PROMISING PRACTICES FOR SERVING
TRANSGENDER & NON-BINARY
FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS

A PUBLICATION OF

all children
all families

HUMAN
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Contents

About All Children—All Families

HRC's All Children—All Families project promotes LGBTQ cultural competency among child welfare agencies through innovative resources, including an online agency self-assessment tool, comprehensive staff training, free technical assistance and online learning. For more information, or to participate on behalf of your agency, visit hrc.org/acaf.

How to Use This Resource

This guide is intended for a range of audiences inside child welfare agencies and arranged by key areas of need. Feel free to read from front-to-back or jump to specific sections addressing current challenges:

- **Section I: Introduction.** A look at research on transgender and non-binary parents and the unique strengths they can bring to foster care and adoption; an overview of key terms and concepts related to gender identity and expression; and keys to success by your role in an agency.

- **Section II: Guiding Principles for Leadership.** An issue-by-issue guide for administrators working to build an agency inclusive of people of all genders, and offer services rooted in cultural humility,[1] including: transgender and non-binary inclusive non-discrimination policies; data collection on gender identity; creating an inclusive agency environment (i.e., amending forms, addressing gender-segregated facilities, displaying key literature and signage); engaging local organizations; training staff and gathering community feedback.

- **Section III: Resource Parent Certification Process from A-Z.** An overview of promising practices for frontline workers, supervisors and advocates to consider while guiding prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents through the certification process from recruitment to post-placement support.

- **Section IV: Tools for Agencies.** Tools to support child welfare agencies implementing the practices offered in this guide, including: a checklist for creating gender-inclusive events; affirming questions on gender identity; resources to share with transgender and non-binary parents and a glossary of terms.

SECTION I:
Introduction

1. Unique Strengths of Transgender & Non-Binary Parents

The United States foster care system provides services and support for nearly half a million children and youth. More than 100,000 of these young people are awaiting adoption and thousands age out of the system each year without ever achieving permanency.[2] Research indicates that an estimated 2 million lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) adults are interested in adoption in the U.S. Recently, many foster care and adoption agencies around the country have actively recruited resource parents from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community, yet targeted recruitment has mostly centered around LGB cisgender (non-transgender)[*] resource parents. In fact, same-sex couples are six times more likely to raise a child in foster care and four times more likely to raise an adopted child compared to their different-sex counterparts.[3]

Recognizing that transgender and non-binary[†] parents are a similarly qualified and untapped resource for children in need of loving homes, agencies across the U.S. are beginning to more intentionally welcome, recruit and certify transgender and non-binary resource parents. This guide provides policy and practice guidance for agencies working to improve their work with this often-overlooked community of potential parents.

There are approximately 1.4 million transgender and non-binary adults living in the United States.[4] Research on this community is limited; however, one meta-study found a substantial number of transgender and non-binary people are parenting, though at rates below the U.S. general population. The vast majority of these parents report good or positive relationships with their children, including after "coming out" as transgender or non-binary or transitioning. In addition, studies have consistently found no evidence that having a transgender or non-binary parent affects a child's gender identity or sexual orientation, nor has an impact on other developmental milestones.[5]

Transgender and non-binary parents also bring unique strengths to foster care and adoption. The lived experiences of many transgender and non-binary adults can complement the skills required to navigate the inevitable challenges that arise when serving as resource parents.[6] Specifically, research shows that these experiences may result in the following skills and strengths as resource parents:[7]

- ***Navigating Rejection.*** Transgender and non-binary people often find themselves explaining their identities to people—including family—who may have a hard time understanding or who actively reject them. Navigating these experiences requires a strong sense of self, and can help many transgender and non-binary people attain an uncommon level of self-acceptance. In facing familial misunderstanding or rejection, they often build their capacity to create supportive family units and model affirming behaviors to others in their families and beyond.[8] These are all helpful skills for resource parents as they seek to build a supportive family environment for children in care.

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* Please refer to page 11 for key terms used throughout this guide. A comprehensive glossary of terms is included in Section IV.

† While the term "transgender" is inclusive of non-binary people, this publication's title and content intentionally read "transgender and non-binary resource parents" to ensure non-binary people are acknowledged and considered as agencies work to implement the promising practices herein.

- ***Embracing Difference.*** Transgender and non-binary people experience disproportionately high rates of discrimination and may therefore have a higher awareness of oppression, and a deeper understanding of the importance of embracing differences.[9] In child welfare settings, these skills are especially meaningful given that many foster placements and adoptions are transracial and cross-cultural.

- ***Resilient & Resourceful.*** Transgender and non-binary people often demonstrate resiliency and resourcefulness, which is a key psychological indicator for health and well-being. These traits empower transgender and non-binary people to cope with everyday stress, as well as bias, discrimination and harassment. Given the challenges that are likely to arise for resource parents, having transgender and non-binary adults certified and ready to serve in these roles is essential.

- ***Fostering Optimism.*** Many transgender and non-binary people lead happy and hopeful lives, believing in a happy future for themselves and their family members. Engaging transgender and non-binary adults will offer models of possibility for transgender and non-binary children and young people living in out-of-home care settings.

As this last strength suggests, further motivation for improving practice with transgender and non-binary resource parents stems from a growing awareness of the specific needs of transgender and non-binary young people in child welfare systems. Transgender and non-binary young people are overrepresented in care, with some estimates as high as 16.7 percent, as compared to the general transgender and non-binary population in the United States (less than 1 percent).[10] Tragically, these young people enter out-of-home care settings primarily due to family rejection, homelessness, biased school discipline policies and other failed safety nets.[11] Far too often, they continue to experience higher rates of bias, discrimination and violence when in foster care, often leading to negative safety, permanency and well-being outcomes.[12]

Targeted recruitment of transgender and non-binary adults is one effective response to the real need for affirming placements for young people of diverse gender identities. Moreover, given the many strengths outlined here, transgender and non-binary adults are well positioned to welcome and encourage all children in care to live authentically, to treat their children with respect and dignity, and to work tirelessly to meet the best interests of their children.

This guide is intended for foster care and adoption agencies seeking to intentionally recruit, certify and support transgender and non-binary adults to serve as resource parents for young people in care. After reviewing the guide, practitioners will gain a fresh perspective on how to better welcome transgender and non-binary adults, understand the barriers that transgender and non-binary adults often face when navigating the foster care and adoption process, and know the steps necessary to overcome these barriers and attract the most qualified and skilled resource parents.

2. Understanding Gender Identity

Recognizing that many foster care and adoption professionals have a steep learning curve when it comes to understanding gender identity and expression, efforts to improve practice with transgender and non-binary adults should start with a focus on these concepts. It is important to recognize that transgender and non-binary adults are just as multi-dimensional as adults who are not transgender or non-binary. To truly know someone who is transgender or non-binary you need to know all aspects of that person's identity—not only those related to gender identity or expression.

Sex, Gender Identity and Gender Expression

Every person has a sex, a gender identity and a gender expression. Gender identity is a person's innate sense of being male, female, or another gender. Gender expression is the way a person shows or communicates their gender to others through things like hairstyles, dress, speech patterns and mannerisms. It is important to note that gender identity is not inherently nor solely connected to one's sex (i.e., the assigned sex at birth based on a person's genitals, chromosomes and sex hormone levels).[13] In fact, it is estimated that 1.4 million people in the United States are transgender—meaning they have a gender identity that is different from their sex assigned at birth.[14] The transgender community is diverse and includes transgender women, transgender men and non-binary people (people who do not identify as male or female).

Our internal understanding of our gender begins as early as ages 2-3 and continues throughout our lifetimes.[15] Many cisgender people—meaning people whose sex assigned at birth aligns with their gender identity—rarely need to question their gender and the way they express it. Moreover, when a cisgender person meets someone new, their gender and pronouns are often correctly assumed. Transgender and non-binary people, on the other hand, encounter many barriers that keep them from these same everyday, affirming experiences. The first barrier is often navigating their own awareness, understanding and acceptance of their gender identity. They then often encounter the added challenge of explaining their gender identity to their family, friends, peers, co-workers, etc., on a continual basis. The majority of transgender and non-binary people also face verbal harassment or even physical violence rooted in transphobia—a form of prejudice towards people who do not conform to the gender binary, or society's gender expectations.[16] To understand this, we must consider the gender binary.

> **WHAT ABOUT SEXUAL ORIENTATION?**
>
> In addition to a sex, a gender identity, and a gender expression, everyone also has a sexual orientation.
>
> Sexual orientation is a concept distinct from gender, that describes one's emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people. Examples of sexual orientations include: gay, lesbian, bisexual and straight.
>
> Knowing that someone is transgender or non-binary does not tell us anything about that person's sexual orientation.
>
> Remember that just like cisgender (non-transgender) people, transgender and non-binary people can be straight, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, or any other sexual orientation.

The Limitations of the Gender Binary

The common understanding of gender is that it is based on a binary, or a system that constructs gender as two discrete categories—male and female—based on someone's sex assigned at birth. Within the gender binary system, those assigned male at birth are expected to express their gender in a traditionally masculine manner, while those assigned female at birth are expected to express their gender in a traditionally feminine manner. This understanding of gender fails to recognize the experiences and identities of many and is at the root of many of the challenges facing transgender and non-binary communities—including discrimination and violence.

Rather than a binary, a more inclusive understanding of gender is one that is based on a spectrum that includes male and female. In this understanding, male and female do not exist as absolutes or polar opposites, and they are not assigned at birth. This view of gender includes transgender people who may identify as male, female or non-binary.

The Nuances of Gender Transition

Many transgender and non-binary people will go through some level of gender transition. The concept of gender transition is complex and different for everyone based on an individual's needs, health and access to resources. People falsely assume all transgender and non-binary people take similar steps when "transitioning." To live their affirmed gender, all transgender and non-binary people socially transition in some capacity. However, not everyone will legally or medically transition. The following definitions are offered to help better understand the nuances to transitioning:

- **Social Transition.** The social process of disclosing to oneself and others that one is transgender or non-binary. This often includes asking others to use a name or pronoun that is more congruent with one's gender identity and different from one's sex assigned at birth, name and assumed pronouns. This process also may include changing one's gender expression, which may or may not correspond to traditional gender roles. While this transition process is the most accessible to transgender and non-binary people, it may also present some of the greatest challenges. There are risks of negative reactions ranging from intentional microaggressions to serious violence. Due to these risks, transgender and non-binary people may choose to socially transition in different social groups at different periods of time (i.e., coming out to close friends and refraining from disclosing to others).

- **Legal Transition.** Legal transition involves the administrative process of legally changing one's name and gender on identity documents. For many transgender and non-binary people, legally transitioning is an important aspect to obtaining accurate identity documents needed in their everyday lives, such as a passport, driver's license, birth certificate and Social Security card. Without these documents, it can be impossible to secure gainful employment, obtain credit or even find housing. For non-binary people, the process of legally transitioning can be complex, as many do not identify with being male or female. Note that certain jurisdictions offer alternatives to choosing a binary gender on public identity documents (i.e., India allows a person to elect a third gender and Oregon and Washington, D.C. allow a person to elect a "non-binary" gender label).

- **Medical Transition.** Medical transition is the process of undergoing medical treatments, including pubertal suppression, hormone therapy and surgical procedures, or receiving services like voice therapy and hair removal, to align the body and secondary sex characteristics with one's gender identity. While nearly all transgender and non-binary people undergo some form of social transition, not everyone will pursue legal transition, and even fewer will pursue medical transition for a variety of reasons. For example, some transgender and non-binary people have no desire to medically transition, some cannot medically transition for health reasons, and many have difficulty accessing it because of financial barriers.

Given these experiences, intentionally inviting transgender and non-binary adults to serve as resource parents, opens your agency's doors to a group of caretakers who can help children and young adults effectively navigate childhood and adolescent development. Many of these resource parents have a keen understanding of the diversity of gender and can help recognize and validate the physical, cognitive, social and emotional milestones that first emerge related to a child's gender identity and gender expression. Transgender and non-binary resource parents have the capacity to effectively support a child's self-determination of how they want to identify and express their gender in the world.

Gender 101: Key Terminology & Concepts

Note on Terminology

To get the most out of this resource, a foundation of knowledge related to concepts of gender is essential. When learning new terminology, keep in mind that you should always reflect the language each person uses to describe themselves. When you follow a client's lead and mirror their language, you are sure to build trust and a positive rapport. Building an understanding of these terms and concepts puts you in a strong position to affirm people of all genders and ask clarifying questions from a place of openness.

- **Gender Identity.** A person's internal sense of being male, female, or, for some people, a blend of both or neither.

- **Gender Expression.** The many ways people show their gender to others, such as the clothing and haircuts they wear or the roles and activities they choose.

- **Sex**. The combinations of physical characteristics (including but not limited to genitals, chromosomes and sex hormone levels) typical of males or females.

- **Cisgender.** An adjective that describes any person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned or presumed to be at birth.

- **Transgender.** An adjective that describes any person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned or presumed to be at birth. This includes transgender women, transgender men and non-binary people.

