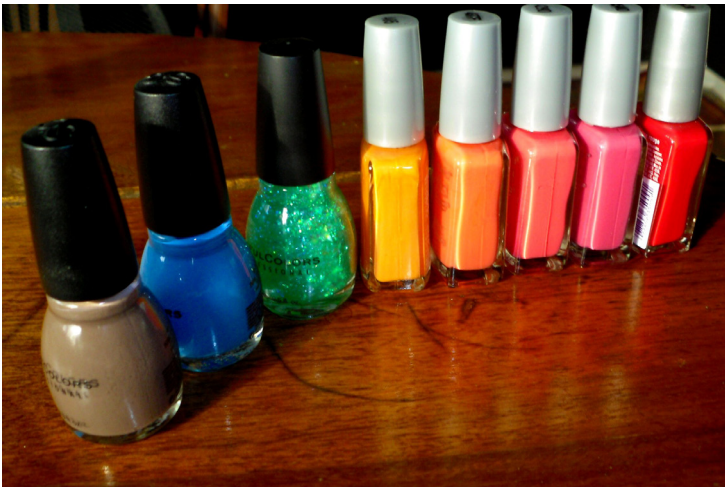


Transitioning to Inclusion

Embracing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth in Faith Communities



A resource from the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry



This resource was written by Kelsey Pacha for CLGS, the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at Pacific School of Religion, and made possible by a grant from the Atkinson Foundation. Through their generosity, CLGS has worked with congregations, parents, and religious educators in San Mateo County and beyond to create this resource.

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Embracing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth in Faith Communities

In recent years, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) people have become much more visible in pop culture and media. LGBTQ young people and their coming out journeys are represented in youth-focused programming such as TV series *Glee*, *Awkward*, and *The Fosters*. Even YouTube celebrity Connor Franta has come out as a young gay man, disappointing his considerable female following. Despite the seemingly widespread acceptance of many out LGBTQ¹ people, from Ellen DeGeneres to Michael Sam, the public conversation about LGBTQ youth in religious spaces remains tumultuous at best. Many of these discussions have focused on issues like the ethics of religiously-based conversion therapy for young people, and of course, endless discussions about sacred texts.

A recent Human Rights Campaign survey of over 10,000 youth, the largest of its kind, revealed that only 28% of LGBTQ youth regularly attend church or religious services, compared to 58% of their non-LGBTQ peers. This survey also showed LGBTQ youth are half as likely as their non-LGBTQ peers to participate in a church or religious youth group. Six percent of LGBTQ youth reported “religion leading to lack of acceptance” as the most difficult problem facing them in their life. The youth in this study reported feeling more socially isolated, less likely to have an adult they can talk to, and are more than twice as likely to experiment with alcohol and drugs than their non-LGBTQ peers due to isolation and discrimination.²

With children coming out as young as the age of two, medical professionals are recognizing the importance of honoring children’s sexual orientation and gender identity to support their overall health and mitigate the health disparities caused by lack of LGBTQ competency. The American Academy of Pediatrics released a policy statement in 2013 outlining best practices for physicians in supporting LGBTQ youth, based on the mounting evidence that this support is absolutely necessary to allow LGBTQ young people to live full and healthy lives.³

Faith communities play a pivotal role for families and other care providers of youth, which can either support young people’s growth during vulnerable years, or negatively affect their journey towards fullness. Religiously-based anti-LGBTQ messages proliferate in the media, and young LGBTQ people are often led to believe that they must choose between their deeply-held gender identity, sexual orientation, and their spirituality. As children and adolescents come out at younger and younger ages, both they and their families are looking for faith environments that make their embrace of LGBTQ youth absolutely clear.

Culturally-ingrained and spiritually-based expectations about sexuality and gender affect everyone, not just LGBTQ people. Often, the most powerful messages we receive—positive or negative—about our identities come to us from adult role models in our most formative childhood years. LGBTQ youth face particular challenges as young people who often lack the emotional and economic resources to address the oppression they face from not strictly following cultural expectations. Mounting research evidence suggests that family acceptance and community support for LGBTQ people greatly reduces their risk for suicide, homelessness, and substance abuse.⁴

The purpose of this guide is to help religious educators, youth ministers, and other faith-based mentors resource themselves to fully include LGBTQ youth in their programs. Inside you will find a road map of what you may experience if and when a young person comes out to you as LGBTQ, with recommendations for how to use your theology, sacred texts, community values, and existing program guidelines to support them in their journey.

To create this guide we interviewed parents, religious educators like Sunday and Hebrew School teachers, pastors, and young people who have come out in faith communities, representing Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, and interfaith perspectives. We have included a glossary of terms related to gender and sexuality on pages 13-14 of this guide. If you encounter a word you’re unfamiliar with, please check our definitions to learn more. While we cannot provide an exhaustive list of terms (or

1 For the purposes of this guide, we will be using the acronym “LGBTQ” to refer to anyone who falls outside gender and sexuality norms, though we recognize this does not describe the full diversity of identities under that umbrella. This could include identities such as queer, pansexual, and asexual, as well as youth who are questioning their gender identity. It is shortened for space and simplicity. Please see the glossary of terms on pages 13-14 for definitions of terms you are unfamiliar with.

