



Youth Housing & Facilities Policy

Inclusion is a core value at FosterClub.

FosterClub strives to provide an inclusive, welcoming, and safe environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals, and those who have LGBTQ parents and family members. Under these headings, you will find more specific aspects and action to help achieve equity and create an inclusive environment for all young people. This list is neither exhaustive nor does it apply to every event environment.

We do not assume the sexual orientation or gender identity of young people.

We always use the pronouns (e.g. he, she, them) that individuals ask us to use. When we make incorrect assumptions about the sexuality or gender identity of youth, we risk rendering gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals invisible, and may cause deep pain. When we fail to see our young people as their full selves, we risk alienating them from our community and discouraging them from participating fully, or at all. It's not uncommon to mistakenly use a pronoun a person doesn't identify with when referring to them. This is okay. However, don't pretend you didn't use the incorrect pronoun. If you make a mistake, take accountability for your error by correcting yourself before continuing your conversation. Everyone will appreciate your effort.

We ensure that event application materials share our culture and commitment to inclusion and provide an opportunity for youth and staff to ask for what they need.

FosterClub reinforces our inclusive culture through marketing materials, on our website and other communications that are welcoming of LGBTQ participants and families. For many, this is the first introduction to let potential youth participants know an event is a safe space for them and lets all other constituents know the values of your institution.

We ensure that facilities are accessible to youth and staff of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Restrooms: Everyday actions like using the bathroom are complicated and often dangerous for transgender and gender non-conforming people because our world often only offers two options: "male" and "female." FosterClub HQ restrooms are not gender-specific. When an activity takes place at a temporary, shared, or rented facility, at least one restroom should be made available to everyone (not gender specific). This need not be complicated; covering the "men" or "women" sign with "all-gender restroom" is sufficient.

Lodging: Ensuring comfortable housing for LGBTQ youth is often a challenge for overnight events that have traditional "all male" and "all female" lodging accommodations. There is rarely a single solution that meets the needs of every situation. However, it is crucial that open and frank discussions take place for all participants involved to feel comfortable. Here are a few suggestions based upon different situations you might encounter at your event:

Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals:

There is not a "one-size-fits-all" housing policy for transgender or gender non-conforming youth. It is vitally important to openly communicate with the youth about their needs and desires in order to create the best solution. Some transgender youth may feel more comfortable housing with the gender that correlates with their full-time presentation and identity, others with their biological sex. Some may have a preference in rooming assignments and some if given the option, may prefer their own room. Again, it is important to work with the youth to create a reasonable accommodation that best suits everyone.

An openly LGBTQ youth bunking with straight-identified peers:

There is absolutely no reason why an LGBTQ youth should be not allowed to bunk with straight-identified peers. The primary concern in this situation is the possibility for bullying and harassment. Counselors should be trained to identify and deal with bullying and harassment and should seek support if it persists.

LGBTQ Staff:

When supervising and training all staff, whether staff are LGBTQ or non-LGBTQ, it is essential to emphasize appropriate staff-youth boundaries and train them in the norms and expectations of your event. There is no reason why a staff member's LGBTQ identity would render them unsuitable to be a chaperone or fulfill any other staff role.

Inclusion is a journey, not a destination.

Every event and group is different. No matter how many trainings we hold, safe space signs we put up, or anti-bullying policies we put into place, the only true way to create a fully open and supportive community is to be committed to values of equity and respect all the time, every day. Staff should check in regularly and discuss how the event is meeting its goals and achieving its values. This time for reflection does not necessarily require special meetings, but can be incorporated into regular staff meetings and check-ins. Brainstorm new ways to encourage greater equality and respect, address any issues and make it an ongoing conversation in your community. An event that cares deeply about the safety and happiness of LGBTQ participants will undoubtedly be a wonderful place for ALL young people to grow, connect, and have a great time.

Sources and references:

Does Your Camp Reinforce, Resist, or Relieve Gender Stereotypes? American Camp Association,
<https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/camping-magazine/does-your-camp-reinforce-resist-or-relieve-gender-stereotypes>

A Guide for LGBTQ Inclusion for Jewish Summer Camps, Keshet (a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life).
<https://keshetonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Keshet-Summer-Camp-InclusionGuide1-1.pdf>

Summer Camp for All: Serving the Need of Trans Campers, American Camp Association,
<https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/campline/summer-camp-all-serving-need-trans-campers>