- **Non-Binary.** An adjective referring to any person whose gender identity is neither male nor female.

- **Gender Binary.** A system that constructs gender as two discrete categories: male/boy/man and female/girl/woman. This view of gender is limiting and leaves out many—including transgender and non-binary people.

- **Gender Spectrum.** A term describing gender without conforming to the gender binary. It denotes gender as a continuum that includes male and female, without assigning them at birth and without establishing them as absolutes or polar opposites. This understanding of gender is inclusive of people of all sexes, gender identities and gender expressions.

- **Gender History.** Information related to a transgender or non-binary person's sex, name and pronouns assigned at birth, as well as aspects of their past social, legal and/or medical transitions.

- **Transphobia.** A type of prejudice, discrimination, or microaggression towards people who do not conform to the gender binary, or society's gender expectations. Transphobia includes a range of negative attitudes, feelings, or actions including fear, disgust, violence, anger, or discomfort.

3. Getting Started: Keys to Success by Role

Everyone has a role to play when it comes to creating an agency climate in which young people and parents of all genders feel welcome and supported. This guide provides detailed suggestions for administrators, supervisors and frontline workers looking to take action. Below are keys to success by role for starting this important work.

Administrators

You have a key role in making it clear to your staff and partner organizations that inclusion of transgender and non-binary people is an agency priority. Your actions to incorporate inclusive practices into your agency's infrastructure are crucial for ensuring that staff in all roles and at all levels do the same.

- **Provide clear guidance and messaging to your staff and to your agency's partners** about your agency's commitment to non-discrimination and inclusion. Spend time preparing to respond to questions or concerns that may be directed your way.

- **Examine the system-wide implications for improving inclusion of transgender and non-binary people.** Look at your key organizational drivers and infrastructure—existing policies, practice guidance, staff training and supervision—to identify needed changes.

- **Review and update your staff orientation and training materials** to ensure that they include your agency's commitment to transgender and non-binary inclusive practice, non-discrimination policies and opportunities to build staff members' knowledge and capabilities to work with transgender and non-binary parents.

- **Invest in necessary staff training** to build your agency's cultural humility and capacity to best serve transgender and non-binary people.

Supervisors

Your staff members will be looking to you for information on how your agency is implementing inclusive policies and practices and for coaching on how these connect to their roles and existing professional skills and ethics.

- **Set clear expectations for your staff and provide consistent messaging about best practices in transgender and non-binary inclusion.** Help your staff understand any new approaches they should take in their work to ensure transgender and non-binary parents receive services free of discrimination.

- **Create opportunities—in individual supervision, team meetings and other settings—for your staff to discuss questions or concerns** about being inclusive so they can build their individual capacity and learn from each other.

- **Help your staff understand how inclusion fits into your agency's existing policies and practices**, as well as into fundamentals of good social work practice.

- **Create a safe space for transgender and non-binary parents, youth and colleagues** at your workplace by advocating for affirming policies and practices.

Frontline Workers

You'll need to be sure that you understand how your agency is implementing inclusive policies and practices and that you're incorporating these into your work accordingly.

- **Build your own knowledge about transgender and non-binary people and their experiences.** Even the most affirming and educated people have room to continually challenge themselves and grow in their work with people of diverse gender identities. A great place to start is hrc.org/acaf-resources.

- **Take time to understand your feelings towards transgender and non-binary people.** Explore the range of thoughts, emotions and questions you have and be mindful of any potential biases that may impact your role as a professional.

- **Assess—and discuss with your supervisor—how inclusion connects with your individual roles and responsibilities.** (e.g., supporting reunification, recruitment and preparation of resource parents, etc.).

- **Contribute to an inclusive organizational culture free of discrimination.** Create a workplace free of harassment, where transphobic comments and jokes are clearly not tolerated. Remind others that these comments can be incredibly harmful and are not appropriate.

- **Consider ways subtle discrimination based on the actual or perceived gender identity or gender expression of the parents you work with may be present.** Talk with your supervisor about specific situations that arise so you can strengthen your ability to recognize and help prevent discrimination.

- **Seek out information from your supervisor** and others about how your agency will assess its current level of transgender and non-binary inclusion.

SECTION II:
Guiding Principles for Leadership

1. The Role of Leadership

The Challenge

Child welfare leaders increasingly recognize the importance of including transgender and non-binary prospective resource parents to expand their pool of potential stable and loving homes for children and young adults in foster care. Yet successfully engaging and recruiting transgender and non-binary people requires much more than stating that "all qualified families are welcomed and encouraged to apply." Even an explicit message welcoming transgender and non-binary people will not result in the desired increase in potential families unless it's backed up by policy and practice change. As child welfare leaders commit to building their agency's capacity to engage transgender and non-binary stakeholders, they must follow through on that commitment through meaningful action.

> "I listen very closely to what the leaders of an agency say about welcoming transgender communities, or at least if they feel comfortable responding to questions about LGBTQ young people in care. I also observe if those words are coupled with meaningful actions."
>
> – **Transgender Foster Dad,** Michigan

Promising Practices

- **Connect the goal of transgender and non-binary inclusion to the mission and values of your agency.** Remember that your team is working to certify more qualified resource parents who are best positioned to meet the varying needs of children in care. The unique skills and experiences of transgender and non-binary prospective resource parents can be assets to the child welfare system and can help meet the specific needs of some of the most vulnerable young people in care. Recognize the value prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents can add to your existing pool of resource parents, and support your staff in diligently certifying them.

- **Work with your leadership team to evaluate how your agency is communicating its values of inclusion both internally and externally.** Consider how those values are shared, particularly with prospective parents, and be mindful of the importance of key terminology specific to transgender and non-binary communities.[17] For example, work with local transgender and non-binary community leaders to review materials and host events that attract and recruit prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents, and identify outdated and offensive terminology that might repel transgender and non-binary people from engaging with your organization.

- **Organize a professional development workshop for senior executives at your agency to process and incorporate the practices shared in this guide.** Such workshops specific to transgender and non-binary inclusion should be offered at least once per year to familiarize child welfare leaders with some of the barriers that prohibit transgender and non-binary people from pursuing certification. Workshops should allow leaders to ask questions, and gain concrete strategies on how they can be more inclusive, confident and well-versed in addressing the concerns transgender and non-binary people may have.

- **Recognize that incorporating inclusive language is not enough.** Transgender and non-binary people need signs from child welfare leaders that they are not only welcomed, but that the agency has worked to dismantle institutional barriers that make it difficult for them to pursue certification. Child welfare leaders must outline concrete actions their agencies are taking, such as implementing inclusive non-discrimination policies, training staff and amplifying targeted outreach of transgender and non-binary. This approach will send a strong signal to transgender and non-binary people that they are valued and belong at your agency, and it will build the trust and rapport you need to effectively engage these prospective resource parents.

Practices to Avoid

- **Avoid using general language when talking about the importance of recruiting resource parents, especially when trying to recruit from underutilized communities.** For example, when speaking at a recruitment event that may align with LGBTQ Pride Month, don't gloss over the letters within the LGBTQ acronym, as each one represents a different identity. Remember that transgender and non-binary people will look for signs that you are intentionally including them.

- **Don't assume that only staff working directly with transgender and non-binary resource parents need to receive training and coaching.** Recognize that you, and members of your executive team, will need to receive regular coaching around how to respectfully talk about transgender and non-binary stakeholders involved with your agency, as well as gain awareness around what some of the institutional barriers are that prevent transgender and non-binary people from pursuing certification.

- **When asked about actions you have taken to include transgender and non-binary stakeholders into your agency, avoid talking about institutional changes you've made for lesbian, gay bisexual and queer people.** Transgender and non-binary people have specific needs and concerns as it relates to becoming a certified resource parent. Consider the question, respond with respect and share concrete actions you've taken to create a more inclusive agency, or actions you are planning to take after incorporating some of the practices offered in this guide. Honesty and sincerity will go a long way to signal to transgender and non-binary people that you are working to create a more welcoming environment.

2. Non-Discrimination

The Challenge

Legal Landscape

Discrimination against transgender and non-binary people is unfortunately all too common, including in foster care and adoption services. The federal government and some states—including Mississippi, North Dakota, South Dakota, Virginia, Michigan and Texas—affirmatively allow publicly funded child welfare agencies to refuse to place children with adults to whom the agency has a religious objection. Alabama has a similar law that applies to agencies that do not receive public funds. In other states, a lack of non-discrimination laws or policies protecting transgender and non-binary prospective adoptive or foster parents may lead to a similarly discriminatory outcome. Further, transgender and non-binary prospective parents who are in same-gender relationships, or who are perceived to be in same-gender relationships, may face discrimination in this area due to their real or perceived sexual orientation. Eleven states and the District of Columbia have laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity in foster services.

A further complication is that family law, including determinations about a parent's suitability to foster or adopt, is an individualized, fact-specific practice where determinations are made based on a "best interest of the child" standard. In practice, that means that the perspectives of caseworkers, agencies, guardians ad litem and even judges, can have a significant influence on the outcome. For that reason, staff training around transgender and non-binary people is of particular importance.

Transgender & Non-Binary Communities at High Risk for Discrimination

Transgender and non-binary people are at high risk for discrimination in all areas of life. One national study found that nearly a quarter of respondents had experienced some form of housing discrimination in the last year.[18] Thirty percent reported being fired, denied a promotion or experiencing some other form of mistreatment at work due to their gender identity or expression. According to a recent study, 87 percent of transgender and non-binary individuals are verbally harassed often or frequently,[19] and many experience daily microaggressions,[20] or subtle hostile actions by an individual that may revel some form of bias. Research has shown that over time, daily microaggressions lead to negative impacts on the emotional health and well-being of transgender and non-binary people.[21] To avoid the threat of negative interactions, some transgender and non-binary people will not engage with a child welfare agency unless the agency demonstrates that it is working to prevent discrimination and microaggressions through explicit policies and inclusive practices.

Promising Practices

▪ **Recognize that transgender and non-binary people endure an unacceptably high level of discrimination, verbal harassment and microaggressions.** Given this reality, transgender and non-binary people carefully evaluate how they are treated by staff to better assess if they are truly welcomed and belong. To help cultivate trusting relationships with transgender and non-binary people, be sure to check-in with prospective and existing resource parents to ensure that they feel welcomed and supported.

- **Role model respectful behavior at all times.** Work with your team to reinforce how to respect transgender and non-binary people, and hold yourself accountable by practicing these affirming behaviors with your manager or supervisor. Creating an inclusive agency requires that everyone actively participate, as it takes only one person on staff to create a hostile environment.

- **Review your existing non-discrimination policy.** Check to see if discrimination and harassment against all transgender and non-binary stakeholders—children, youth, families, staff, resource parents, etc.—is prohibited through the inclusion of the terms "gender identity" and "gender expression" within the list of protected categories. If these terms are not in the current policy, revise the policy and clearly communicate this change to all stakeholders.

- **Compliment your updated non-discrimination policy with a transgender and non-binary specific policy.** This policy should enshrine best practices related to working with transgender and non-binary people, including much of what is covered in Section III of this guide, to create comprehensive staff guidance that considers the needs of transgender and non-binary resource parents.

"If I saw the words gender identity and gender expression listed [in an agency policy], that would make me feel that someone put some thought into including me and my family."

– **Non-Binary Adoptive Parent**, Washington

"Prior to becoming a foster dad, I was afraid of the process because I was certain I would have been humiliated for being transgender. In the past, I had to endure a lot of negative attitudes and verbal harassment simply for being transgender, and I was afraid of disclosing my gender history to my case manager for similar reasons. Since there were no other visible transgender and non-binary foster parents, I wasn't sure what I was going to encounter."

– **Transgender Foster Dad,** California

"Respecting religion and parenting a trans child came up during my foster parent certification training. The instructor stressed that a foster parent's faith was not sufficient to impose their belief system onto a child in foster care. This reminder gave me a sense of relief, knowing that the needs of transgender and non-binary stakeholders would not be vulnerable to the personal or religious beliefs of others involved in the system."

– **Transgender Foster Dad,** Vermont

- **Provide information and guidance related to the updated non-discrimination and transgender and non-binary specific policies.** Ensure that all staff have the knowledge, skills and confidence to comply with the policies and offer ongoing education so staff have a firm understanding of the most affirming terminology and practices.

- **Offer staff training that includes opportunities to practice and learn new skills.** Be sure that trainings provide role-play scenarios that require staff to practice using new language and skills. For example, staff can practice intervening when instances of verbal harassment and microaggressions arise. If someone says something verbally humiliating to a transgender or non-binary person, encourage staff to ask, "What do you mean by that statement?" and redirect the dialogue into a learning moment. Respectfully addressing negative comments and actions helps raise awareness around how they can cause significant harm.