2 Human Rights Campaign, *Growing Up LGBT in America: HRC Youth Survey Report Key Findings*, June 2012, and Human Rights Campaign and Gender Spectrum, *Supporting and Caring for Our Gender-Expansive Youth: Lessons From the Human Rights Campaign’s Youth Survey*. June 2012.

3 American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Adolescence Policy Statement: “Office-Based Care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth,” July 2013.

4 For more information, see <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/files/FamilySupportForLGBTChildrenGuidance.pdf> and http://endtransdiscrimination.org/PDFs/NTDS_Report.pdf

ensure that every person defines words exactly the same way), we have tried our best to be clear within the context of this guide. We are also using “the divine” in place of terms like “God” or “Creator” in order to be inclusive of multiple religious traditions, including those that include multiple deities or none at all.

You may perceive your faith community as very accepting, but it could feel very different to a young person. Expressing a welcome to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth is not a one-time event—we encourage continual re-examination of your understanding of LGBTQ youth issues and supportive interventions. Our hope is that this guide will serve as a starting point for further exploration, and have included an extensive resource list on pages 15-19. As a spiritual leader, you have the opportunity to open wide the gates of your community to a variety of expressions of the divine, and to create a generation of people who have known wholeness in their identity as LGBTQ people and as people of faith. Thank you for joining us on this journey.

Section 1: Coming Out: Exploring, Experimenting, and Explaining

“I think a lot of this is about creating a comfortable space for people to explore their identities and experiment, and to keep in mind that people who are gender non-conforming are not necessarily LGBTQ. We should give leeway to people to have all kinds of presentations without prescribing anything.” -Xander, queer-identified man and Unitarian Universalist Educator

Youth is a time of exploration and identity formation. Young children play dress up and imaginative games in imitation of others and to try out new roles as a way of making sense of the world. Adolescents often experiment with different clothing or hairstyles, suddenly change their interests in music or extracurricular activities, and join different peer groups before settling into stable patterns. Deeply held aspects of identity like one’s gender or sexual orientation can also be questioned during these times. Children and youth’s exploration of their identities and interests is a normal part of their development. Some things will be left behind as the young person grows but others will form the seeds of their lifelong personalities. Allowing a child to consider different identities provides a safe and affirming environment for them to discover more about the person they want to be.

It is important to note that all of the professional organizations that are concerned with childhood development, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychological Association, confirm that sexual orientation and gender identity are innate, unchangeable traits. So, while youth may be exploring how to express their identity as LGBTQ people, **it is not an “experiment” or “phase.”** The question is, do children and youth trust their parents, their religious community, and other adults enough to share their truth and their identity?

Below we discuss expanding your awareness of the multiple ways in which a child could come out in your program, with recommendations on how to respond. Ultimately, having policies, support plans, and resources in place that express outward support for LGBTQ youth long before any child comes out to you will set the best possible stage for an LGBTQ young person’s overall well-being.

Gender Non-Conformity Versus Sexual Orientation

Before we discuss a young person’s possible coming out process, we first need to make some distinctions between coming out in terms of sexuality versus coming out in terms of gender identity. While they may be related, they are separate processes and separate types of identity. One’s sexuality, or sexual orientation, refers to a person’s emotional and sexual attraction to another person. Gender identity refers to a person’s deeply-rooted identification as female, male, or another gender, regardless of the sex one was assigned at birth. While sexual orientation involves one’s relationships to other people, gender identity is about one’s internal sense of self.

This distinction is important because people sometimes get confused as to why these terms are brought together in the acronym LGBTQ, and because the developmental processes that occur when a person is discerning their sexual orientation or gender identity are different, and require different kinds of support. With pre-pubescent children, gender play is common (like young girls playing a husband or brother role in a game), and does not necessarily indicate that children are questioning their gender identity. Similarly, gender non-conformity (stereotypically masculine behaviors by girls, stereotypically feminine behaviors by boys, or any “unexpected” expression of one’s gender) do not denote that children are, or will be, gay or lesbian.

It is important to note that young girls are usually given more latitude to express their gender—“tomboys,” after all, are very common and accepted, while boys receive much more pressure to conform to masculine gender roles.

There have been several public examples of parents advocating for their gender non-conforming young children in day cares and schools, promoting acceptance for them as they grow regardless of whether they identify as LGBTQ or not. In a July 2014 Huffington Post piece, Seth Menachem said of his two-year old son who wears dresses, “If my son is gay, so be it. Maybe he is. Maybe he’s not. Maybe he’ll be a cross dresser. Maybe not. I have no control over any of it. All I can do is be supportive.”⁵

Adolescents exploring their identity may have a slightly different journey. For some transgender and gender variant youth, the sudden bodily changes that accompany puberty are some of the first and/or most upsetting signs that they do not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth. This can be very painful and scary, and they may need a supportive ear to listen without judgment. LGB⁶ or questioning youth, like many young people, may have a difficult time as they experience what may be their first sexual urges or attractions. LGB or questioning youth have the added element of knowing that their non-heterosexual attraction is not always embraced by their society or faith community.

