

Welcome to understanding the LGBTQ plus community and supporting the foster youth in your care.

My name is Hillary Peterson.

My pronouns are she, her hers.

I am a clinical health counselor here in Reno, Nevada.

I work for the Washoe County Human

Agency Human Services Agency and Our Place,

which is a women and family shelter.

I have over ten years of experience in the mental

health field, and I'm a mentor and advocate for LGBTQ

plus youth in our area, as well as I co

facilitate a trans teen group here in town.

And I am a member of the LGBTQ plus community myself.

Identify as a lesbian or I also like

to say that I'm a queer woman. All right, welcome.

Let's get into this.

We're going to start with a video, just a little intro

on the topic that we're going to be discussing today.

Okay?

As you just learned in that video, the Human Rights

Campaign has a great training called All Children, All Families,

and they have a lot of great resources as well.

I highly encourage you to check out their

website and information, especially if we don't cover

a topic that you are interested in exploring.

They have just about everything you can think of on

their website, so the link is there, and we'll make

sure that you have access to other links as well.

Something that I like to say as a reminder when we jump into this topic is that there's really no such thing as an expert.

We're all the experts of our own lives, and it's really hard to be an expert in something so that continues to grow and change.

Like the topic of LGBTQ plus people, we have new terms that kind of pop up every day.

I like to say that we're constantly learning and constantly gaining access to more and more research on the LGBTQ plus community.

So LGBTQ plus is an acronym meant to encompass a whole bunch of diverse sexualities and genders.

It is an all encompassing kind of umbrella term used to identify all of these diverse sexualities and genders.

So although it can be helpful to learn the acronyms and definitions within the LGBTQ plus community, nothing is as important as allowing the person to define their identity for themselves.

So the key here is asking, instead of telling, we want to listen to the person and allow them to leave the conversation.

It is not our place and can be harmful to tell a person that how they are describing their identity is incorrect.

So I see this a lot, especially working with kids.

Maybe they have an idea of what something means

and that's different than what I think that means.

And so if I have a kid that comes into

my office and they tell me that they are bisexual,

I'm not going to just assume that I know what

that means based on the information that I have.

I'm going to instead ask them what that means to them.

So I might say something like, thank

you for sharing that with me.

Tell me what that means to you.

Because maybe their definition is totally different than

what I would have assumed that it meant.

So it's not a place for me to tell them that they're

wrong or to interject and put my own stuff onto it.

It's for me to listen to them and

let them tell me how they identify.

So I encourage you to do the same,

and I promise you it opens up some

really good conversations down the road as well.

Soji is an acronym that you might have

heard a little bit more frequently these days.

So Soji stands for Sexual

Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression.

So we all have a Soji Soji is

not unique to the LGBTQ plus community.

We all have a sexual orientation, we all have

a gender identity, and we all have gender expression.

So this is something that gets thrown around a lot.

But I want to clarify that again, it's

not unique to the LGBTQ plus community.

So digging in a little bit more to our Soji.

So we have our gender identity, which

is a person's identification of their gender.

So that could mean transgender, that could mean

gender fluid, that could mean misgender, right?

So our gender identity is how we identify our

gender, which is then different than our biological sex.

So our biological sex is the sex

that we are signed at birth.

So that could be female, that could

be male, that could be intersex.

So intersex is when a person

is born with atypical reproductive anatomy.

So they may have both

male and female reproductive organs.

So our biological sex, again, could be different or

could be the same as our gender identity.

And then we jump into gender expression.

So gender expression is how

a person presents their gender.

So that could be through clothing,

actions, demeanor, mannerisms, et cetera.

So we might have a feminine gender expression or

a masculine gender expression to be gender neutral or.

Androgynous so our gender expression may or may not match that of our biological sex.

And it is a way to kind

of show the world our gender identity.

However, it may or may not match our gender identity as well, especially depending on how

out a person is or is not now,

our gender identity, our gender expression, and our biological sex are separate from our sexual orientation.