- **Prohibit staff from coercing or imposing their personal, cultural or religious beliefs onto any young person, family or prospective resource parent they encounter.** Given the diversity among those involved with the child welfare system, all staff will encounter and support people and communities with beliefs, cultures and faith traditions that deviate from their own. Your organization's professional responsibilities require your staff to meet the best interest of all children, youth and families involved with the child welfare system, including transgender and non-binary people. This means that professional responsibilities must take priority over personal, cultural or religious beliefs in an instance where an employee feels like the two are at odds.* Assign a supervisor who can coach this employee around how to reconcile their ethical obligations with their professional responsibilities. If reconciliation is not possible, consider reassigning this employee to other tasks not directly working with children, youth and families.

- **Be sure to provide reasonable accommodations for your staff in instances where ethical obligations conflict with agency policies or relevant laws or regulations.** In efforts to resolve a conflict, be sure to do so in a manner consistent with the organization's values, principles and standards as they relate to welcoming and supporting transgender and non-binary people.[22]

- **Remember that attempts to "save," "cure" or "treat," transgender and non-binary people, and transform them into cisgender and/or gender conforming people is considered unethical and a form of conversion therapy practice.** Conversion therapy is a range of dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person's gender identity.[23] Any attempt to coerce or encourage a person from being transgender or non-binary can lead to depression, anxiety, drug use, homelessness and even suicide. These dangerous outcomes can arise even in instances where staff believe they are preventing a transgender or non-binary person from enduring hardships like bias, discrimination and violence.

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* Consult with your legal representation to understand the law in your state.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not ignore instances of verbal harassment and microaggressions.** Failure to address these instances demonstrates to transgender and non-binary people that they are not welcomed, and are in a space that is hostile towards their existence. It's essential to address all instances as they arise.

- **Do not assume that microaggressions are not a problem at your agency just because you have not heard about them.** Research shows that everyone has thoughts and feelings that create unconscious biases, or even implicit biases, which indicate a preference or an aversion to a person or group of people.

- **Avoid drafting a generic non-discrimination policy that fails to enumerate protected categories vulnerable to bias, harassment and discrimination.** Clearly including "gender identity" and "gender expression" in your non-discrimination policy will signal to transgender and non-binary stakeholders that they are welcomed and belong.

- **Do not fall into the belief that one training is sufficient.** Ongoing coaching and supervision is needed to equip staff with the skills and confidence to consistently intervene and create an environment free of all forms of harassment—whether based on race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, etc.

"It's really important to not just check off a box. You can change policy, you can change forms, but if you don't also inspire and encourage your entire team to ensure folks really feel welcome then you haven't gone the whole way to create that inclusive space. Our non-discrimination policy was changed within minutes and then we thought, "So we changed it but what does that mean now? How do we communicate that to the rest of the staff? And then, after that, how do we let clients (existing and prospective) know that this is our policy?"

– Phoenix Schneider, Director, LGBTQ Initiative, Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia

3. Data Collection

The Challenge

Most child welfare agencies do not include demographic questions that clearly enable transgender and non-binary people to accurately report their gender identity. While some agencies are working to change this, many struggle with how to modify existing sex and gender demographic questions on basic intake forms and homestudy applications. Without asking such questions, it is difficult to identify current transgender and non-binary resource parents, and to fully understand what kind of support they need by tracking data on outcomes for these families.

"If we truly are a welcoming agency, we need to make sure that everyone feels welcome and included from the start and the first thing you do when you start any process is complete an application."

— Diane Tomaz, Director of Family Support Services, Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange, Inc.

"I had no place to disclose my gender history on my written application, which caused some fear and anxiety that [the agency] wouldn't want to work with my family. My fears would have been somewhat allayed if I saw an intake question that allowed me to disclose my gender history."

– Transgender Foster Mom, Ohio

Promising Practices

▪ **It is essential that agencies create a safe and affirming environment prior to formalizing data collection efforts.** This includes implementing and publicizing non-discrimination policies and training staff. For more information on assessing your agency's readiness for formalized data collection and model language for forms and interviews, visit hrc.im/acaf-sogie.

▪ **Review existing foster parent recruitment and homestudy forms and applications.** Ensure questions related to gender are inclusive of diverse genders. Include questions that allow prospective resource parents to provide their chosen names along with what pronouns they use. For sample questions see Section IV.

▪ **Prior to meeting with a prospective resource parent, be sure to review their chosen name and pronouns.** Taking this step can help quickly build trust and rapport. It signals immediately that you affirm a transgender or non-binary parent's identity.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not begin more formalized data collection before you develop policies and staff training explicitly inclusive of transgender and non-binary people.** Your non-discrimination policy should protect all stakeholders on the basis of their gender identity and gender expression and the training should educate your staff on what these protections mean.

- **Do not assume that you are not already working with prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents.** Without signaling that your agency is familiar with transgender and non-binary people, and that you are interested in better serving these communities, learning this information about prospective resource parents is difficult. In fact, you likely already have worked with transgender and non-binary people without being aware.

- **Do not disclose another person's gender history without discussing with that person first.** Rather, when you learn that a prospective resource parent is transgender or non-binary, thank them for sharing this information, and explain to them how you will manage their privacy throughout the certification process. Specifically let them know why, when and to whom their gender history will be shared in advance of sharing such information. Only share the information on a need-to-know basis. Whenever possible, let individuals be in control of why, when and to whom this information is shared.

For more information on responding when you learn that someone is transgender or non-binary, see Section III.

For much more on safety, privacy and other best practices in data collection visit hrc.im/acaf-sogie.

4. Agency Environment

An agency environment that is inclusive of transgender and non-binary people is one in which people of diverse gender identities feel seen, valued and welcomed. Practice shifts in three key areas will help transform your agency's environment to ensure transgender and non-binary resource parents feel included: Forms and External Communications, Gender-Segregated Facilities and Literature and Signage.

Forms & External Communications

The Challenge

Paperwork, policies and processes dominate child welfare systems and gender-specific language is infused in almost every aspect of child welfare practice. For example, through the fields on the forms we use, systems may falsely assume that we are recruiting only married couples composed of a "husband," or "wife," or that when asking people to share what their sex or gender is, that there are simply two choices—"male" or "female." Inclusive language is also important in all external communications—whether on written recruitment materials or when staff members address participants at a parent orientation.

> "It is supremely frustrating when I speak with a [child welfare professional] who doesn't know, or have access to the most affirming language. Spending time training up staff to use the right language can send a profound signal that [an agency] truly wants to welcome trans folks like me."
>
> **– Non-Binary Foster Parent,** Michigan

Promising Practices

- **On all agency forms, consider making room to include a prospective resource parent's chosen name and their pronouns.** Once these changes are made to your forms, be sure to train and coach your staff on how to accurately fill out these forms, and most importantly, reference them before calling or meeting with a prospective resource parent. Using a person's chosen name and affirming pronouns expedites the trust-building process, which helps us do our best work.

- **When hosting resource parent recruitment events, consider creating name tags that ask each participant to write their name along with their pronouns.** Incorporating this practice shift will not only educate your staff and participants, but it will signal to prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents that they are valued and belong at the event. Offer examples of the type of pronouns people use, as many cisgender

people are not used to being asked for the pronouns that best affirm their gender identities. Examples include: "she/her/hers," "he/him/his" and "they/them/theirs." One way to provide examples for attendees is to create stickers with the pronouns for them to place on their name tags. See Section IV for a quick-reference checklist for creating gender-inclusive events.

- **When addressing a group of people, or even when you're crafting an agency policy or procedure, avoid gendered language such as "she or he."** Instead, consider using the singular form of "they," to promote the inclusion of multiple genders. The use of the singular "they" is an established practice and offers a promising solution for any gender-related inclusion challenges in your writing or public speaking engagements.

Practices to Avoid

- **Refrain from assuming people's pronouns.** Often when a person encounters someone new, they tend to guess what pronoun best respects their gender presentation. Instead of assuming or guessing, build in consistent practices at events, in meetings and when engaging people one-on-one to share their names and pronouns. Prior to asking others what their names and pronouns are, role model by sharing your own first.

- **Avoid only asking transgender and non-binary people what their names and pronouns are.** When you encounter a person not easily read as male or female, it may be tempting to directly ask them what pronoun they use. This directness can often be viewed as tokenizing by transgender and non-binary people. To normalize the reality that we all want to be respected by having our names and pronouns used correctly, first introduce yourself, and share your name and pronouns, and then give everyone else in the space the opportunity to do the same. When you take this extra step, you are signaling to transgender and non-binary people that they belong and are valued.

- **Do not assume that people generally accept gendered language as a norm.** For example, when using the word "men," or traditionally male pronouns ("he/him/his"), as a standard for talking about all genders, you may be signaling to women and non-binary people that their needs and priorities are not valued. Taking the extra time to assign staff at your agency to scrub policies, operating manuals and existing forms of gendered language can go a long way to welcoming people with diverse gender identities.

"The bulk of my work in the first year focused on getting the agency to a place of not only being welcoming but also being explicitly inclusive. We implemented a policy ensuring that everyone can use the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity. We also established a gender-neutral restroom as an option for people of any gender. We made sure that one was identified and that there was clear signage throughout the building so folks knew where to go. All agency wide forms were reviewed and some were modified to ensure that anybody who came to the agency or looked at the website or marketing materials —whether trans, non-binary or perhaps questioning their gender identity—would see another example of how the agency is inclusive."

– Phoenix Schneider, Director, LGBTQ Initiative, Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia

Gender-Segregated Facilities

The Challenge

Unfortunately, transgender and non-binary people often encounter gender-segregated spaces within child welfare systems that create barriers for full participation. For example, when attending recruitment events for prospective resource parents, transgender and non-binary people may experience challenges in accessing restroom facilities safely and without having someone tell them they are using the wrong restroom. Failure to create gender-inclusive environments makes transgender and non-binary people vulnerable to microaggressions, verbal harassment and physical assault.

> "When I attended a [resource parent] recruitment event, I noticed that the agency did not offer gender-neutral restrooms, so I reluctantly used the women's restroom for safety reasons. When I entered the restroom, another participant shouted at me in alarm and pushed me out of the restroom, saying that I was in the wrong bathroom. When I shared what happened with one of the hosts, they looked at me and asked, 'What did I honestly expect?'"
>
> **– Non-Binary Foster Parent,** Michigan

Promising Practices

- **Make clear in your own policies and trainings that transgender and non-binary people should have access to restrooms consistent with their gender identities and where their safety is valued.** Transgender and non-binary people should be empowered to use the restroom facility which they feel is the safest and most appropriate for them. If that is a multi-occupancy gendered facility, they should be affirmed in accessing that space and not policed. Some transgender and non-binary people may feel more comfortable using a single-occupancy restroom; for that reason, ensure that those restrooms are designed as gender-neutral spaces and be sure that anyone who would feel more comfortable using a single-occupancy space (including those with mobility challenges, parents with small children, etc.) are aware of where those single-user facilities are. These can be labeled as "Gender-Neutral" or "All Gender" facilities. Never force a transgender or non-binary person to use a single-occupancy facility if they'd prefer to access a gendered facility consistent with their gender identity.

- **Create policy language around the use of gender-segregated facilities that makes the expectation of harassment-free environments clear.** Transgender and non-binary individuals should have access to facilities like restrooms that are physically safe, and can be accessed without microaggressions, verbal harassment or physical violence from other people using the space.

- **Equip staff with the skills and confidence to intervene should a transgender or non-binary person be threatened or redirected to use a different restroom facility.** Transgender and non-binary people are often targeted in multi-occupancy restroom facilities and are vulnerable to violence and discrimination. Staff must have the ability to intervene and diffuse these instances.

- **Educate yourself and prepare to work with others to dismantle myths that transgender and non-binary people's presence in gender-segregated facilities like restrooms presents a threat to the safety of other restroom users.** Studies demonstrate time and again that transgender and non-binary people are often the most vulnerable to violence when using public restroom facilities.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not police which gendered space a transgender or non-binary person should use.** Transgender and non-binary people are well aware of the violence and harassment that can occur when they are perceived to be in a gendered space inappropriately, and they will make a choice about which facilities to access based on where they feel safest. They should be supported in making their own determination.

- **Do not underestimate the importance of developing a policy around how to respect transgender and non-binary people in gender-segregated spaces.** Chances are transgender and non-binary people are already actively involved at your agency, and need to have access to restroom facilities to satisfy a basic human need. Having affirmative policies dealing with these questions will signal to transgender and non-binary people that you appreciate the uncertainty they may be experiencing and that you want to ameliorate it. By contrast, a lack of such policies can signal to transgender and non-binary people that they are not valued nor welcomed, and will turn off many qualified transgender and non-binary prospective parents.

- **Avoid delaying training, coaching and supervision to equip staff with the basic knowledge, skills and confidence that they will need to educate members of the public who may have concerns or fears.** Transgender and non-binary people are already using public facilities, and staff need guidance on how to educate members of the public on how to share these spaces with transgender and non-binary people.

Literature & Signage

The Challenge

Transgender and non-binary prospective resource parents may have questions specific to becoming a certified foster or adoptive parent related to their gender identities and may not have access to online or local resources. Given the dangerous and pervasive misinformation about transgender and non-binary people and communities, your agency must work to create written materials and signage that is inclusive of transgender and non-binary people. These visual cues should address some of the specific questions and concerns members of these communities may have. For example, information on their right to services free from discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression should be made explicit. If available, your agency could also provide information on ways to connect with other transgender and non-binary parents, and to access written materials that can help them navigate coming out to their children.