Although you may suspect that a young person is struggling with their gender identity or sexual orientation, it is important to strike a balance between expressing openness and pressuring a young person to come out to you. Remember that the young person will need time to process their own feelings, and may not feel able to come out to others because they are in an unsafe situation. A good way to let students know that you and your program is supportive of LGBTQ youth is by making LGBTQ people’s lives and experiences visible and represented in your curricula, activities, speakers, and even posters and room decorations. By presenting the LGBTQ experience as a normal, accepted way of life in your program, you provide space for youth to claim as they come out.

Interfacing With Parents and Other Caregivers

Depending on the age of the child, your program structure, and the child’s relationship with their family, you may experience a mixture of support, rejection, or ambivalence from their caregivers. Parents may come to you directly and let you know that their child is LGBTQ as part of advocating for their involvement in your program. Or a young person may come out to you in confidence because their caregivers are actively homo- or transphobic. They may ask for you to help them come out to peers or adults in or outside your community, or they may tell you they do not want assistance or support.

Regardless of the particulars of the coming out process, the most important thing for you as an educator or mentor is to listen to the young person and express your support. Let them direct you about what, if anything, they would like you to do. Their right to privacy is paramount, even when it comes to family, unless you believe the youth is in danger of hurting themselves or someone else. Even in this situation, you should follow your program’s protocol for reporting serious concerns and disclose any information about sexuality or gender only if you believe it is absolutely necessary to getting that person help in a crisis. Young people can reasonably expect that any information they give to youth ministers and pastors is confidential unless they indicate otherwise. Youth ministers and pastors have no legal obligation to tell parents about their child’s sexual orientation or gender identity. More importantly, disclosing the information to the parents could jeopardize the youth’s safety and well-being.⁷

Keep in mind that any kind of coming out process may bring up emotions for other youth. Younger children may be confused by a child going by a different name or pronouns, or may not understand sexual attraction regardless of its object. Both younger and older youth may feel threatened in general by another young person discussing their sexual orientation. You will want to know how to respond to children or parents’ concerns about LGBTQ youth sharing bathrooms and overnight sleeping spaces, since these areas are often hypersexualized in people’s minds. Having a clear, no tolerance policy for any kind of

5 “My Son Wears Dresses, and That’s Okay With Me” by Seth Menachem. Huffington Post, July 2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/seth-menachem/my-son-wears-dresses-and-thats-ok-with-me_b_5578709.html

6 LGB stands for “lesbian, gay, and bisexual,” though in this context we mean for it to apply for any non-heterosexually identified young person.

7 All legal claims in this guide come from the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) and are intended to apply to California communities. More information can be found at nclrights.org. If you need additional information about your specific situation, you should consult with your community’s legal counsel.

harassment—including sexual, physical, and emotional—that occurs between youth in your program enables you to reassure parents that your program will not tolerate harassment or bullying on either side of the LGBTQ question. This allows you to also reassure young people and their families that you will directly address and attempt to diffuse any negative behaviors from other youth after a young person comes out. We will expound upon anti-bullying policies in Section 4.

There are many youth that overlap categories, have multiple identities and choose to express themselves in multiple combinations of ever-changing, evolving terms. While we have included a sampling of these in our glossary, no print guide could ever keep up with the proliferation of identity-based words youth use to describe themselves, especially considering the different kinds of identification used in online spaces. If you hear a word you don't understand, simply asking a young person, "Would you tell me what that word means to you?" or "How can I best show my respect to you?" will go a long way in communicating a desire to validate their experience. Even asking for a website, book, or other resource to find more information could yield helpful insights into your young people's world.

However, even with the best training and intentions, you will likely make mistakes. You might make an assumption about a young person's identity, accidentally disclose a youth's sexual orientation, or forget a young person's pronouns. When this happens, remember to have compassion for yourself, just as the divine would have compassion for you, to rectify the situation in whatever way that is most appropriate, and to move on. Focusing too much on a slip-up, though it may come from a place of genuine regret, may prolong an uncomfortable situation.



Section 2: Allyship in Action

You may have heard the term “ally” before to refer to a person who is not a member of a given identity-based group, but supports them nonetheless. In this context, we are using the term “ally” to refer to someone who does not identify as LGBTQ, but is proactively, outwardly supportive of LGBTQ people and makes an effort to educate themselves on LGBTQ issues. By reading this guide, you are taking an important step towards allyship, but the process never ends, because our learning never ends. Before exploring theological reasons for LGBTQ youth support, we first want to address logistical aspects of creating an LGBTQ-inclusive religious education or youth ministry space.

Gender-Segregated Spaces

“My parents’ faith prevents them from seeing a lot of gender issues—especially that if you’re a woman you’re a particular kind of Christian and if you’re a man you’re another kind of Christian. So they can’t see all of the ways that gender expectations hurt people.” –Micah, Methodist trans-man

Many aspects of youth programs are separated into “male” and “female” spaces, from locker rooms and restrooms to discussion groups and sometimes even whole classrooms and worship spaces. Not only can this cause overwhelming stress for transgender and gender variant youth and their families,⁸ but this segregation can also create especially unsafe spaces for LGB-identified youth, whose behavior or interests may be policed more intensely by those who were assigned the same sex at birth. For any youth who are out as LGB, parents as well as other youth may be concerned about sharing intimate space with an LGB peer. The concern may be that the LGB-identified or questioning child will express interest in another child, or will exploit sharing space where children will be changing clothes or showering to sexually harass them.