So our sexual orientation is who a person is physically, emotionally, and or sexually attracted to.

So these are some terms that are commonly used.

And granted, there's a whole umbrella of other terms.

And that goes for all of these,

again, constantly changing, constantly growing sexual orientation.

So heterosexual, somebody who is attracted to the opposite

sex, homosexual attracted to same sex, bisexual, attracted to

both men and women, transsexual is attracted to all

genders, not just those genders that fit in our

binary, but then also that could be people who

are transgender, or maybe they identify as gender neutral,

continue on and on and on with all of

those other acronyms that might be used.

And then asexual someone who is not

sexually attracted to anyone, and then even

within that, there's a whole spectrum.

So gender is a spectrum, or

sexual orientation can be a spectrum. Yeah.

So kind of across the board.

We're going to watch a video that

jumps more into these terms here.

And again, I want to remind you that even though

we're talking about these today, you might have a use

in your home or a friend or maybe even yourself

that has a term that's not covered and that's okay.

Doesn't mean it's not real or it doesn't exist.

Again, we're going to ask them what it means to them.

We're going to let them tell us, and then we

are going to go and do our own research on

what kind of other information is out there.

All right.

I know that video moves quickly, and it's a lot

of information to take in kind of all at once.

So I'm going to encourage you to go back and watch

that video again if you need to, or maybe even save

it for another time down the road when maybe somebody discloses

something to you and you're like, gosh, I kind of remember

what that term means, and you can kind of go back

and take a peek as needed.

I do want to discuss two things that they

included in that video, including the term queer.

Now, queer is used, like they said in

the video, kind of as an umbrella term

for gender identities and sexual orientation.

And queer used to be a term that was used offensively, and I guess it still could be used offensively within the Clear or LGBTQ plus community.

So it's important to only use that word if somebody is using that word to tell you that's how they identify.

It's never okay for us to just use that word as an attempt to, I guess, as a slur towards the LGBTQ plus community or to use that word unless it's something that's being shared by an individual to you or something that they would like to be referred to as.

Just like I did in the beginning of this training, I said that I identify as a lesbian.

And for a queer woman, the other topic that I'd like to discuss is they mentioned trans people or transgender people.

Something that they mentioned in the video is that some trans people may go ahead and start the transition process. Right?

That might mean hormone therapies.

That could mean kind of different surgeries.

That could mean a lot of different things.

It could just even mean a name change or change in pronouns or a change in how somebody dresses.

Just because a trans person doesn't seek out medical transition doesn't make them any less of a trans person.

You don't have to go through the process of medical transition to be considered trans.

All right.

Now we touched on pronouns a bit in the video.

However, we're going to dig into them a

little bit more because this is the topic

that I actually get asked about pretty frequently

when I introduced myself to a new person.

I try to use my pronouns when I use my

pronouns, that gives that person permission to do the same.

And even if I don't use my pronouns, it

doesn't mean that they can't tell me their pronouns.

However, it is a helpful way to let somebody

know that you're a safe person to talk about

pronouns and gender identity and even sexual orientation with.

So I want you to take a moment

and practice introducing yourself using your pronouns.

I'll go back and I'll introduce myself again.

So my name is Hillary Peterson, and

my pronouns are she, her, hers.

Some of you might be really comfortable introducing

yourself and using your pronouns and others.

This may be a bit foreign to you, and that's okay.

We're here to learn.

We're here to be openminded, and we're here

to kind of practice some of these things

that might be a little bit uncomfortable.

So if you are unsure of what pronouns

somebody might use, go ahead and ask.



We're not going to ask, like in an aggressive manner or in a way that might be considered harmful or hurtful to somebody. No.

The way to ask is kind of like I said, like, my name is Hillary.

My pronouns are she hers.

What are your pronouns?

If somebody has no idea what you're talking about, that's okay.

I promise you, you ask the right person.

That question could mean the world to them and again, give permission for them to be who they are authentically and to share that with you.