> "I'd love to see my agency advertise in LGBTQ magazines and publications, offer clear guidance on how to support transgender foster parents, and prominently place non-discrimination policies including protections for trans folks to signal that trans people like me are welcome."
>
> – **Transgender Foster Dad,** California

Promising Practices

- **Your agency should display transgender and non-binary visual cues within your agency and at external events.** This includes prominently displaying your agency's gender identity and gender expression inclusive non-discrimination policy, images of transgender and non-binary community members, and, where available, support groups for transgender and non-binary parents.

- **Literature for transgender and non-binary resource parents should be featured in public waiting areas.** These written materials should offer online resources, any available local community supports, information on their rights and how to file reports of mistreatment should also be visible and easily accessible.

- **Connect with local transgender and non-binary community leaders and organizations.** These relationships will help you identify the most recent transgender and non-binary affirming resources including: podcasts, books, blogs or other materials. Include these materials in public waiting areas and online where staff and resource parents go to find support and information.

Practices to Avoid

- **Avoid only including transgender and non-binary people as an afterthought when talking more broadly about LGBTQ communities.** You can avoid tokenizing transgender and non-binary people by offering resources that explicitly empower them to successfully support a foster or adoptive child. Review your agency's LGBTQ-specific materials and consider ways to expand them so you are speaking to the needs of transgender and non-binary resource parents.

- **Avoid only posting a non-discrimination policy on the wall.** Vulnerable people and communities need to specifically understand how such policies protect them from enduring bias, harassment, discrimination and violence. Consider how your organization can make it explicitly clear that transgender and non-binary people are welcome and encouraged to apply to become resource parents, and clarify how they will be supported after certification.

- **Do not create a static list of resources for transgender and non-binary people.** Rather, designate staff to continually update existing resources, support groups, etc. As an agency, it's essential to stay aware of how the needs of these communities continue to change, and offer more resources over time.

5. Local Organizations & Expertise

The Challenge

Transgender and non-binary people experience significant levels of discrimination, harassment, and sometimes the refusal of services when attempting to access government funded programs. For prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents, this makes it difficult to find accepting foster care and adoption agencies. This is especially true in an environment where federal and several state governments allow taxpayer-funded social services, including child welfare systems, to refuse to serve transgender and non-binary people simply because of who they are.

> "I wish my agency would consider working with our local transgender state advocacy group to map out trans-friendly service providers that can serve as positive referrals. As a trans resource parent, I could use some support from fellow trans foster parents like me. At this point, I'm not certain where to find these folks."
>
> – **Transgender Foster Mom,** Ohio

Promising Practices

- **Consider working with local transgender and non-binary community leaders and organizations to identify social services that are open to supporting transgender and non-binary resource parents.** As you identify these organizations, research the specific providers who have proven expertise and cultural humility to effectively work with transgender and non-binary people, and create a comprehensive resource list of affirming organizations and providers. Increasingly, parents of transgender and non-binary children and youth are organizing and building networks of support. These networks may also serve as a source of information on affirming providers in your area.

- **Once these organizations and community leaders are identified, make efforts to build ongoing professional relationships with them.** Taking this step will make it easier to facilitate future referrals, or to seek guidance in your ongoing efforts to best serve and support transgender and non-binary resource parents.

- **Consider hosting conferences or other networking and learning opportunities.** Providing these experiences will allow providers, community leaders and resource parents to speak to some of the challenges that exist in creating a more transgender and non-binary inclusive culture, and to explore possible solutions.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not assume that partner organizations are transgender and non-binary inclusive.** Instead work to identify transgender and non-binary leaders and organizations in your communities who can assist in developing a comprehensive list of inclusive providers.

- **Even after transgender and non-binary inclusive partner organizations are identified, do not assume that all staff at these organizations are equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to effectively support transgender and non-binary people.** Proactively work to create strong relationships with organizations and key staff that you know, like and trust to support existing transgender and non-binary resource parents.

- **Do not expect local transgender advocacy and social service organizations to take on the sole responsibility of creating coalitions that aim to support transgender and non-binary resource parents.** Rather, identify staff eager to tackle this opportunity, and offer the resources and guidance necessary to build positive relationships with organizations and individuals who can fill these service gaps.

"There is often this assumption that if someone is lesbian or gay, they will automatically understand trans experience and that is absolutely not the case. It speaks to the need for training across the board for everyone and the need to not make assumptions that because we have LGBQ folks on staff that they know everything, that they're going to give you all the best recommendations. We have to have trans and non-binary folks' voices heard, even if not out on the staff."

– **Phoenix Schneider, Director, LGBTQ Initiative, Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia**

6. Staff Training

The Challenge

To provide affirming services for transgender and non-binary resource parents, child welfare leaders must equip their staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to do so with cultural humility. Cultural humility refers to one's ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people from one's own culture as well as those from other cultures. This concept differs from "cultural competency" in its focuses on self-education, empathy and execution rather than striving to achieve a state of expertise on a culture that is not your own.

> "Some of the leading agencies I considered working with had a very basic understanding of welcoming transgender people as foster parents. Agencies looking to truly welcome and recruit transgender resource parents must offer training and coaching for staff that offer a more nuanced approach to welcoming us. Without this level of training, it feels like we are an afterthought, and still vulnerable to unsafe situations."
>
> – **Transgender Foster Dad,** Kansas

Promising Practices

- **All staff directly interfacing with prospective resource parents should receive training specific to creating welcoming environments for transgender and non-binary parents.** Creating an inclusive environment takes all staff members, and yet, it only takes one staff member to create an unsafe environment. Therefore, including frontline staff like receptionists and security guards along with key agency leadership is essential.

- **Trainings should cover basic knowledge about transgender and non-binary people, including terminology, and offer specific skills and scenarios where staff can practice how to successfully manage challenging situations.** For homestudy case managers and supervisors, offering examples of how to ask questions related to one's gender history is essential, as many transgender and non-binary resource parents have stressed some of the many challenges that have arisen during this aspect of the certification process. See Section III for more on this topic.

- **Require managers and supervisors to participate fully.** This includes attending staff trainings and offering management coaching on how to check-in with their staff after such trainings. Such check-ins ensure employees can demonstrate what they've learned, and how they are applying new knowledge to their everyday practice.

- **Provide training on an on-going basis.** This ensures that all new hires receive basic information on welcoming transgender and non-binary people and all staff receive routine "refresher" training on this content.

For more information on staff training, including the All Children—All Families National Training Program, visit hrc.im/acaf-training.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not rely solely on condensed meetings, or webinar technology for staff training.** Many people hold significant knowledge gaps and misconceptions about transgender and non-binary people. Creating learning environments where participants can unpack their beliefs, and understand the knowledge gaps they have is key before talking about the basic skills and best practices to serve transgender and non-binary people. Participants need to understand why including transgender and non-binary people is important before learning how to welcome, recruit and support them.

- **Do not assume that everyone has basic knowledge about transgender and non-binary people, and knows common terminology used to affirm these communities.** Rather, take the time to provide context to whom you are talking about, before talking about why staff should care, and how to welcome transgender and non-binary people into your agency.

- **Avoid asking a transgender or non-binary staff member, or prominent community members to develop your transgender and non-binary training and coaching services for free.** Taking this step tokenizes your relationship with these stakeholders and devalues their actual roles within your agency or as an external stakeholder. Additionally, while they have personal experience, they may not be experienced working with transgender and non-binary resource parents. Instead, seek out experts in the field who have experience developing programming to prepare your agency to welcome, recruit and support transgender and non-binary people.

For tips on how to bring training to your agency, see the All Children - All Families guide for planning staff training.

7. Feedback Mechanisms

The Challenge

Staff charged with designing transgender and non-binary non-discrimination and practice-specific policies should also implement a process to help staff members maintain regular communication with HR and diversity professionals. Clear communication channels empower all agency staff to discuss challenges regarding welcoming, recruiting and supporting transgender and non-binary resource parents. A defined reporting mechanism should also be in place for resource parents who experience bias, discrimination and/or harassment. Unfortunately, most child welfare agencies lack clear policies in this area. Those that do, often do not have a defined reporting mechanism in place for staff who are struggling with understanding how to apply these policy shifts into everyday practice nor for the resource parents.

 "After I was reassigned a case manager at my agency, my experience as a foster parent took a turn for the worst. Despite having a great relationship with my previous case manager, her replacement had a real issue with my gender identity. After enduring several verbally harassing encounters with my new case manager, I attempted to report her behavior, and ran into real challenges as to how or even if I could report it. My agency lacked a clear process to advocate for my rights as a resource parent, and I ultimately had to get a lawyer due to unfair treatment."

– Transgender Foster Dad, California

Promising Practices

- **Assign key staff and charge them with implementation and enforcement responsibilities, and the task of responding to concerns that resource parents bring to the agencies attention.** Be sure that your staff understand that certain resource parents are more vulnerable to experiencing incidents of bias, discrimination and harassment, including transgender and non-binary resource parents.

- **Designated staff must handle all incidents of bias, discrimination and harassment against transgender and non-binary people as serious and immediately address these situations.** Develop an investigation process for alleged cases of unfair treatment against transgender and non-binary resource parents to assist designated staff with handling these instances, and if substantiated, determining the corrective action necessary to resolve the issue.

- **Train and coach all staff on common scenarios where bias, discrimination and harassment is likely to arise for transgender and non-binary resource parents, and equip staff with the skills and confidence to address these scenarios.** To identify common scenarios, consider working with local transgender and non-binary support organizations or advocacy groups that can help you understand the experiences of transgender and non-binary community members in your area.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not assume that your staff members have the knowledge or skills to address alleged bias, discrimination and harassment that is likely to arise for transgender and non-binary resource parents.** Most staff have limited understanding on how to effectively intervene when such instances arise, which sets up all involved for experiencing some level of failure on your agency's part.

- **Do not leave it to transgender and non-binary resources parents to search for a way to report bias.** Failure to develop a clear reporting process that empowers resource parents to share feedback and concerns with agency staff will make it difficult for these parents to advocate for their rights.

- **Do not assume that a written reporting process alone will equip your staff with the skills and confidence to effectively intervene during instances of bias, discrimination and harassment targeting resource parents.** Be sure to continuously train and coach your staff on real and potential scenarios where resource parents experienced some form of unfair treatment, and outline how staff responded, or could have responded to successfully intervene.

SECTION III:
Resource Parent Certification Process from A to Z

1. Resource Parent Recruitment

The Challenge

Prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents need to know that they are valued and belong at your agency. Unfortunately, most foster care and adoption agencies stop short of explicitly welcoming transgender and non-binary people in their materials. Most outreach attempts, rather, center around broader LGBTQ communities. Recruitment efforts intentionally targeting prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents are necessary for community members to recognize that they are welcomed and will be supported as resource parents.

> "It's not enough to say that [foster and adoption agencies] are LGBTQ friendly when a transgender person asks if the agency is welcoming to transgender people. When an agency does that, the message is that they don't understand trans issues. Rainbows aren't enough, and they often miss the trans part. It's important that they include trans people on staff, hang the trans flag, have strong gender identity and expression non-discrimination policies, and have someone on staff who is approachable and can speak fluently without being embarrassed."
>
> **– Transgender Foster Dad,** Vermont

Promising Practices

- **When designing outreach and recruitment materials, be sure to feature visual cues and scenarios in the text that are specific to transgender and non-binary people.** Work with local or national transgender and non-binary advocacy organizations to locate images of transgender families that are inclusive of non-binary people. In the absence of images of transgender and non-binary people, rely on other visual cues like the transgender pride flag. Be sure to include specific information about how the agency actively engages with transgender and non-binary communities in your materials. Make it clear that transgender and non-binary people are welcome to serve as resource parents, and address some of the common concerns transgender and non-binary people have with the process (i.e., non-discrimination policy, background check, homestudy, etc.).

- **Proactively train and coach recruitment staff around how to respond to prospective transgender and non-binary parents when asked how the agency is actively working to welcome, recruit and support these parents.** All staff charged with responding to questions from resource parents should demonstrate confidence and fluency in addressing basic concerns, and, if more complex questions arise, be able to identify other knowledgeable staffers who can provide additional guidance and support.

- **Consider hosting targeted recruitment events and orientations specifically for prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents.** Those staff responsible for hosting these events should be especially fluent when responding to the specific concerns and needs of transgender and non-binary people. To ensure a successful event, consider working with local transgender and non-binary community organizations and leaders to conduct outreach and sponsorship.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not begin targeted recruitment efforts before you've done the work.** It's necessary to develop policy and implement new practices to truly welcome and support transgender and non-binary adults. Much of these policy and practice recommendations are outlined in this guide. For more information on where to begin and tools for this ongoing work, visit hrc.org/acaf.