Often these concerns are motivated by manipulative media strategies aimed at creating fear among parents and convincing them of danger where there is none. You can assure parents that their children will be safe in any kind of intimate space shared by children of different genders. The most important factor in their children’s safety is not whether any of the other children are LGBTQ, but that their adult mentors are attentive and carefully follow program safety guidelines.

One good resource you can refer concerned parents to is California law AB1266, which allows students to use the gender-segregated school facilities that they most identify with, regardless of legal documentation, and state that you are simply aligning your program’s policy with this state law. In the more than 9 years that the Los Angeles Unified School District has had this policy, there have been zero incidents of assault or harassment by child who was “taking advantage” of shared space, showing this to be an unfounded myth.⁹ If parents or a child express discomfort with sharing space with an LGBTQ youth, that child can use a separate, private space, but the LGBTQ young person should be allowed to use the facilities they are comfortable with. The burden of prejudice should never rest on the child who is the target of that prejudice.

While your faith community or governing body may have guidelines that mandate gender separation at overnight camps and retreats, there is no legal basis for gender segregation from a liability standpoint in the state of California. As a general rule, youth ministers and pastors should permit youth access to housing and sleeping arrangements in which the youth are most safe and comfortable. There are no laws or cases in California that impose liability on a pastor or youth minister for housing LGBTQ youth on field trips or at sleep away camps, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. To avoid liability in connection with overnight trips with young people, the responsible adults should emphasize safety and supervision, and take steps to create an environment in which every child is treated with respect and protected from emotional or physical harm. Again, this has not proven to be a problem in fact, but rather one of managing anxieties that are based in prejudice.

8 For more detailed information about how to create gender-neutral bathrooms and other spaces, please see our companion guide *Transitioning to Inclusion: A guide to welcoming transgender children and their families in your community of faith*, available at <http://www.clgs.org/transitioning-inclusion-guide> or the CLGS office.

9 “California transgender students have new law but still face old struggles,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, November 2013. <http://www.dailynews.com/social-affairs/20131105/california-transgender-students-have-new-law-but-still-face-old-struggles>

Language and Assumptions

It is important to notice when words like “opposite sex,” “brothers and sisters,” “Mom and Dad,” and the like are used to generalize about people’s experiences in families and relationships. These kind of terms inherently assume heterosexuality and an either male or female experience. Watch also for ways your program assumes particular gendered roles not only in families (women doing domestic duties and being nurturing; men as main breadwinners who fix things) but also in the toys, activities, and lessons for children in your youth program. As an educator or youth minister, think about the following questions: What does your community teach about being a male or female follower of your tradition? What does your community teach, if anything, about complementarity or differentiation of sexes as divinely inspired? Is this an inherent part of your tradition or is it simply reinforcing cultural expectations? Could it be interpreted to alienate LGBTQ people? How could it be modified for those who will not be in male-female partnerships? How are you including children with single parents or whose parents are a same-sex couple?

Another essential place to remain vigilant about sexual and gendered assumptions is your program’s sexuality education curriculum. What constitutes “safe sex” for your program? Is there an undue focus on the possibility of pregnancy, practically or theologically? If applicable, try substituting gender neutral language in for gendered language in your lessons and see what comes up for your young people.

Section 3: Drawing From Your Well of Resources

“Eventually I realized deep in my heart what a non-issue sexuality was in the face of such an immense, unconditional love. Reaching deep and holding fast to my Beloved during hard times was and still is the thing that keeps me going when the going gets rough.”

-Lani, queer-identified Muslim woman

Many faith leaders, especially those who are part of communities that have historically emphasized so-called “traditional” gender roles and family structures, often feel anxious about using their theology, sacred texts and other resources to embrace LGBTQ people. Some religious leaders may fear that if they embrace an affirming interpretation of sacred texts that have historically been used to condemn homosexuality, their entire theology and approach to texts will be in question.

Christianity in particular has used parts of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as Paul’s writings of the New Testament to condemn LGB people. There are many, many resources dedicated to refuting the seven so-called “Clobber Passages” that can be found in the resource section starting on page 15. Although this condemnation can be paralleled with other faith traditions, we highlight Christianity here because it is the faith that most influences public policy related to LGBTQ people, and is the source of most negative spiritually-based media messages that affect LGBTQ youth.

Rather than starting from a defensive place, we recommend looking at LGBTQ issues in the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Bible in a more holistic way, focusing on the role sexuality and gender plays for every person in their faith life, regardless of identity. The Bible as a sacred text has no unified ethic on sexuality, recommending at times to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28) while at others, advising complete abstinence in anticipation of Jesus’ imminent return (1 Cor 7). Jesus, who remains unmarried despite keeping the company of both women and men, does not act as a typical Jewish male of his time. He also does not outrightly condemn non-heterosexual people, though he does make clear, strong statements about adultery and divorce. Many take this to mean that the LGBTQ issue is not important or worthy of being addressed, though the truth is LGBTQ as identity categories did not exist the way we think of it today at the time the Bible was written.