So using a person's correct pronoun, we do not say the word preferred anymore, or we try not to.

I know it's still on a lot of things.

Preferred indicates that it's a choice for people, often gender. It's not a choice.

That is who they are, and their pronouns should reflect that.

So we want to use their correct pronouns because it shows respect and understanding, and it's all about trying our best.

Mistakes happen.

So if you accidentally mispronounce somebody or use a name that they're no longer using or misgender somebody, move forward. Right?

Learn from it and move forward.

Don't have to make a big deal about it.

Again, it's all about trying our best.

And if somebody sees that you're trying your best,

they tend to be pretty happy with that.

Now, I'm not leaving you to say, like,

well, I tried my best, and then to

give up, I mean, truly try your best.

Again, we're going back to pronouns, and using

correct pronouns really shows respect and understanding towards

the other person, especially with these youth. Right.

They don't have a lot of control in their lives.

They don't have a lot of access

to maybe supportive people in their lives.

And so by doing this, it's not going to just

show them respect and understanding, but it's going to show

them that you support them and that you're working really

hard to be there for them and have a better

understanding of who they are and how they identify.

All right, here's another video

on gender identity and pronouns.

And it digs in a bit deeper than the last video.

Okay, now that we've covered some of

the basics, let's jump into the why.

Why are you here?

Why are we talking about this topic today?

So I love this quote by Nelson Mandela.

So we owe our children the most vulnerable citizens  
in any society alive, free from violence and fear.

That's the why, right?

That is why you're here.

That is why so many of you open up  
your home to kids, to youth that need a  
safe place to live, whether that's permanently or temporarily.

Here's another why.

So the LGBTQ plus youth and  
homelessness have some pretty staggering statistics.

So over 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ plus.

So their primary reason for homelessness is  
family rejection around their sexual orientation and  
or their gender identity and expression.

30% of LGBTQ youth reported physical violence  
at the hands of a family member.

After coming out as LGBTQ plus.

They are seven times more likely to  
be victims of crime and nearly twice  
as likely to report sexual victimization.

So a little piece of information I also would  
like to share is that oftentimes these statistics are  
underrepresented because in order to truly know if somebody  
is in the LGBTQ plus community, they have to  
be willing to share that information.

And so a lot of these studies that  
come out in these statistics are likely under

reporting or underrepresenting the actual number.

And so, unfortunately, that means that

the percentages are probably much higher.

So 26% of LGBT youth are forced from

their homes to due conflict with their families

over their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Now, you may have noticed at this point that sometimes

it fluctuates from LGBTQ plus to LGBT, and that is

due to the language that was used in different studies

and how they were including people in their studies.

And this information is hard to take in.

I mean, it's hard to see these statistics.

At least it is difficult even for me to,

like, kind of read it as we go through.

So in 2019, 34% of the youth in foster care

identified as LGBTQ and 5% identified as transgender, compared to

11.2% and 1.7% of you not in care.

So this is staggering, right?

This is kind of showing that LGBTQ plus

youth are overrepresented in our foster care system.

This is the why.

This is why you're here learning about this topic.

So all young people, regardless of what they look

like, which religion they follow, who they love, or

the gender they identify with deserves a chance to

dream and grow in a loving, permanent home.

President Barack Obama So LGBTQ youth are

more likely to suffer from consistent harassment and abuse in foster care, juvenile and juvenile justice settings, and in homeless shelters.

So what happens when placements aren't affirming or supportive?

A study based in New York City found that 78% of LGBTQ plus youth were removed or ran away from their cost replacement as a result of possibility towards their sexual orientation or gender identity.

So 100% of LGBTQ plus youth in group homes reported verbal harassment and 70% reported physical violence in group homes.

An La Bay study found that 12.9% of LGBTQ plus youth recorded being treated poorly in foster care, compared to 5.8% of non LGBTQ plus youth.

Lgbtq plus youth had a greater average number of placements and likelihood to be placed in congregate care.