- **Resist simply featuring a rainbow flag, or images of same-sex couples if your agency intends to proactively recruit transgender and non-binary people.** While rainbow flags and same-sex couples include transgender and non-binary people, they do not sufficiently signal that your agency is transgender and non-binary inclusive. Some events, while intended for LGBTQ communities, are exclusive of transgender and non-binary people and are not safe, welcoming or inclusive.

- **Be sure to avoid stock photos when creating transgender and non-binary inclusive communications and recruitment materials.** Instead, rely on photos of real families or transgender-specific symbols such as the transgender pride flag.

- **Do not assume that staff who are knowledgeable of general LGBTQ issues are equipped to respond to the specific concerns and needs of transgender and non-binary people.** Sexual orientation (a person's emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people) is not the same as gender identity (how someone identifies their gender as being male, female, or another gender). Staff will need additional coaching to understand these distinctions, and be prepared to specifically address issues that relate to prospective resource parents with diverse gender identities.

- **Do not intentionally exclude transgender and non-binary people from recruitment events when outreaching for resource parents.** While not all transgender and non-binary people are qualified to serve as resource parents, for those looking to build a family, they are more likely to consider serving as a foster or adoptive parent. As outlined in the introduction to this guide, many are likely to have the skills and life experiences to understand the challenges many young people in care are working to overcome, and support them on their journeys as they thrive into adulthood.

Sample Targeted Recruitment Palm Card

Front of palm card

[AGENCY'S NAME]
IS COMMITTED TO FINDING ALL KINDS
OF LOVING FAMILIES FOR ALL CHILDREN
IN NEED OF LOVING HOMES.

**AND WHEN WE SAY ALL,
WE MEAN ALL.**

Back of palm card

[Agency's Name] is working with the HRC Foundation's
All Children - All Families program to make sure parents
of all sexual orientations and gender identities feel welcomed
and supported as they pursue foster care or adoption.

To learn more about our work toward LGBTQ inclusion, contact
[Agency's LGBTQ Staff Liaison's Name and Phone Number].

**all children
all families**

HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN
FOUNDATION

The above palm card template shows an example of how recruitment materials can make
it explicitly clear to transgender and non-binary adults that they are welcomed and encouraged
to apply to become resource parents.

All Children – All Families Leader agencies can request a customized version of this palm card by
e-mailing acaf@hrc.org.

Not an All Children – All Families participating agency? Visit hrc.org/acaf to request to participate today!

2. Parent Certification Program Materials

The Challenge

Many resource parent certification programs require a certain number of classroom training hours prior to becoming a certified resource parent. While some of these programs have evolved over the past few decades, many are still using content designed several decades ago. Most of this dated content leaves out any mention of diverse families and resource parents, including those resource parents who are transgender and non-binary. The lack of representation of these resource parents makes it difficult to signal to prospective transgender and non-binary parents that they are truly welcome and understood.

"When I went through my certification courses, I did not see any examples of transgender and non-binary youth in care or resource parents. Even more surprisingly, I didn't see any gay or lesbian people featured in these videos. I believe the materials were created in the 1980s. Honestly, I'm so used to examples only featuring straight and cisgender people, so I wasn't too shocked."

– Transgender Foster Mom, Ohio

"By talking to our families about these issues, we're going to be able to pick up on who has an openness, an empathy—or best case scenario—an active, enthusiastic interest in adopting a child who is coming to the table as gender expansive or who openly identifies as trans. We want successful placements for everyone, and we need families that can be comfortable, confident and loving with kids who may be in the system strictly as a result of being LGBTQ. We want families that are going to be able to take them in and support them fully and completely when it comes to SOGIE."

– Michael Hill, Associate Director, Adoption STAR Inc., Amherst New York

Promising Practices

- **Designate staff to review all materials associated with your agency's resource parent certification program, including existing curricula, training videos and marketing materials.** Identify areas where your agency can develop original content that includes visible representation of transgender and non-binary people and communities.

- **Work in partnership with transgender and non-binary organizations and leaders in your region or state to expand your materials.** These groups can help identify transgender and non-binary parents who would like to participate in any recruitment or marketing campaigns to help increase positive representation.

- **Work with transgender and non-binary community members and organizations to have a better understanding of some of the challenges transgender and non-binary young people face in care.** Consider amplifying what type of resource parent these young people need to help signal to prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents that you have a clear understanding that there's an overrepresentation of transgender and non-binary young people in care, and you have knowledge about the type of families they will need to thrive.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not assume that representation of cisgender lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer people is enough to signal to transgender and non-binary people that they are welcomed as foster parents.** To truly welcome transgender and non-binary people, you will need to proactively design certification materials that include positive representation of their lives.

- **Do not assume that there aren't transgender and non-binary community leaders or organizations in your region or your state**. If you have good relationships with cisgender lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer people, consider reaching out to them and ask if they have knowledge of transgender and non-binary leaders who can offer support. Also consider reaching out to national transgender organizations like the National Center for Transgender Equality or the Transgender Law Center for recommendations.

- **Avoid creating content or visual representations of transgender and non-binary people in certification materials in the absence of transgender and non-binary experts.** It's essential to include transgender and non-binary community leaders and organizations knowledgeable about child welfare systems to ensure that representation is positive and affirming.

3. Homestudies & Family Assessments

The Challenge

All prospective resource parents must go through the homestudy process. This process serves as an assessment of prospective parents, as well as an opportunity to educate them about some of the specific needs of children and youth in care. For transgender and non-binary people, determining how "out" they should be about their gender history during this step of the process is a heavy burden that often causes fear and anxiety. Many will worry about how welcoming and inclusive a foster care or adoption agency will be. Given that all homestudies require a background check of each prospective resource parent, transgender and non-binary people will have to disclose aspects of their gender history, often with very real concerns and hesitation.

> "My case worker mentioned that she noticed I legally changed my name from a "woman's name," to a "man's name," and I said, "That's right."
> I explained that I changed my name because I'm a trans guy. She was silent for a bit, and then said very slowly as if she were processing what I just told her, "Oh, you're transgender." She then asked a series of very specific questions about my gender history, and, in particular, my medical transition. While I understood that she wanted to have a complete picture of me, I believe that the majority of questions she asked about me being trans was largely to satisfy her personal curiosity."
>
> **– Transgender Foster Dad,** Missouri

Promising Practices

- **Assign the most experienced and competent staff to conduct a homestudy with a prospective transgender or non-binary resource parent.** Refer to All Children—All Families' guide for affirming questions related to a transgender or non-binary person's gender history at hrc.im/acaf-homestudy.

- **Train and equip all staff responsible for managing and conducting homestudies to explain to prospective resource parents that homestudies can feel intrusive.** This process requires asking questions about personal information and conducting a background check of all prospective parents. For transgender and non-binary parents, this step will likely require purposeful disclosure of gender histories. To help address any fears of discrimination or bias, take every opportunity throughout the process to make clear that transgender and non-binary prospective resource parents are welcomed and encouraged to apply.

- **Understand that your team is likely to learn about the gender history of a transgender or non-binary person in one of two ways, and identify appropriate responses to each scenario.** The transgender or non-binary person—either verbally or through a form/application—may directly inform you of their gender history. Or, a background check or other information during the process may reveal a transgender or non-binary person's gender history. Withhold judgement if you discover a person's gender history through a background check or other mechanism rather than from them directly. There are many reasons why a transgender or non-binary person may not proactively disclose this aspect of their lives. Approach clarifying conversations in an affirming and strengths-based manner. When a transgender or non-binary resource parent discloses their gender history during the homestudy, thank them for sharing this information, stress how their privacy will be managed, and inquire how their experiences with their gender identity strengthen and inform their approach to parenting.

- **Review your agency's process around managing privacy, and whenever possible, maintain the privacy of prospective resource parents during the homestudy portion of the certification process.** During your review, identify any areas where personal information about a prospective resource parent is shared, and work diligently to share this information, including a transgender or non-binary person's gender history, with other professionals on a need-to-know basis.

- **Remember that the transition process may span over the course of years or decades for some transgender and non-binary people.** If discussing a transgender or non-binary person's gender history reveals that they are still in the process of transitioning (whether socially, legally or medically), do not consider this a red flag. This should not automatically be equated with a "major life transition" hindering a person's readiness to provide a loving, stable home.

> "During the home study, we're going to ask clients all kinds of questions about their childhood and upbringing, including questions about puberty, sex and sexuality—now we're just taking it one step further by discussing gender identity and gender expression, too. To have these questions as a part of our process, whether someone identifies as trans, non-binary, or none of the above, makes sense. Even if a client does not identify as LGBTQ, a conversation about gender identity and gender expression still allows for the all-important discussion of how a client is going to react if their future child identifies as a member of the LGBTQ community."
>
> **– Michael Hill, Associate Director, Adoption STAR Inc., Amherst, New York**

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not assume that your agency's existing policies and procedures around conducting homestudies will fully equip staff with the knowledge and skills to successfully respond to a transgender or non-binary prospective resource parent when they disclose their gender history.** Rather, offer specific guidance especially as it relates to background checks that would reveal a prospective resource parent's gender history (i.e., the changing of legal names and genders).

- **Do not forget to explain how your agency manages privacy, and only share such personal information with other staff on a need-to-know basis.** When reviewing findings from a background check, explain why you are following up on questions related to a resource parent's gender history. For example, "I would like to ask you a few questions related to your gender history to best represent you to third parties outside our agency such as family courts and state administrative agencies."

- **Do not ask questions about a transgender or non-binary person's gender history purely to satisfy your own curiosity, or to impart judgement upon a transgender or non-binary person.** Rather, be sure to ask questions related to a resource parent's gender history that will help you understand how it will influence their approach to parenting, and how a transgender or non-binary resource parent views their experiences as assets to being successful resource parents.

Guiding Principles for Homestudies with Transgender & Non-Binary Resource Parents

When conducting a homestudy for a transgender or non-binary person, consider the following guiding principles:

- **Identify transgender and non-binary competent and knowledgeable staff.** When conducting a homestudy for a transgender or non-binary person, assign staff with a high level of knowledge and demonstrated success working with transgender and non-binary people. For organizations developing transgender and non-binary knowledgeable staff, identify those employees interested in gaining professional expertise and connect them with coaching and continuing education opportunities that will help them refine the knowledge, skills and confidence to engage with transgender and non-binary people.

- **Apply basic social work principles.** Given the diversity of transgender and non-binary people, applying basic social work principles that meet each prospective resource parent where they are is critical to conducting an effective homestudy. Center your evaluation on the principles of valuing each individual person, honoring their lived experiences, and assessing their qualifications to serve as a resource parent. Remember each transgender or non-binary person has a different journey, and respecting that journey is essential.

- **Conduct a strengths-based homestudy.** Ask questions that allow transgender and non-binary people to reflect on their gender histories from a place of strength. Questions should help you evaluate their ability to serve as an effective resource parent, and not center on your curiosity. Remember that many transgender and non-binary people demonstrate skills of resilience and resourcefulness, among many others detailed in Section I.

- **Remember the goal of the homestudy.** The homestudy serves as an evaluation tool that allows you to determine if a prospective resource parent has the capability to provide a child with a safe and nurturing home. Whether you are working with a transgender, non-binary or cisgender prospective parent, keep the homestudy goal front of mind. The goal will help you navigate appropriate follow-up questions and conduct a thorough evaluation.

For sample questions for affirming homestudies with transgender and non-binary applicants, visit hrc.im/acaf-homestudy.

Responding When You Learn that a Resource Parent is Transgender or Non-Binary

When working with transgender and non-binary resource parents, you will learn about their gender histories at different points as they work towards getting certified as resource parents with your agency. The following strategies will help you respect and honor each transgender or non-binary resource parent you encounter:

- **Don't assume someone's gender history.** Don't assume that you can easily identify a transgender or non-binary person just by looking at them. Transgender and non-binary people come from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences—just as cisgender people do. This means that transgender and non-binary people do not dress, look or identify in one distinct way. As a best practice, rely on data collection methods and self-disclosure through your homestudy process to truly understand and affirm each resource parent's gender history.

- **If a transgender or non-binary person comes out to you, affirm them.** Thank them for sharing their gender history, and ask them if they would like to talk more about it as it relates to their role as a resource parent. When a transgender or non-binary person shares their gender history with you, it is a positive sign that they trust you. They are seeking your affirmation and respect. Some transgender and non-binary people may feel vulnerable after sharing this information, and will need positive feedback from you.

- **If you first learn of someone's gender history through a background check or similar means, do your best to withhold judgement.** Given the diversity among transgender and non-binary people, there's no single rule as to whether a person will, or even should disclose their gender history to others on a day-to-day basis in the many different spheres of their life. The homestudy process leaves no choice for disclosure, as background checks and medical histories will often give some clues to a person's sex assigned at birth and birth name. Disclosure may cause distress and anxiety for some transgender and non-binary people. Approach clarifying conversations in an affirming and strengths-based manner. Seek coaching and additional information in order to feel most prepared to have an affirming conversation.