There are many stories that complicate the question of what ethical sexual conduct looks like. The stories of David and Bathsheba or Samson and Delilah, for example, demonstrate the consequences of succumbing to sexual desire without careful attention to other aspects of one’s relationship. There are also many different family and relationship structures represented in Jewish and Christian sacred texts, especially among ancient Hebrew figures. David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, and Jesus and John the beloved disciple, all had very close relationships. It is not important to speculate about whether these relationships were sexual, or whether any given figure could be said to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or any other variety of “not straight.” What is important is to acknowledge is that even before our modern identity labels, a multiplicity of loves, relationship configurations, and gender representations were present among significant Biblical figures.

There are many other stories that communicate inclusivity and appreciation of diversity. The Ancient Hebrew people’s struggles to intermingle with people of varying ethnic groups, and the conflicts among early Christians as to how to integrate

Jewish and Gentile people into the faith illustrate that the question of who gets God's favor—who is in, and who is out—has been one that has perplexed faith communities for centuries. The story of Joseph in Genesis can be used to show God's unexpected favor of someone different, and has the added benefit of including a symbolic rainbow in his multi-colored cloak. Joseph's treatment by his brothers (Genesis 37:3-35) also provides a good opportunity to talk about bullying and why it is wrong (more on bullying in Section 4.)

For communities outside of the Judeo-Christian traditions, finding sexual ethics that are not gender-based but can still be applicable to LGBTQ people and relationships can make for fruitful study that applies to all students. Many traditions' sexual ethics focus on forbidding exploitation and violence in sexuality over and above prohibitions of specific sexual acts. Interrogating the history of any specific prohibitions may reveal influences outside of the tradition itself (like colonialism), which could be worthwhile to discuss with your group. Your tradition might also have historical, mythological, or ritual figures (like shamans) who were openly non-heterosexual as well.¹⁰

Grounding Inclusivity in Other Values and Practices

"I support inclusion of LGBTQ youth because I believe in the sacredness of every individual, and the divinity within everyone. Each person should be recognized for who they are in all of their beauty." -Nicole, Wiccan priestess and Unitarian Universalist educator

Beyond the historical or scriptural resources your community already possesses, there are likely many values that structure your community's overall ethic that also support LGBTQ inclusivity. The ethic of reciprocity, better known as the Golden Rule—"Treat others as you'd like to be treated"—is present in many of the world's religious traditions, from Islam to Buddhism to the Baha'i Faith, as well as in many indigenous practices. Values that emphasize interpersonal harmony and connectedness, like compassion and kindness, as well as inward-focused values like openness and being self-challenging, can be employed to encourage allyship and acceptance of LGBTQ youth.

Values of solidarity and justice also align with active inclusion in your program, as anti-LGBTQ messages often originate from faith-based communities. You can offer a different message. If your community participates in actions like protests, letter writing campaigns, etc., organizing around LGBTQ justice (i.e. in favor of an LGBTQ-inclusive non-discrimination policy in your area) with your youth sends the message that you will fight for their rights in and outside of the classroom.

If it fits with your community's theological vision, emphasizing one's personal relationship with the divine can take the pressure off of you and your community to have all of the answers, and all the "right" answers for any particular person. Sharing individual meditations or devotionals and offering on-one-on check-ins for insights that occur can center spiritual growth on what comes from your student rather than being centered on abstract concepts or ideals. If your tradition honors rites of passages through ceremony or other ritual, think about ways they can be adapted to honor a person's coming out journey. This can be a great opportunity for your community to come together in support of an LGBTQ youth.

Young people in your program may carry spiritual wounds from negative experiences in other faith communities. Recognize that programs like "reparative therapy" or "conversion therapy," which falsely purport to change sexual orientation and/or gender identity, can do serious psychological harm to young people as well as adults.¹¹ In these situations, it's important to have a resource list on-hand to address any emotional or mental health consequences, as well as a support plan for how to intervene.

In seeking additional support, ask yourself: Are there any spiritual leaders, inside or outside your program, who have experience with LGBTQ youth? Are there any LGBTQ-identified adults in your community who could be a mentor? Are there LGBTQ community groups or gatherings? What qualified mental or other health professionals can you refer youth or families in a crisis? Try to be aware of the difference between encouraging and pressuring a child who is resistant to being involved or being vulnerable about their identity, especially if they are sent to your program by parents or other caregivers. And always be aware of your community's limitations in the interest of safety.

10 See Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit in our resource list for more ideas and information.

11 Therapy intended to change sexual orientation for minor youth is illegal in the state of California under Senate Bill 1172, and its legality is being contemplated in other states. The full text of this law can be found at: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120SB1172

Section 4: Coming Out in Support of LGBTQ Youth

“Congregations need to be willing to constantly check in and process their own experiences and feelings—that makes all the difference. It’s one thing to be prepared for the unknown but another for the unknown to become known. Admitting that we always have more to learn, even beyond a workbook, helps us to maintain an attitude of curiosity and openness. We don’t need to shame each other about being perfect as religious leaders, just remain open.” —Mona, Jewish educator

Finding Resources

Many faith communities have an LGBTQ-friendly network established that offer a wealth of denomination- or tradition-specific resources on how to be welcoming to LGBTQ people. These groups may already have resources like LGBTQ-inclusive text studies, sermons, meditations, rituals, or community-wide trainings that your group can take advantage of for little or no cost. They also might have a listing of other communities in your area that yours can network with to share resources and even partner for events.

