 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 *TheActivist: They/ Them/ Theirs*
- 18 years experience as Professional Development Facilitator
- Lived and professional experience in housing justice, justice-involved system, social and behavioral health systems

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??



Workshop Overview

- Why LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in homelessness
- What “Safe, Seen, and Supported” looks like in practice
- Tools you can implement immediately
- Strengthening school + housing collaboration



Intersectionality

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



Centering Intersectionality

LGBTQ+ youth of color face compounded risks.

Address:

- Racial disparities
- Disability inclusion
- Immigration concerns
- Foster care crossover

Equity requires more than inclusion — it requires intentional redesign.



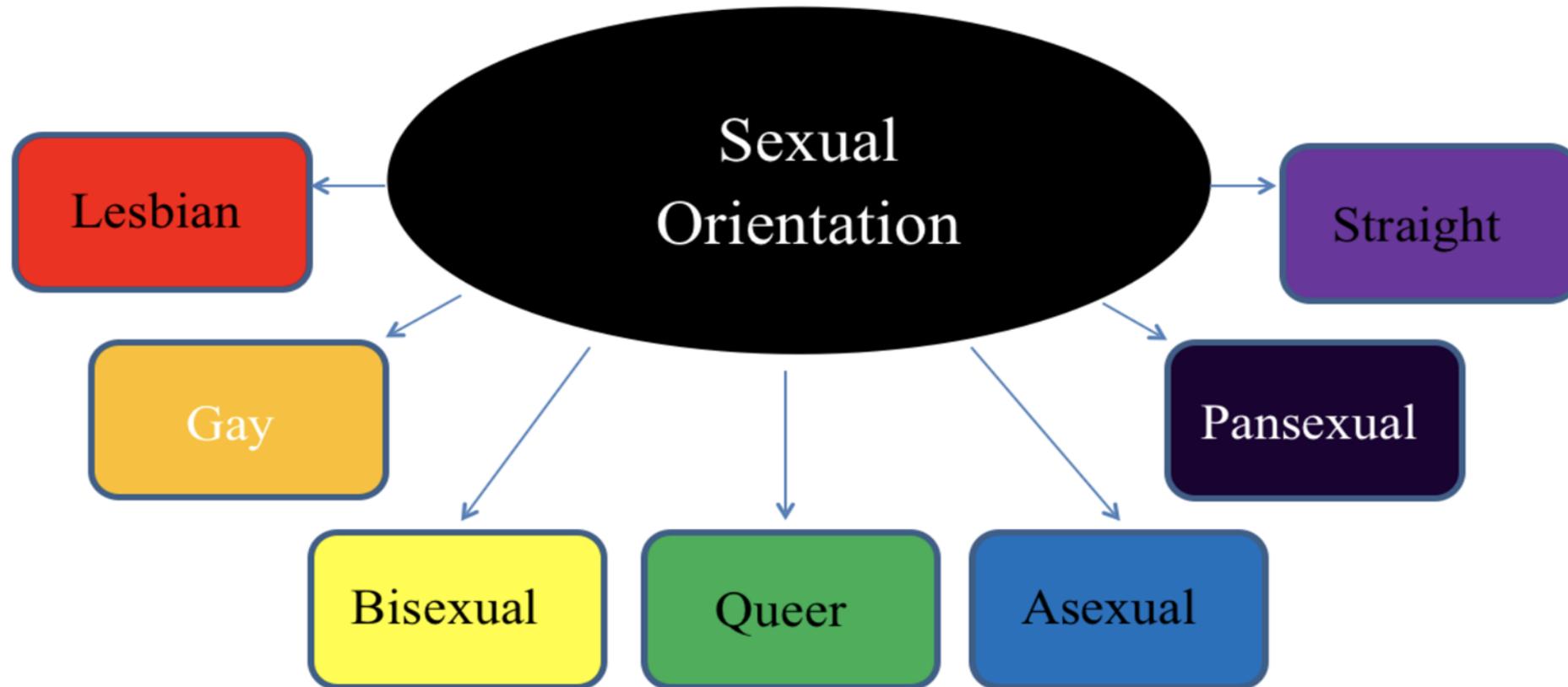
What is SOGIE??