- **Manage a transgender or non-binary person's gender history with care.** When you learn about a transgender or non-binary person's gender history, remember that this information is personal, and should only be shared with other professionals on a need-to-know basis. This means that you must refrain from casually sharing this information with others, gossiping or speculating about a transgender or non-binary person. Freely sharing this information with others could place a transgender or non-binary person in an unsafe situation given high levels of discrimination, bias and harassment targeting transgender and non-binary people.

4. Privacy & Confidentiality

The Challenge

Prospective resource parents often disclose personal information that they expect to be managed with privacy and only shared on a need-to-know basis with other essential staff. Disclosure of gender history will look different for every transgender or non-binary person you serve. For some transgender and non-binary people whose gender identities or expressions are perceived by others as outside societal expectations, disclosure is often not a distinct decision point within their control. Rather, it is a part of their daily lives moving through the world. For example, if a non-binary person uses gender neutral pronouns (e.g., "they/them") then every time they tell someone their pronouns they are disclosing information related to their non-binary identity.

Unfortunately, when transgender and non-binary resource parents disclose their gender histories to agency staff, this information is often shared without their explicit permission. Whether the disclosure is accidental or purposeful, it places transgender and non-binary people at risk of enduring bias, discrimination, harassment and violence. While it is paramount to have a complete picture of who a prospective resource parent is to ensure the safety of young people in care, when a transgender or non-binary person discloses their gender history, that history should never be shared with others solely for personal curiosity, gossip or judgment.

> "My homestudy was conducted by a cisgender lesbian who was a great ally to trans people. When I disclosed my gender history to her, I didn't think I would have to worry about this information being shared with other staff at the agency. Unfortunately, I was wrong, and another case worker at the agency I was working with found out, and made my experiences as a foster parent with them a living nightmare."
>
> **– Transgender Foster Dad,** California

Promising Practices

- **Ideally, transgender and non-binary people should have the power to decide whether, when and to whom they will share their gender history.** For transgender and non-binary resource parents, disclosure will often occur during the homestudy process, if it hasn't already occurred. After a transgender or non-binary person discloses their gender history, it's important for staff to explain some of the complexities related to managing their privacy, and ways in which their gender history may be shared (e.g., during an adoption hearing involving family courts and state child welfare agencies). Only staff who need information on someone's gender history (e.g., those responsible for making assessments on the qualifications of prospective resource parents) should have access to this information.

- **Staff who need to know this information must proactively consider how to manage the privacy of a transgender or non-binary applicant, and take appropriate steps to protect it by sharing on a need-to-know basis.** If possible, making notes in a confidential folder could offer an additional layer of protection to ensure the safety of the prospective transgender or non-binary resource parent.

- **Consider opportunities to proactively prepare colleagues and others to affirm the identities of transgender and non-binary parents who use gender-neutral pronouns and/or have gender expressions perceived as more androgynous.** For example, educate team members on the proper use of the pronouns to facilitate positive interactions with the parents.

- **In instances involving family courts and state child welfare agencies, there may be times where staff will have to furnish written documents containing information regarding the gender history of a transgender or non-binary resource parent.** In those instances, staff are encouraged to consult with their legal counsel on how to best manage the privacy of the transgender or non-binary resource parent.

- **Staff must inform transgender and non-binary resource parents on instances when their gender histories may need to be shared with other professionals.** Staff can offer examples of how this information is often shared, and how it specifically will be used, and who will have access to this information.

- **Clarify in advance the people with whom it is acceptable to share this information, including when a transgender or non-binary person may be referred to receive additional family support.** If there are people with whom the information should not be shared, make sure that is clear to all staff and is thoroughly respected. Periodically check for changes.

Practices to Avoid

- **Refrain from sharing, discussing or revealing a transgender or non-binary person's gender history beyond those staff that need to know for professional purposes.** Even if a transgender or non-binary person is generally out about their gender identity, and everyone seems to acknowledge their gender identity, it is still essential to ask a transgender or non-binary person if there is anyone with whom the information should not be shared.

- **Never assume a transgender or non-binary person is "out" simply by looking at their gender expression, or pressure transgender and non-binary people to share their gender history with others.** The coming out process occurs again-and-again over the lifetime of a transgender or non-binary person, and transgender and non-binary people should have control over how and when they come out to others.

- **Do not expect that transgender and non-binary people want to educate or openly discuss the process of coming out or transitioning.** Everyone's gender history is personal and private, and is often difficult to discuss with strangers. Outside of some of the essential questions you need to ask during the homestudy process, respect the decisions of transgender and non-binary people to share, or not, their gender histories, and understand that their comfort around discussing this topic is likely to change over time.

5. Matching & Placement

The Challenge

Too many transgender and non-binary prospective resource parents are prevented from serving as such even though they have the skills and confidence to provide loving and stable homes for those young people currently awaiting a family. Many of the barriers that transgender and non-binary people face in the foster or adoption process arise after certification is complete, during matching and placement. This section discusses general promising practices and then explores two crucial elements of this process: parent advocacy with third parties and disclosing gender history to a child.

> "It's very important for my partner and I to have a family… Since we don't have many people in our lives to share our resources, we wanted to pursue becoming adoptive parents, serve as strong parents for kids in need of a good home, and build a loving family."
>
> **– Transgender Adoptive Mom,** Ohio

Promising Practices

- **Train all relevant staff on how to make the most appropriate placements to connect children and youth with transgender and non-binary resource parents.** Work with transgender and non-binary resource parents to determine if or when they will disclose their gender histories to their foster or adoptive children (see next section for more information). Proactively create a plan that empowers transgender and non-binary people to determine how they will share this information to ensure that the placement is a good match for all parties involved.

- **As with all certified resource parents awaiting a match, it's important to consistently communicate with transgender and non-binary resource parents as to the status of a potential placement.** Any indication that a placement is not an affirming and supportive match for either a transgender or non-binary resource parent, or a child, should be immediately addressed.

> "We hadn't seen or heard of a lot of outright discrimination but our families weren't being considered. We'd float around these summaries and these homestudies and just not get a response."
>
> **– Diane Tomaz, Director of Family Support Services,** Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange, Inc.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not dismiss concerns expressed by a transgender or non-binary resource parent or assume that the parent is being "too picky" when such concerns are discovered.** Instead, work to understand and address these concerns.

Parent Advocacy with Third Parties

The Challenge

Even the most affirming agencies encounter significant challenges when interfacing with third parties (e.g., state child welfare agencies and family courts) that are less familiar with working with and affirming transgender and non-binary resource parents. For example, hardships often arise when transgender and non-binary resource parents move from serving as foster parents to adoptive parents. Given the involvement with the state and family courts, transgender and non-binary resource parents are likely to have their gender history questioned, and for myths and stereotypes to influence determinations of whether they are qualified to serve as resource parents. Your agency can play a critical role in helping to advocate on behalf of a transgender or non-binary resource parent and their family.

For sample responses to harmful misconceptions about transgender and non-binary youth and adults, visit hrc.im/acaf-myths.

"When we submitted our application for adoption, our child's great aunt also submitted an application. After many anxious months of waiting, the State circled back with us to say that they had questions about my gender history. My agency got in touch with me, and said they weren't sure how to respond to the State's questions. Given these questions, and our agency's uncertainty about how to respond, we were terrified that the adoption wouldn't go through."

– Non-Binary Adoptive Parent, Michigan

"When a family registers a homestudy with us, we commit to advocating for them throughout the matching process. We do that with all families and feel like we need to keep a closer eye on trans-headed families. We want to be sure that their outcome is positive and hopefully that means getting matched with a child… We've acted as liaisons to the child workers by offering more education."

– Diane Tomaz, Director of Family Support Services, Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange, Inc.

Promising Practices

- **Develop an agency policy that clearly articulates that a resource parent's gender identity or gender expression will not disqualify them from serving as a foster or adoptive parent.** Be sure that all staff understand why this policy was developed, and how they are expected to implement it. When offering training and coaching around this policy, be sure to offer examples of where a resource parent's gender history may come into question, especially when it involves your state's child welfare agency and family courts.

- **Strengthen existing relationships with local family courts and key staff at your state child welfare agency.** Through your existing relationships, offer professional development conferences, workshops or seminars where your organizations can discuss some of the complexities that arise when applications for adoption are submitted by transgender and non-binary resource parents. Specifically break down what it means to be transgender and non-binary, and help these organizations dismantle some of the myths they may have as it relates to transgender and non-binary people parenting children.

- **When a transgender or non-binary resource parent discloses their gender history during the homestudy, ask clarifying questions to fully understand how their gender history relates to their strengths as a potential foster/adoptive parent.** Explain that their responses will help your agency field additional questions from family courts and state child welfare officials. Be sure to mirror back to transgender and non-binary resource parents how they describe their gender identity, how their lived experiences, resiliencies and perspectives enable them to serve as empathic and supportive parents, and let them know that this topic may come up again should they submit an adoption application.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not assume that transgender and non-binary resource parents understand that their gender identity or gender expression won't prohibit them from serving as resource parents.** In certain parts of the country, transgender and non-binary people are automatically disqualified from fully participating in everyday life simply because of who they are. If your agency has a non-discrimination policy inclusive of gender identity and gender expression, staff responsible for home finding should have the skills and confidence to communicate to transgender and non-binary resource parents that this policy offers them protections and empowers them to serve as resource parents.

- **Do not fail to intervene as advocates of transgender and non-binary resource parents should family court or state child welfare officials question their fitness to serve as foster or adoptive parents simply due to their gender identities or gender expressions.** Tragically, given the amount of misinformation and stereotypes about transgender and non-binary people, some of these professionals may allow this misinformation to influence their judgement on whether transgender and non-binary resource parents can serve as resource parents. Transgender and non-binary people need your agency staff to be equipped to help educate and empower these decision makers with accurate information, and underscore the unique strengths of many transgender and non-binary resource parents.

- **Avoid glossing over a transgender and non-binary resource parents gender history during the homestudy process.** Staff need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to successfully engage after a transgender and non-binary resource parent discloses this information. See Homestudies & Family Assessments for more information.

Disclosing Gender History to a Child

The Challenge

Ideally, how and when to purposefully disclose the gender history of a transgender or non-binary resource parent to a child in foster or adoptive care would always be determined by the resource parent. Due to the complexities of child welfare systems, personal information like one's gender history will sometimes need to be shared between key staff on a need-to-know basis. Unfortunately, some staff disclose this information due to personal curiosity, gossip and sometimes maliciously, to "out" a transgender or non-binary resource parent without their permission. For these resource parents, coming out to their children may be one of the most frightening and difficult challenges they will face as a resource parent. They may fear that their coming out will impact their children's love for them or make their children's lives more difficult. Staff should be prepared to discuss and process these fears and navigate disclosures to children with transgender and non-binary resource parents.

"What was most interesting about our experience is that when we decided to share our gender history with our kids, they were far more adaptable than many of the case managers we worked with at our adoption agency. What we underscored was that our gender history would never get in the way of supporting our kids, or loving them unconditionally."

– Transgender Adoptive Mother, North Carolina

"We had speakers from a local organization come to one of the staff meetings with the Department of Children and Families and other contracted agencies to talk about their experiences as transgender folks. One of them was already a parent, not through adoption, but had the experience of talking to their children about their gender identity. I think that's something that social workers always thought would be so confusing for kids or just impossible for kids to understand. It was great to have this person come in and talk about how she actually did this with her kiddos and how at times it was painful but also really wonderful and actually brought them closer together. That was good for them to hear."

– Diane Tomaz, Director of Family Support Services, Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange, Inc.

Promising Practices

- **Develop clear policies at your agency that address the diversity of families, and normalize that resource parents within your agency are composed of people of different gender identities and gender expressions.** Offer education around what this means, making it clear that your agency welcomes, certifies and supports transgender and non-binary resource parents. Normalize and clarify that families involved with your agency include both cisgender, transgender and non-binary people.

- **Train and equip staff with the knowledge and skills to support transgender and non-binary resource parents in determining how and when they should come out to their foster or adoptive children.** Just like any other topic, it is important to consider the age of children and adolescents involved since they will interpret and understand information differently. For example, a child under the age of 10 can understand the coming out process if described with simpler, age appropriate language. For example, a transgender foster dad may say, "I was born with a girl's body, but have a boy's brain, and I changed my outside to match my inside." Adolescents, on the other hand, may already be somewhat familiar with transgender and non-binary people and have received messages about this community. Unfortunately, these early messages may be rooted in misconceptions and transphobia. Therefore, older children may have more questions and require a more detailed conversation.

- **Staff should work closely with transgender and non-binary resource parents around when to disclose this information.** Timing this news will offer some specific challenges, namely, a transgender or non-binary resource parent will need to prepare being vulnerable with their child, they will then need to work diligently to meet their children's needs. These two competing demands make coming out to children especially challenging, and agency staff should be prepared to offer support and resources to help transgender and non-binary parents carefully consider when to share this information.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not assume that a child or young person would not be accepting of a transgender or non-binary person as their parent.** Instead, diligently work to make the most appropriate placements that match the skills and strengths of a transgender or non-binary resource parent with a child who can benefit and thrive from such a parent.