In addition to outward public displays of LGBTQ inclusion, it is also essential that LGBTQ people are represented in your community’s library, liturgy, curricula, and art or other images. It is easier to adopt a blanket statement of acceptance than to actively include LGBTQ people and their unique perspectives in your community’s day-to-day spiritual work. Young people who grow up with seeing LGBTQ people as just another part of their community are more likely to be allies and to have less internalized homo- and transphobia if and when they question their own sexuality or gender identity.

Similarly, it is vital that your youth ministry or religious education program has a clear anti-bullying policy that specifically denounces homophobic and transphobic language (such as “You’re so gay” as an insult or the use of the word “tranny” by non-transgender people.) If your program does not have an established anti-bullying policy, we have provided a sample policy below as a place to start:

“[Name of faith community or youth program] is committed to providing a safe and healthy [religious education/ youth ministry/etc.] environment in accordance with our values. Bullying (including but not limited to name-calling, threats, social isolation, or physical contact intended to hurt or intimidate someone) is not tolerated and will be addressed using our program’s disciplinary procedures. Bullying based on actual or perceived disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation is inexcusable, and [program staff/spiritual leaders] are responsible for addressing it immediately.”

Notice that this policy specifically denounces bullying on the basis of actual or perceived gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. This is very important, as it shows a clear commitment to protecting your LGBTQ youth. It also puts your program in line with California state public school anti-bullying policies, which have protected students on the basis of actual or perceived gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation (among other characteristics) under California law AB 9, also known as “Seth’s Law,” since July 1, 2012.¹² We believe that firm correction, with opportunities for the bullying child to be educated to make different choices, is the best way to change behavior. More anti-bullying resources can be found in the resource list.

Becoming A Resource

The best way to make your community’s welcome of LGBTQ youth and adults abundantly clear is to create a public statement that can be accessed on your website, in print in your youth and/or religious education space, and perhaps even outside the entrance of your building. Many communities use rainbow flags to communicate their embrace of LGBTQ people; this visual symbol is an important signifier of your acceptance. This could be a simple action or require your community to go through an extended process involving your governing bodies. If things get contentious, finding LGBTQ youth and/or their families who would be willing to speak of the importance of this public welcome can help open people’s hearts and minds.

Lastly, think about how your community can use its youth and spiritual leaders’ voices to advocate for LGBTQ youth on a larger level. So much of the public opposition to comprehensive services for LGBTQ youth come from faith communities and their leaders. Fulfilling our responsibility to care for LGBTQ youth demands not only that we welcome them in our spiritual

12 For more information on Seth’s Law, a fact sheet can be found at: <https://www.aclusocal.org/seths-law-ab9-handout/>

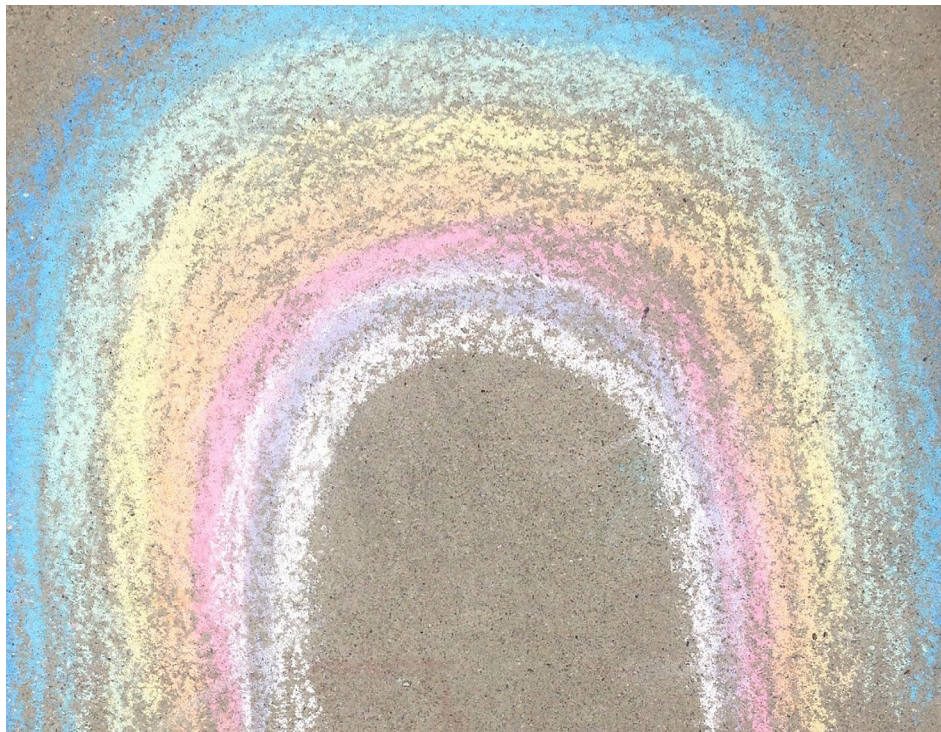
spaces, but that we help change the conversation about LGBTQ youth safeguards to one with unequivocal faith-based support. Youth or adults in your community can write letters to political representatives, attend a rally, or partner in other ways (i.e. in a social justice committee) to make their voice heard on a systemic level.