Now that is something that's happening across the country.

Without safe foster care placements and without the vital support of case workers and other child welfare professionals, LGBTQ youth often sleep in foster care only to face homelessness and sexual exploitation.

Family acceptance is the biggest factor for positive LGBTQ plus youth outcomes.

If youth that identifies as LGBTQ plus has just one supportive person in their life, one supportive adult

in their life, that changes their outcomes and shifts  
it in a positive direction drastically.

So now that we've gone through  
this information, what can you do?

How can you create an inviting  
and inclusive home for all?

You want to give me a moment.

I want you to reflect on this.

Think about your own home right now.

What are you doing that is  
inviting and inclusive to all you?

Are there things that you could be doing differently?

Are there things that maybe you haven't thought  
of doing before to make a ship?

Are there things that you can include in your home  
that might make it feel more inclusive to all you?

Part of that is acceptance.

Acceptance is key.

So family acceptance during adolescence and perceptions  
of being a happy LGBT adult.

So when the family is extremely accepting, it  
really shows that their perceptions of being a  
happy adult is much higher than of course  
we can see not accepting it all.

Talk with the youth about their identity.

Support the youth and their LGBTQ plus identity,  
even if it makes you feel uncomfortable.

Express support and affection when you learn  
that the youth is LGBTQ plus advocate  
for the youth and their needs.

I think all of you are so good at that.

Require that other family members  
respect the LGBTQ plus youth.

Bring the youth to LGBTQ plus events and organizations.

Do some research.

See what organizations are out there in  
your town, in your area that you  
live, and what events might be happening.

Most bigger cities have a Pride event every year.

You can help the youth acquire an  
LGBTQ plus adult role model or mentor.

You can work to make Church or  
congregation LGBTQ plus supportive, or you can  
find a supportive space community.

If this is something that is important in your  
family, you can also welcome the youth LGBTQ plus  
friends and partner to your home, to family events  
and activities to support the youth gender expression and  
identity and believe that the youth can have a  
happy future as an LGBTQ plus adult.

And of course, there are many other things  
we can do beyond this and even being  
able to advocate for the youth.

Maybe they are interested in legally changing their

name or legally changing their gender, or they're interested in talking with a doctor or therapist about what options there are regarding gender identity and transitioning and what medical interventions might be available to them.

Even as we use these are some things that you can do to help support them.

Even if you are not totally comfortable with all of this yourself, you can seek out resources and help from people who have a greater understanding of this community and kind of know the directions to move in with youth.

Now we jump into how can I support a youth who is coming out?

This is another topic that I hear frequently, right?

This is I have parents that will come in and say, oh my gosh, my kid just came out to me and I said this, did I do something wrong?

Or my kid came up to me and I don't understand this, or I think my kid is gay, or

I think my kid might identify with a different gender other than the sex assigned at birth, how can I best support them when they do come out to me?

I found this incredible video called Life Boats and this may really resonate with people who have a Christian background, but I think that it's helpful for everybody in terms of supporting somebody who is coming out.

Video is powerful, has a lot of helpful and



supportive ideas and language that can be used.

If you do have a youth that comes

to you, that comes out to you.

The bottom line and the biggest

takeaway from that video is support.

Love, listening and being there.

That's what that kid needs, right?

I promise you, they have thought long and hard

about what they're telling you, and they have thought

long and hard and they weighed the pros and

cons before they've decided to come out at all.

So things to say, give a use that comes out to you.

Thank you for sharing with me.

I will always love and care about you.

I support you.

What else have you told?

Do you plan on telling other people?

It's important to ask who is the use of

shared or opened up to other people and how

I guess we would say out they are.

We never want to out somebody, right?

We don't want to take that information and share it.

It's not ours to share.

So by asking who are you out to?

Who knows, right.

That's going to give us information on

who else you can talk to.

If you have a youth in your home and  
you're the first person that they've told, maybe. Right.