- **Do not share a transgender or non-binary resource parent's gender history with a child or a young person without the express consent of the resource parent.** Rather, collaborate with the transgender or non-binary resource parent and work on a plan of if, when and how disclosure of their gender history will take place. In certain instances, sharing this information at the time of a placement may not be a necessary step (i.e., when placing a baby, young child, etc.).

- **Do not assume that transgender and non-binary resource parents already have the skills and confidence to disclose their gender histories to their children.** Many transgender and non-binary resource parents are unsure of what their rights are, and may feel especially vulnerable that should they share this information with their children, they will run the risk of upsetting their children, having their children reject them, or potentially having their children removed from their home. Given these fears, it is imperative that your agency anticipates these concerns, and identify resources that can help make this coming out process easier for all involved.

- **Do not assume that young children under the age of 10 cannot understand the concepts of gender identity and gender expression.** Again, consider some of the resources specifically geared to support transgender and non-binary parents, especially around coming out located in Section IV. Consider coaching transgender and non-binary resource parents around how to disclose this information in an age and developmentally appropriate manner. Do not assume that transgender and non-binary resource parents understand childhood and adolescent development. Work with them to practice how to come out, and support them on creating an age-appropriate message that will be best understood by their child.

- **Do not assume that a transgender or non-binary resource parent does not need support, no matter how many times they have shared their gender history to family, friends, loved ones, etc.** Coming out to children can be an especially challenging moment for transgender and non-binary people, and they will need specific support either through your agency, or through a partner organization. Be sure that your staff has access to the resources offered to transgender and non-binary parents featured in this guide, and consider adding any additional resources located in your region.

6. Resource Parent Supports

The Challenge

Prospective resource parents benefit from speaking to other resource parents when navigating different steps of the foster and adoption process. Many transgender and non-binary resource parents report feeling excluded from existing parent support groups. These feelings tend to arise due to existing groups' lacking awareness of transgender and non-binary people, or understanding their lived experiences. As a result, many existing and prospective transgender and non-binary resource parents tend to feel isolated, and often have to serve as personal advocates or pioneers to make it through an already challenging process.

"We were invited to join a group for same-sex parents, but unfortunately the group's attendance fell off, and turned into an online Facebook group, which wasn't officially supported by my agency. Everyone in the group, besides me, is cisgender. I still haven't met other trans and non-binary resource parents."

– Transgender Foster Dad, Missouri

"For the first trans couple we didn't have another trans family that they could speak to. I ended up reaching out to Family Equality Council, which has a local Boston Chapter, and we've gotten their assistance connecting with another local non-profit, the Rainbow Initiative. It ended up strengthening our work together because they knew of families that we didn't know who were able to help our families through this process. It was great because we expanded the pool of possibilities."

– Diane Tomaz, Director of Family Support Services, Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange, Inc.

Promising Practices

- **Designate key staff to review existing online resources available for transgender and non-binary parents, and specifically for transgender and non-binary foster or adoptive parents.** Create a list of transgender and non-binary specific resources for your region. See Section IV for a list to get started.

- **Consider sponsoring an online community that serves to support transgender and non-binary resource parents.** Work with national, state and local transgender and non-binary organizations to help identify resource parents who would like to participate in this online community. Section IV of this guide includes a list of some of these organizations.

- **Collaborate with transgender and non-binary resource parents and community leaders to identify challenges and barriers to becoming a certified resource parent, along with a method to offer support to fellow transgender and non-binary people.** As an agency, creating the space, offering the resources and empowering community leaders can be essential steps toward creating a successful parent support group.

Practices to Avoid

- **Do not assume that LGBTQ groups are sufficient in offering support to transgender and non-binary resource parents.** While some transgender and non-binary resource parents are in same-sex households, nearly all transgender and non-binary resource parents have different needs as it relates to their gender identities and expressions, and they will benefit from a dedicated space to support each other through some of the inevitable challenges that arise when serving as resource parents.

- **Do not expect another agency or organization to take the lead on sponsoring a transgender and non-binary parent support group—either online or in person.** If you are currently serving transgender and non-binary resource parents at your agency, solicit their opinions on whether they feel a need for a support group, if they know of other resource parents, and if they would like to connect with other transgender and non-binary resource parents. Starting the conversation can help get the momentum needed to create a local support group in your region.

SECTION IV:
Tools for Agencies

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION | 1640 Rhode Island Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 | **www.hrc.org/acaf**

1. Checklist for Gender-Inclusive Events

Follow the steps below to ensure your agency events are inclusive of people of all genders.

☐ **Include pronouns on nametags and in verbal introductions.** Staff members should model the inclusion of pronouns by writing their pronouns on their own nametags. If possible, print "Name" and "Pronouns" onto the nametags to offer that as information to share. Prepare staff and volunteers to answer questions about why you are including pronouns.

☐ **Identify at least one "All Gender" of "Gender-Neutral" restroom.** To make sure all attendees have a restroom in which they feel comfortable, designate at least one restroom as open to all genders. If possible, this should be a single occupancy restroom. Announce the location of this restroom during other housekeeping announcements and post a sign designating the restroom as "All Gender" or "Gender Neutral." Prepare staff to answer questions and advocate for a person's ability to use the restroom that corresponds to their gender identity.

☐ **Avoid the use of gendered greetings like "Hello ladies and gentleman," or "Sir" and "Ma'am."** While these greetings traditionally communicate respect, they can unintentionally exclude people who do not identify as women or men. Instead, use language like "Good evening, everyone" or "It's great to see all you folks here today."

☐ **Scan forms and other paperwork for gender-related questions.** If you are collecting gender information, the gender field can either be a write-in field (allowing people to identify using their own language) or use options inclusive of non-binary identities. For example, three options: Male, Female, Another Gender.

2. Affirming Questions Related to Gender Identity & Expression

Child welfare agencies can use the following questions to ask all prospective resource parents about their gender, transgender status, preferred name and pronouns on various administrative forms.

For much more information on assessing your agency's readiness for formalized data collection, privacy and safety considerations, and model language for forms and interviews, visit hrc.im/acaf-sogie.

Gender Identity Questions:

Which of the following best describes your gender?

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Another gender: _____

Do you consider yourself to be transgender?

☐ No, I am not transgender
☐ Yes, I am a transgender woman (assigned male at birth and identify myself as a woman)
☐ Yes, I am a transgender man (assigned female at birth and identify myself as a man)
☐ Yes, I identify as non-binary, genderqueer or another term
☐ Not sure whether I am transgender
☐ Not sure what this question means

What is your preferred name? _____

Which pronouns should we use for you?

☐ She / Her
☐ He / Him
☐ They / Them
☐ Something else: _____

3. Resources for Transgender & Non-Binary Parents

- **Adoption Laws and Resource for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Families.**
  This webpage provides resources and information for LGBT families, information about how to talk with an LGBT adoption specialist and LGBT family stories.

  Download the full publication: *https://www.adoptuskids.org/adoption-and-foster-care/overview/who-can-adopt-foster.*

- **AdoptUSKids Facebook Group for LGBT Foster or Adoptive Parents.**
  This closed Facebook group provides information to current and prospective foster or adoptive parents who are part of the LGBT community. Group members can ask questions and share information and ideas on this page.

  Submit a request to join the group: *https://www.facebook.com/groups/289599221130603/.*

- **COLAGE.**
  COLAGE unites people with LGBT and/or queer parents into a network of peers and supports them as they nurture and empower each other to be skilled, self-confident and just leaders in our collective communities. The COLAGE website provides a variety of resources and publications, including resources in Spanish, for LGBT parents and their children. COLAGE offers events and local community groups and chapters.

  More information about COLAGE: *https://www.colage.org/.*

- **Family Equality Council.**
  Family Equality Council connects, supports and represents the 3 million parents who are LGBT and queer in this country and their 6 million children. The website offers a variety of resources, including The LGBTQ Family Friendly Children's Book List and Talking To Children About Our Families. The website also provides an online forum, opportunities to connect to upcoming events, parent groups in your area, an email list, parent stories and The Family Room Blog.

  More information about FEC: *http://www.familyequality.org/.*

- **The LGBTQ Institute for Family Therapy (LIFT).**
  LIFT is a groundbreaking, six-month certification program for Licensed Master Social Workers (LMSW) and Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) who provide therapeutic services to families involved with child welfare systems. LIFT helps clinicians gain additional knowledge, skills and confidence to reduce the rejecting behaviors of families struggling to accept their LGBTQ children. The program also aims to support families experiencing conflict around their child's actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Upon program completion, clinicians will receive 54 CE hours. This program is free to eligible clinicians for a limited time.

  Interested clinicians must submit an application for each six-month session: *https://gaycenter.org/lift.*

- **National Center for Transgender Equality.**
  Strong families—however they are composed—support the well-being of transgender people throughout their lives. Despite the advance of marriage equality, transgender people and their families still face many challenges. Both transgender parents and supportive parents of trans children can face unfair and harmful challenges to their parental rights and decisions. As with LGBT families in general, trans people's families continue to face barriers to fostering and adopting in many places, and to recognition of their family relationships in many situations. Trans people seeking support in the face of family rejection or domestic violence still often face barriers as well. NCTE's resources focus on family rights and responding to discrimination related to family relationships.

  More information about NCTE: *http://www.transequality.org/issues/families.*

- **Our Trans Loved Ones: Questions and Answers for Parents, Families and Friends of People Who are Transgender and Gender Expansive.**
  PFLAG National, the nation's largest ally organization for LGBT people, created this guide to support families and friends of transgender and gender expansive children, adolescents and adults. PFLAG National's experiences, expertise, knowledge and resources continue to evolve over time, and therefore, readers are encouraged to check with medical, mental health, social services and other professional providers, or local support groups—including PFLAG chapters—for the most up-to-date information on transgender and gender expansive experiences.

  Download full publication: *https://www.pflag.org/sites/default/files/Our%20Trans%20 Loved%20Ones.pdf.*

- **Safe Havens: Closing the Gap Between Recommended Practice and Reality for Transgender and Gender-Expansive Youth in Out-of-Home Care.**
  This 2017 report from Lambda Legal, Children's Rights and the Center for the Study of Social Policy identifies barriers to affirming treatment for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming young people, and offers strategies to eliminate these barriers. The report provides groundbreaking, live, national maps of specific out-of-home care statutes, policies and licensing regulations related to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, providing a resource to help users understand the explicit protections that exist (or do not exist) in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Also provided are concrete law and policy reform recommendations and practical tips to better protect and serve transgender and non-binary youth involved in intervening public systems. The recommendations incorporate significant input from both transgender and non-binary youth who reported affirming experiences during their placement in out-of-home care and providers who have made recommended practices a reality for the youth they serve.

  Download full publication: *http://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/TNB-policy-report_2017_final-web_05-02-17.pdf.*

- **Transgender Family Law: A Guide to Effective Advocacy.**
  Transgender Family Law: A Guide to Effective Advocacy is the first book to comprehensively address legal issues facing transgender people in the family law context and provide practitioners the tools to represent transgender clients effectively. The book is written by attorneys with expertise in both family law and advocacy for transgender clients, and is a must-have, practical guide for attorneys interested in becoming effective advocates for their clients. It is also a valuable resource for any transgender person who is forming, expanding, or dissolving a family relationship.

  Find the book here: *https://www.glad.org/tfl/.*

- **TGNC Best Practice Guide: Safe & Respected.**
  The New York City Administration for Children's Services (NYC ACS) has released the nation's first ever transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) best practices guide developed by a child welfare government agency. This resource offers concrete guidance, strategies for successfully providing inclusive care and resources that will enable child welfare practitioners to meet the specific needs of TGNC children and young people. Safe & Respected includes a brief overview of the barriers that TGNC children and young people face while in care; a glossary of terms; and an overview of affirming resources, policies and best practices especially meaningful for staff to help affirm and support TGNC children and young people.

  Download full publication: *http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/lgbtq/FINAL_06_23_2014_WEB.pdf*

- **Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Children in California Foster Care.**
  This 2016 brief from Family Builders by Adoption, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and the National Center for Lesbian Rights supports the efforts of California child welfare professionals to promote the safety, permanency and well-being of transgender and gender non-conforming (TNB) children in foster care. Using a question-and-answer format, the brief: 1) provides an overview of terms and concepts related to gender identity and expression, and accurate information about gender identity development; 2) provides accurate information on the impact of bias on the health and safety of transgender and non-binary children, and; 3) describes legal and professional standards governing services to, and treatment of, transgender and non-binary children in the child welfare system.

  Download full publication: *http://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/get-real/what-we-do/body/TNB-Children-in-CA-Foster-Care-Feb-2016.pdf.*

4. Glossary of Terms

Affirming: In the context of this guide, the term "affirming" describes and identifies key stakeholders that treat transgender and non-binary people equally, offer non-judgmental support and acceptance, encourage transgender and non-binary people to speak openly and honestly about who they are, and advocate for transgender and non-binary people when they endure bias, harassment and discrimination.

Assigned sex: The sex noted on an individual's birth certificate issued at birth. Also referred to as sex assigned at birth or birth sex.