Journeying Towards Authenticity

A rabbi named Zusya died and went to stand before the judgment seat of God. As he waited for God to appear, he grew nervous thinking about his life and how little he had done. He began to imagine that God was going to ask him, “Why weren’t you Moses or why weren’t you Solomon or why weren’t you David?” But when God appeared, the rabbi was surprised. God simply asked, “Why weren’t you Zusya?” (Adapted from Tales of the Hasidim by Martin Buber)

It is an amazing honor to work with young people, to see them grow in their knowledge of the world and of themselves. In the same way that parents might wistfully long for the first few years of their child’s life, often youth workers have a difficult time accepting a young person’s journey into adulthood. It can feel difficult to let a young person venture into a complicated world, even if they are capable and self-sufficient. Sometimes we might find that it’s hard to let them pursue their own dreams and passions if they are not what we had in mind for them.

Many LGBTQ people have spoken about their coming out process as an integral part of their spiritual journey. So often young people receive the message, directly or indirectly, that they are not welcome to be who they are within faith communities—that the desires of their heart are not what the divine had in mind for them. We believe that the divine is “doing a new thing” around our society’s expectations around gender and sexuality, and this is abundantly clear among our young people. By encouraging young people to be true to themselves as the divine has created them, you invite a new way of seeing creation. We hope you will work with your whole heart, soul, and mind to support LGBTQ youth, and to be eager to see what is revealed through their journeys.



CLGS LGBT Guide Glossary of Terms

Asexual: Used to describe a person who does not experience sexual attraction. Asexual people may be emotionally or romantically attracted to any gender, and may describe themselves as hetero-, bi-, or homoromantic, and thus may or may not identify as part of the LGBTQ community. The language around asexuality is somewhat new and still evolving, used primarily, though far from exclusively, among younger people. It is best to ask a person what they mean when they use any given term.

Bisexual: Used to describe a person who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to more than one sex and/or gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Closeted: Describes a person who is not open about his or her sexual orientation or gender identity, but is LGBTQ. Has a slightly negative connotation, as “coming out of the closet” is assumed to be a liberating experience, and can be used to pressure people to come out when they are unwilling or not ready to.

Coming out: The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others. Often used as part of the phrase “coming out of the closet.”

Homosexual: A medicalized term used to describe someone who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to members of the same sex. Considered out of favor and even sometimes derogatory, this term is not usually used by youth to self-identify.

Gay: A word describing a man or a woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to members of the same sex.

Gender: A person’s actual sex or perceived sex, and includes a person’s perceived identity, appearance, or behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with a person’s sex at birth [Title 5, California Code of Regulations, §4910(k)].

Gender Expression/Gender Presentation: A person’s gender-related appearance and behavior, whether or not stereotypically associated with the person’s assigned sex at birth. People who adopt a presentation that varies from the stereotypic gender expectations sometimes may describe themselves as gender nonconforming, genderqueer, or gender fluid, among other terms.

Gender Identity: A person’s internal, deeply rooted identification as female, male or a non-binary (outside of just male or female) understanding of gender, regardless of one’s assigned sex at birth. The responsibility for determining an individual’s gender identity rests with the individual.

Gender Variant/Gender Nonconforming: Displaying a gender identity or expression that may differ from those typically associated with one’s sex assigned at birth. A person’s gender expression may differ from stereotypical expectations about how females and males are “supposed to” look or act. Gender nonconforming is not synonymous with transgender; not all gender nonconforming students identify as transgender.

Genderqueer: People who identify as genderqueer may think of themselves as being both a man and a woman, as being neither a man nor a woman, or as falling completely outside the gender binary. Some wish to have certain features of their assigned sex and not all characteristics; others want it all. The terms “transgender” and “genderqueer” are not synonymous, but there is some overlap between people who identify as transgender and people who identify as genderqueer.

Lesbian: A woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to other women.

LGBTQ: An acronym that stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning.” Questioning incorporates those who are uncertain or exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Pansexual: From the Greek “pan,” meaning “all,” pansexual is a term used to describe someone who is attracted to people of all genders and presentations. Often used by younger people in place of “bisexual,” as bisexual implies that there are only two genders (male and female.)

Queer: Queer is an all-encompassing term used by many members of the LGBTQ community, as a way to reclaim this word from its derogatory origin. Queer can simply mean outside of heterosexuality/heteronormativity or include a combination of multiple, fluid identities. Queer is a term reserved for self-identification rather than identification of others, as it still has negative connotations for some LGBTQ people. Many young people use the term “queer” to self-identify.

