CHECKLIST FOR CREATING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

Youth-serving professionals have an ethical obligation to ensure all young people feel safe, included and affirmed. Unfortunately, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) youth continue to experience disproportionate rates of rejection, bullying and violence, which are impacting their school attendance, academic performance and overall well-being. According to HRC Foundation's analysis of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) data, LGBTQ youth urgently need our attention.

+ **31% of LGBTQ youth**, **43% of transgender youth** and **40% of questioning youth** have been bullied at school, compared to 16% of their non-LGBTQ peers

+ **24% of LGBTQ youth**, **35% of transgender youth** and **41% of questioning youth** have skipped school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to school, compared to 8% of non-LGBTQ youth.

+ **54% of LGBTQ youth**, **61% of transgender youth** and **61% of questioning youth** are battling symptoms of depression, compared to 29% of non-LGBTQ youth.

+ **35% of LGBTQ youth**, **45% of transgender youth** and **40% of questioning youth** have seriously considered attempting suicide, compared to 13% of non-LGBTQ youth.

These findings are a call to action for all youth-serving professionals to address the many disparities including the root of the issue; dismantling anti-LGBTQ bias and stigma. The need is greatest among LGBTQ youth of color who sit at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities and are at greater risk of facing multiple forms of oppression, including racial bias.

This checklist produced by HRC Foundation's Project THRIVE campaign, representing more than 5 million youth-serving professionals across the country, provides a research-based guide for schools and youth-serving organizations to create safe, inclusive and affirming environments for LGBTQ youth.

*This checklist was inspired by HRC's Welcoming Schools Program and the checklist developed for secondary schools on creating LGBTQ and gender-inclusive schools.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- ☐ Our non-discrimination policy explicitly includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, both for students/clients and for employees.

- ☐ Our anti-bullying policy specifically names sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression as protected categories.

- ☐ We support trans and non-binary students during their social transitions (support checklist).

- ☐ All school/agency forms such as registration, attendance and class lists allow students to accurately reflect their gender identity, names and pronouns.

- ☐ We provide all-gender restrooms and private changing options for all students/clients.

- ☐ We have an all-gender dress code that is inclusive of all gender expressions and free of racial bias; students are safe and welcome to wear the clothes, hairstyles and accessories that reflect their intersecting identities.

- ☐ We have a policy that explicitly asserts the confidentiality of information pertaining to a student's sexual orientation and gender identity.

- ☐ We have a policy that respects the First Amendment rights of youth to attend events with a date of any gender or sexual orientation, or to wear clothing aligned with their gender identity in yearbook photos, etc.

- ☐ We have a suicide prevention policy that addresses at-risk populations, including LGBTQ youth.

- ☐ We have certified/credentialed LGBTQ-affirming mental health professionals (MHP) serving young people of all ages with a youth-to-MHP ratio as recommended by ASCA, NASP and SSWAA.

- ☐ We use restorative justice-type approaches to address bullying behavior.

- ☐ We use an intersectional approach to address all forms of oppression (i.e. racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- ☐ Our workplace provides ongoing professional development to improve critical skills to address bias-based bullying behaviors.

- ☐ Our staff members are specifically trained to prevent and respond to bullying incidents involving gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

- ☐ Our mental health professionals are provided with specialized training in the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to provide LGBTQ-affirming social, emotional, and behavioral health services.

CLIMATE, CULTURE AND COUNSELING SERVICES

- ☐ We support youth in using facilities (restrooms and locker rooms) aligned with their gender identity.

- ☐ Our school or program has a GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance).

- ☐ LGBTQ staff know they are safe to be open about their LGBTQ identity at work.

- ☐ Staff are empowered to utilize teachable moments when anti-LGBTQ comments are made.

- ☐ Materials in the office/classroom reflect LGBTQ people and the full spectrum of gender expression.

- ☐ We have established processes to ensure that every LGBTQ youth has one or more caring adults in the building/organization.

☐ We acknowledge relevant awareness months, days and weeks, such as National Coming Out Day, Ally Week, No Name-Calling Week, LGBTQ History Month, LGBTQ Pride Month, etc.

☐ Staff have visible cues in the office/classroom conveying the environment as a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ youth, e.g. posters, signs, literature (print and display the poster on the last page of this checklist).

☐ We provide opportunities for LGBTQ youth to share their experiences and recommendations to improve the climate and culture.

☐ We collect school or program climate data that allow for the analysis of LGBTQ youth responses compared to their non-LGBTQ peers.

☐ We provide LGBTQ youth with resources, such as coming out guides, finding scholarships and grants for post-secondary education, LGBTQ-inclusive colleges, LGBTQ-inclusive workplaces, etc.

☐ We use inclusive, non-heteronormative, non-gendered language.

☐ We have discontinued grouping youth activities by gender — including choir, physical education, class rosters, competitions, student royalty, etc, and we actively work to eliminate gender stereotypes with youth.

☐ We normalize pronoun sharing, including lesson plans that teach youth about gender-neutral pronouns.

☐ Our LGBTQ youth have equal access to LGBTQ-affirming counseling services and resources.

☐ We recognize that a student's sexual orientation or gender identity is likely to have a functional and/or academic impact in the absence of LGBTQ-inclusive and affirming counseling support services.

LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE MATERIAL AND RESOURCES

☐ Staff use LGBTQ-inclusive curricula for elementary and secondary-level youth.

☐ Our sexual health curriculum is inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities and includes HIV prevention and treatment information.

☐ Our academic curriculum includes a full spectrum of gender identity and sexual orientation perspectives, voices, histories and current events.

☐ Our elementary and secondary school libraries include books and resources about people with a broad spectrum of gender identities, sexual orientations and family structures.

☐ We are aware of the local, regional or national LGBTQ-resources that support LGBTQ youth and/or their parents/caregivers.

CONFIDENTIALITY

☐ Educators and staff are aware that under FERPA they must protect the confidentiality of students related to their gender identity and sexual orientation and show great caution not to share a student's sexual orientation and gender identity without that student's permission, even to the student's parent or guardian.

The following page is a poster intended for display in a classroom or office to show support for LGBTQ youth. Visuals like these help LGBTQ young people easily identify trusting adults and improve feelings of safety and connectedness.

PROJECT THRIVE

A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT LGBTQ YOUTH

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

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