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.***

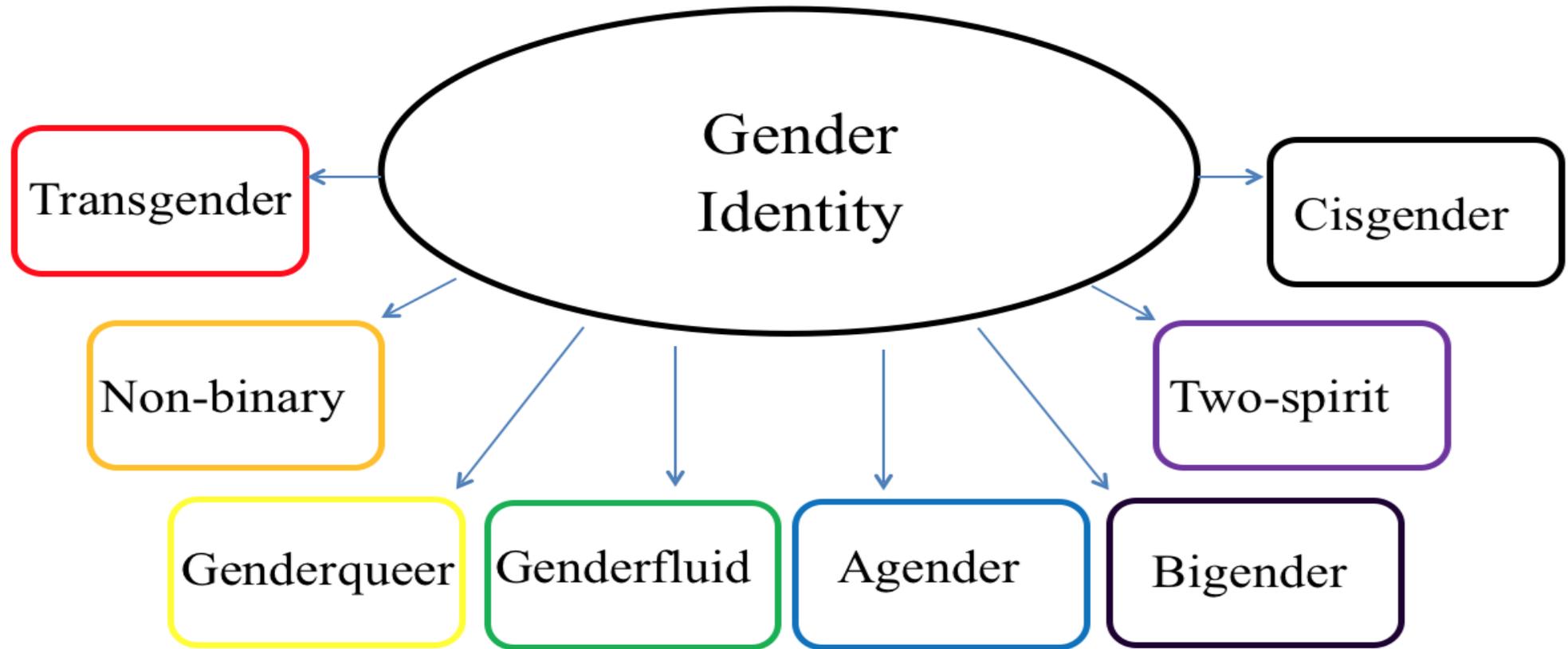
GENDER IDENTITY refers to the individual identification of a person's gender, as defined by that person, and can differ from their sex assigned at birth. It is one's internal sense of being a "man or woman", neither of these, both, or other genders. ***Deeply held sense of who you are.***

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



The Landscape – LGBTQ+ Youth & Homelessness

LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented in homeless youth populations

- **Family rejection is a leading cause**
- **Increased risk of violence, trafficking, and mental health challenges**

Root Causes of Housing Instability

Individual Level

- **Family rejection**
- **Outing without consent**
- **Mental health stigma**

Systemic Level

- **Discrimination in housing programs**
- **Religious-based service barriers**
- **Lack of affirming placements**
- **Racism and transphobia**