Chosen Name: The chosen name a transgender or non-binary person uses. Whenever possible, use a transgender or non-binary person's chosen name, which may differ from their legal name and/or former name.

Cisgender: An adjective that describes any person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned or presumed to be at birth. Also referred to as non-transgender.

Cultural Competency: Refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures, socio-economic backgrounds and experiences, particularly in the context of government and nonprofit agencies whose employees work with persons from different social/cultural/ethnic backgrounds. Cultural competence is comprised of four components: 1) awareness of one's own cultural worldview; 2) attitude towards cultural differences; 3) knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews; and, 4) cross-cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures.

Cultural Humility: Refers to the ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the person.[17] This concept is different from the concept of "cultural competency" because it focuses on self-humility and empathy rather than striving to achieve a state of expertise on a culture that is not your own. A culturally humble practitioner is one that can effectively interact and work with people of different cultures, socio-economic experiences and backgrounds than our own.

Cross-dresser: An outdated term used to refer to someone who wears clothes of another sex/gender.

Discrimination: Specific actions against a person or group that are based on prejudice (e.g., negatively treating a transgender or non-binary person because they are transgender or non-binary).

Emotional/psychology safety: People's sense of security and confidence that they will be treated with respect, which contributes to positive mental health and well-being.

FTM / female-to-male: See "Transgender men and boys."

Gender: The set of meanings assigned by a culture or society to someone's perceived sex. Gender is not static and it can shift over time. Gender has at least three components:

Gender Identity: A person's internal sense of being male, female, or, for some people, a blend of both or neither. This may or may not align with one's assigned sex. Gender identity is well established around 2-3 years old. This component of gender will often influence an individual's name and pronouns.

Physical Markers: Aspects of the human body that are considered to determine sex and/or gender for a given culture or society; including genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, secondary sex characteristics and internal reproductive organs.

Gender Expression: Aspects of behavior and outward presentation that may (intentionally or unintentionally) communicate gender to others in a given culture or society, including clothing, body language, hairstyles, socialization, interests and presence in gendered spaces (e.g., restrooms, places of worship, etc.). Refers to the manner in which a person expresses gender through clothing, appearance, behavior, speech, etc. A person's gender expression may vary from the gender norms traditionally associated with that person's biological sex. Gender expression is separate from gender identity and sexual orientation.

Gender Binary: A system that constructs gender as two discrete categories: male/boy/man and female/girl/woman. This view of gender is limiting and leaves out many—including transgender and non-binary people.

Gender Dysphoria (GD), formerly known as **Gender Identity Disorder (GID):** The formal diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, fifth edition, or simply DSM 5, meaning a marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender.

Gender Expansive: Referring to aspects of gender expression, identity and interests that go beyond binary prescriptions of behaviors and interests associated primarily with boys or girls. Gender expansive includes young people who do not identity with the sex they were assigned at birth as well as those who do, but may nonetheless find themselves barraged with questions based on their dress, appearance or interests, such as, "Are you a boy or a girl?" or "Why do you play with that? It's a boy/girl toy!" Other words with similar meanings include gender diverse, gender creative, gender independent, gender non-conforming and gender wonderful.[18]

Gender History: Information related to a transgender or non-binary person's sex, name, and pronouns assigned at birth, as well as aspects of their past social, legal and/or medical transitions.

Gender-Neutral: A term that describes something (usually a space, such as a bathroom, or clothing) that is not segregated by sex/gender. Also "All Gender."

Gender non-conforming (GNC): Having or perceived to have gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations. Gender non-conforming people may or may not identify as transgender. While they are often assumed to be lesbian, gay or bisexual, sexual orientation cannot be determined by a person's appearance or degree of gender conformity.

Gender norms: Culturally based expectations of how people should act based on their sex or gender (e.g., men are masculine, women are feminine).

Genderqueer: Genderqueer people typically reject static categories of gender and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories. Also see gender non-conforming, non-binary and transgender.

Gender Roles: The socially determined behaviors and actions expected from a person based on their sex or gender.

Gender Spectrum: A term describing gender without conforming to the gender binary. It denotes gender as a continuum that includes male and female, without assigning them at birth and without establishing them as absolutes or polar-opposites. This understanding of gender is inclusive of people of all sexes, gender identities and expressions.

HIPAA Privacy Rule: The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) provides federal protections for individually identifiable health information held by covered entities and their business associates and gives patients an array of rights with respect to that information. At the same time, the Privacy Rule also permits the disclosure of health information needed for patient care and other important purposes.

Intersex/Disorders of Sex Development (DSD): An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. In some cases, these traits are visible at birth while in others, they are not apparent until puberty. Some chromosomal variations of this type may not be physically apparent at all. *While some transgender and non-binary people have intersex condition, not all people with intersex condition identify as transgender or non-binary.* Note: This term replaces "hermaphrodite" which is considered offensive.

Legal Transition: Legal transition involves the administrative process of legally changing one's name and gender on identity documents. For many transgender and non-binary people, legally transitioning is an important aspect to obtaining accurate identity documents needed in their everyday lives, such as a passport, driver's license, birth certificate and Social Security card. Without these documents, it can be impossible to secure gainful employment, obtain credit or even find housing. For non-binary people, the process of legally transitioning can be complex, as many do not identify with being male or female. Note that certain jurisdictions offer alternatives to choosing a binary gender on public identity documents (i.e., India allows a person to elect a third gender, and Oregon and Washington, D.C. allow a person to elect a "non-binary" gender label).

LGBTQ: An acronym commonly used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals and communities. People often use "LGBTQ" as an antonym to "straight," however, this conflates sexual orientation and gender identity and is incorrect. "LGBTQ" and "straight" are not mutually exclusive since transgender people can be straight.

Microaggressions: Small hostile actions by an individual that may reveal prejudice or bias (e.g., a person looking confused or disgusted when seeing someone who appears to be transgender, using a tone of voice that is cold or unfriendly when speaking with a non-binary person, or using derogatory or offensive language when referring to a transgender or non-binary person).[19]

Medical Transition: Medical transition is the process of undergoing medical treatments, including pubertal suppression, hormone therapy and surgical procedures, or receiving services, like voice therapy and hair removal, to align the body and secondary sex characteristics with one's gender identity. While nearly all transgender and non-binary people undergo some form of social transition, not everyone will pursue legal transition, and even fewer will pursue medical transition for a variety of reasons. For example, some transgender and non-binary people have no desire to medically transition, some cannot medically transition for health reasons, and many have difficulty accessing it because of financial barriers.

MTF / male-to-female: See "Transgender women and girls."

Non-Binary: An adjective referring to any person whose gender identity is neither male nor female.

Pronouns: The pronouns that people would like others to use when referring to them. Also referred to as preferred gender pronouns or PGPs. The most common pronouns are:
- She/her/hers: "She wants to see her case worker and is in the waiting room."
- He/him/his: "He has a meeting with his court appointed lawyer this afternoon."
- They/them/theirs: "They use gender neutral pronouns, and go by the name Sam."
- Zie or Ze/hir/hirs: (sounds like "zee," "here," and "heres"). "Ze has an appointment with hir dentist for next week."

Queer: This term can be used as an umbrella term for "LGBT," to express a rejection of other gender and sexual orientation labels, or to describe sexual attraction to people of more than one gender. Historically "queer" has been used as a negative term for LGBTQ people. Some people still find the term offensive while others have embraced the term. It should be used carefully.

Questioning: A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. Some may later identify as transgender or non-binary, while others will not.

Resilience: Refers to the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties, or the ability to become strong, healthy or successful again after adversity. This term is often used to describe transgender and non-binary people, who despite experiencing extreme discrimination, harassment and violence in all aspects of their lives, have the ability to cope and overcome these significant barriers.

Sex: The combinations of physical characteristics (including but not limited to genitals, chromosomes and sex hormone levels) typical of males or females.

Sexual Orientation: A person's emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people. Sexual orientation is separate and distinct from gender identity and gender expression. Sexual orientation is about attraction to other people (external), while gender identity is a deep-seated sense of self (internal).

Social Transition: The social process of disclosing to oneself and others that one is transgender or non-binary. This often includes asking others to use a name or pronoun that is more congruent with one's gender identity and different from one's sex assigned at birth, name and assumed pronouns. This process also may include changing one's gender expression, which may or may not correspond to traditional gender roles. While this process is the most accessible to transgender and non-binary people, it may also present some of the greatest challenges. There are risks of negative reactions ranging from intentional microaggressions to serious violence. Due to these risks, transgender and non-binary people may choose to socially transition in different social groups at different periods of time (i.e., coming out to close friends and refraining from disclosing to others).

Transgender Person: A term for a person whose gender identity (internal sense of self) is incongruent with that person's sex assigned at birth. Note: transgender is an adjective, not a noun. It is inappropriate and can be considered offensive to use transgender alone or to add an –ed or –s at the end (e.g., the transgendered or transgenders are both incorrect).

Transgender-Related Health Care: Broadly describes the medical care that some transgender and non-binary people require in relation to their gender identity. The term may be used in specific instances to describe specific types of care, which may include supportive psychotherapy, hormonal therapies, surgical procedures, voice therapy and/or electrolysis/laser hair removal.

Transgender men and boys: People who identify as male, but were assigned female at birth. Similarly, the terms FTM or female-to-male, refer to those who now identify as boys or men. It is recommended to use people-first language by using the phrases "transgender men" and "transgender boys" instead of the "FTM," to amplify that transgender is an adjective describing an aspect of a person's identity. The term FTM is a noun, and can be perceived by some as a way that subconsciously reduces a person to their gender identity.

Transgender women and girls: People who identify as female, but were assigned male at birth. Similarly, the terms MTF or male-to-female refer to those who now identify as girls or women. It is recommended to use people-first language by using the phrases "transgender women" and "transgender girls" instead of the "MTF," to amplify that transgender is an adjective describing an aspect of a person's identity. The term MTF is a noun, and can be perceived by some as a way that subconsciously reduces a person to their gender identity.

Transphobia: A negative, derogatory, prejudicial or discriminatory response to a person who is (or is perceived to be) transgender or non-binary.

Transsexual: A term that is can be considered offensive. It is also sometimes used by transgender people to refer to a transgender person who has engaged in a medical transition from one sex/gender to another, so that the person's body and gender identity are more physically aligned.

Two-Spirit: An identity label used by Indigenous North Americans to indicate that they embody both a masculine and feminine spirit. May also be used to include native peoples of diverse sexual orientations, and has different nuanced meanings in different native sub-cultures.

WPATH (World Professional Association for Transgender Health) Standards of Care: The standards of care provide guidance for transgender and non-binary-affirming medical and mental health providers in determining if and when a person is ready/able to engage in medical interventions such as pubertal suppression, hormonal treatments and/or surgeries. The standards of care are available online at: http://www.wpath.org/publications_standards.cfm.

Definitions for this glossary have been adapted from the following resources:

- *A Place of Respect; A Guide for Group Care Facilities Serving Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth.* [20]
- *Breaking the Silence. National Center for Lesbian Rights.*[21]
- *Promoting a Safe and Respectful Environment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth and their Families Involved in the Child Welfare, Detention and Juvenile Justice System.*[22]
- *Hidden Injustice: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth in Juvenile Courts.* The Equity Project.[23]
- *Safe & Respected: Policy, Best Practices, & Guidance for Serving Transgender & Gender Non-Conforming Children and Youth Involved in the Child Welfare, Detention, and Juvenile Justice Systems.*[24]
- *Trans Action Guide.* Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network.[25]

Tips for Avoiding Offensive & Derogatory Language

Do not use outdated and offensive language. Here is a quick guide to language that is respectful and affirming.

SAY THIS:	INSTEAD OF SAYING THIS:
Sex assigned at birth	"Real" sex, "real" gender, genital sex
Transgender person	a transgender
Transgender people	transgenders
Transgender	transgendered
Transgender man	FTM, used to be a woman, born female
Transgender woman	MTF, used to be a man, born a male
Medical Transition	Sex change, the surgery, pre-operative, post-operative
Intersex person	Hermaphrodite
Sexual orientation	Sexual preference, homosexual

Terms to Avoid

The following terms are considered outdated, offensive or derogatory when discussing people who are, or are perceived to be transgender or non-binary. (Note: this is not an exhaustive list.)

- Tranny, or Trannie
- Transgendered
- It
- Pre-Op, or Post-Op
- Hermaphrodite
- Deviant
- Homosexual
- Transsexual

- Transvestite
- Transgenders
- She-Male, or He-She
- Fooling, or Deceiving
- "Real" sex
- Sex Change
- "The Surgery"

Endnotes

1   The authors of this guide use the term cultural humility instead of cultural competence to underscore the importance of self-education and empathy rather than striving to achieve a state of expertise on a culture that is not one's own. A culturally humble practitioner is one who actively self-educates on cultures that differ from their own, creates inclusive environments for people that come from different cultural backgrounds, and actively works to provide services and referrals that are culturally appropriate. By reading this guide, you are actively taking steps to provide transgender and non-binary culturally humble care.

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all families

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