You can say again, thank you for sharing with me.

Have you told anyone else?

Would you like help telling anyone else?

What are your next steps with this information?

Some youth might be out to you and they're out  
to their social worker, or maybe they're out to you  
and a teacher at school, to you and their friends.

Again, it's helpful to know because you want to  
make sure that you're not out in them.

Definitely not on purpose, but an accident as well.

It's not safe for all youth to  
be out in certain settings, right.

Some people might say, okay, you're out.

We're going to tell everybody, I could put  
a kid in a really scary situation.

Maybe there are some notsosafe people in other  
parts of that kid's life, or maybe at  
school, they're getting bullied, and that could really  
kind of make things worse for them.

So again, asking, how can I support you?

What do you need from me?

So what not to say?

This is only a phase.

You're just confused.

I love you.

But no but whenever we throw a butt  
in anything good, it never ends good.

And then we're going to have to adjust.

And on paper, these things may seem benign.

These are not benign statements. Right.

And if these are things that you've  
said in the past, that's okay, right?

We're here to learn.

We're not going to pick ourselves apart from  
things that we have or haven't said.

We're just going to learn and we're going to  
move forward reasons why these things might be hurtful.

Again, this person has thought  
about this long and hard.

They thought about gosh, their  
gender identity, their sexual orientation. Right.

It often isn't a phase.

That person likely is not confused. Right.

And if they're coming to you and you're the  
first person that they've told, they're testing the water.

Is this safe?

Am I safe to share this with other people?

I trust this person, so I'm going  
to share this information with them.

We're going to have to adjust.

Unless you have something really positive to  
say after that, maybe don't say that. Right.

We're going to have to adjust because we're going to have to hang a price, like in your room.

That's okay.

But we're going to have to adjust because we're not sure how gay people fit into our family.

That's probably a pretty hurtful thing to hear as a kid, as an adult, too, but definitely as a kid.

So before we wrap up with this training, it's really important that we talk about how we can best support these youth in our home.

Now that they're out to you, how can I make sure that we are not just affirming in our home, but taking the next steps, right.

If you have a youth in your home and they're using, say, their name, their chosen name is Michael and they're using he him pronoun.

But legally, their name is Michelle and their gender is female, that's going to be really tricky, especially it's tricky anyway, in terms of paperwork and legal paperwork.

But I think especially with our kids in the foster care system because there is a lot more legal paperwork that goes into things.

And so it's important to have a conversation at some point with that kids prior to going to a court date or prior to having them sign a legal document where being able to say, gosh, this paperwork is going

to have your legal name on it, your birth name

on it, or your dead name on it, right.

However, I know your name is Michael, and I know

that you see him pronouns and so just kind of

like doing a little pre teaching moment before that happens.

And then if you are the one that is actually

writing on the paperwork, it's okay to have the legal

name and then put in quotations or parentheses their chosen

name and the same thing with gender as well.

And I know it's tricky, and I know not

all paperwork is as flexible and sometimes you're just

clicking a box and that's really tricky.

So again, it's being able to have those

preteaching moments so that it doesn't become like

a trigger for the youth in your home.

The other thing, too, is like being

able to advocate on paperwork, right?

Or if you go to a doctor's office and if there

aren't options for sex or gender outside of male and female,

being able to say, hey, this doesn't fit every kid or

this doesn't fit my kid and really kind of stepping out

of your comfort zone, potentially to help kind of take the

burden off of that youth can make a huge difference.

That is the definition of being an ally, right?

Or an advocate is like going above

and beyond and helping support that person.

Of course, there's more nuances to it, and there's

all of the legal transitions that may happen over time, and especially if you have a team in your home and say they are in the process of transitioning and want to change their name legally and want to change their gender legally.

There are resources to help with that and a lot of information online as well.

Thank you for taking the time to look learn about how to support LGBTQ youth, whether that's in your life, in your home, Wherever that might be, or take you down the road, I appreciate each and every one of you.