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

 transstudent.tumblr.com
 facebook.com/transstudent
 twitter.com/transstudent

For more information,
go to transstudent.org/graphics

TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources

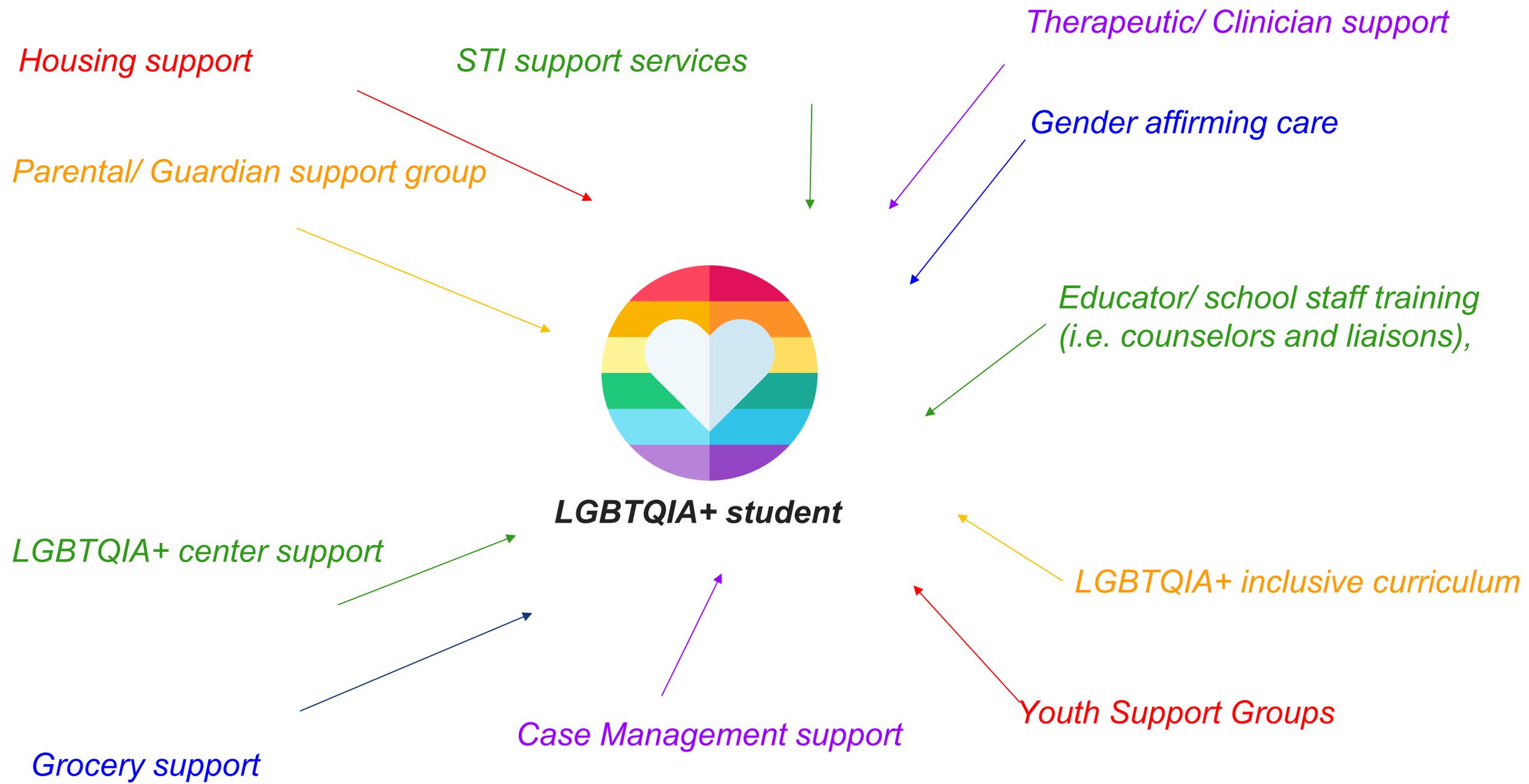
PRONOUN CHECKLIST WHEN WORKING WITH YOUTH

- ✓ **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**

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



What Does “Safe” Mean?

Physical Safety

- Protection from harassment and violence
- Gender-appropriate housing placement

Emotional Safety

- Correct names and pronouns
- Confidentiality

Policy Safety

- Clear anti-discrimination policies
- Zero tolerance for bullying



What Does “Seen” Mean?

Youth are not invisible

- Forms include chosen name & pronouns
- Intake does not assume heterosexuality
- Representation in posters/materials
- Staff trained in SOGIE competency



What Does “Supported” Mean?

- Access to affirming health care
- Mental health supports
- Educational stability
- Workforce pathways
- Long-term housing navigation



Support must be:

- Trauma-informed
- Culturally responsive
- Identity-affirming



Identity-Affirming Practices

Do:

- Use chosen name consistently
- Respect pronouns
- Provide gender-appropriate placement
- Provide access to affirming hygiene items

Avoid:

- Requiring proof of gender identity
- Placing youth based solely on sex assigned at birth
- Publicly outing youth



Policy & Systems Change

Key Policy Components:

- **Explicit SOGIE non-discrimination language**
- **Confidential data collection procedures**
- **Clear grievance process**
- **Staff accountability measures**

Organizational Assessment Tool:

Encourage participants to:

- **Review policies quarterly**
- **Include youth voice in review**
- **Align with state and federal protections**



Barriers to Implementation

Common Challenges:

- Staff discomfort
- Faith-based pushback
- Funding limitations
- Policy confusion

Response Strategies:

- Ongoing training
- Data-driven advocacy
- Youth advisory councils
- Incremental policy shifts



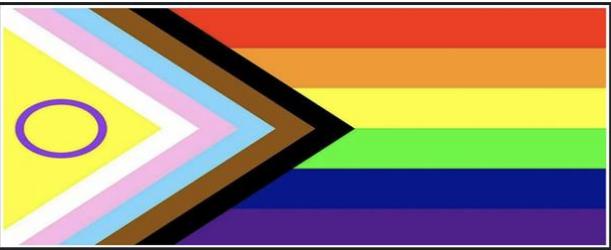
Best Practices for Service Providers

- 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





LGBTQIA+ Homeless Youth/ Students Toolkit



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

TOOLKIT

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

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

Key Takeaways

Safe = Protected & respected

Seen = Affirmed & acknowledged

Supported = Equipped for long-term stability

Belonging is not a bonus — it is foundational.



ALLY TO-DO LIST

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

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.

Q&A Dialogue