Sex: The biological condition or quality of being female or male as determined by a combination of chromosomes, hormones, and/or sex organs.

Sexuality/Sexual Orientation: A person's emotional and sexual attraction to another person based on the gender of the other person. Common terms used to describe sexual orientation include, but are not limited to: heterosexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Sexual orientation and gender identity are different.

Transgender: A person whose gender identity differs from their gender assigned at birth, and whose gender expression consistently varies from stereotypical expectations and norms. A transgender person desires to live persistently by a gender that differs from that which was assigned at birth.

Transgender man (or female-to-male): People who were assigned female at birth but identify and live as a man may use this term to describe themselves. They may shorten it to trans man. Some may also use FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male. Some may prefer to simply be called men, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.

Transgender woman (or male-to-female): People who were assigned male at birth but identify and live as a woman may use this term to describe themselves. They may shorten to trans woman. Some may also use MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female. Some may prefer to simply be called women, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.

Transition: The period of time when a person changes from living and identifying as one gender to another (notice this does not say *the* other). This process usually begins with internal exploration and acceptance and moves to external changes, which can be legal, medical, or social in nature.

Adapted from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Institute for Welcoming Resource's "Transaction: A Transgender Curriculum for Churches and Religious Institutions"; the Los Angeles Unified School District's Policy Bulletin: "Transgender Students: Ensuring Equality and Non-Discrimination" by David Holmquist (February 7, 2014); and the Human Rights Campaign's online "Glossary of Terms," found at: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/glossary-of-terms>

CLGS LGBTQ Inclusivity Guide Resource List

Supportive Resources for LGBTQ Youth:

American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Adolescence Policy Statement: "Office-Based Care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth," July 2013.

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/132/1/198.full.pdf+html>

This policy statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Adolescence outlines recommendations by and for pediatricians in their treatment of LGBTQ youth. These recommendations are based on peer-reviewed research on the positive health effects of affirming LGBTQ youth identities, which is summarized in the document. Great resource to bring to your children's health provider.

Gay-Straight Alliance Network

www.gsanetwork.org

The GSA Network focuses on empowering LGBTQ youth and their allies in school settings on how to create their own supportive LGBTQ network with teachers, administrators, and other students, and to combat homo- and transphobia, violence, harassment, and discrimination. Their website includes information about the national GSA movement, resources for teachers and students, and leadership opportunities for LGBTQ youth.

Human Rights Campaign 2012 Youth Survey

<http://www.hrc.org/youth-report>

This report, released in June 2012, surveyed more than 10,000 LGBT-identified youth, ages 13-17, across America. It covers a multitude of issues including health care, the coming out process, school, bullying, and relationships from the LGBT youth perspective. A summary of findings specifically related to trans* and gender variant youth can be found at <http://www.hrc.org/youth/supporting-and-caring-for-our-gender-expansive-youth> to view on the web or to download. Data about LGBT youth faith experiences as well as experiences of youth of color will be forthcoming.

National Center for Lesbian Rights' Born Perfect Campaign

<http://www.nclrights.org/explore-the-issues/bornperfect/>

NCLR's Born Perfect Campaign webpage includes fact sheets about conversion or reparative therapy, stories of LGBTQ youth conversion therapy survivors, and opportunities to be involved in passing other legislation outside of California. Great resource for becoming educated on the damaging effects of this therapy as well as an opportunity to connect for survivors.

Stop Bullying

<http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/index.html>

Stopbullying.gov has a wealth of information about what bullying is, how to prevent it, and how to respond. This page offers sample policies, recommendations on how to create a reporting system, and insights on how to integrate a commitment to stop bullying into your youth community's culture.

Camp Opportunities:

The Naming Project

<http://www.thenamingproject.org/>

Featured in the documentary "Camp Out," this Minnesota-based Christian camp is exclusively tailored to LGBTQ youth. Their website includes information on their annual weeklong sleepaway camp, as well as information on how to volunteer and LGBT youth spirituality resources.

Spirituality Pride Project

<http://www.spiritualprideproject.org>

The Spirituality Pride Project is a non-profit organization that offers multiple retreats and camps for LGBTQ youth in the South to help develop their spirituality. Based in central Texas, their mission statement is "Spiritual Pride Project (SPP) exists to create a welcoming and safe community for youth and young adults of all sexual orientations and gender identities to experience and share spirituality, community and acceptance." Check their website for the most up-to-date information on upcoming camps and events.

Wonderfully Made

<http://www.sepayouth.org/category/events/events-for-youth/>

Wonderfully Made is an ELCA-sponsored Christian camp out of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Lutheran Youth Organization (also known as SEPA Youth). Their mission statement is: "Wonderfully Made Camp seeks to be Christian community that affirms LGBTQI youth and their allies as wonderfully made by God, it seeks to be a place that celebrates 'God's welcome' to all people, no matter if your 'in the closet,' 'out of the closet,' queering the definition of the very closet itself, transitioning, or gender bending - this is a safe place for you." More up-to-date information can be found at their Facebook page at: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Wonderfully-Made-Camp/78318630984?sk=info&tab=page_info

Educational Activities/Lessons:

The Genderbread Person

<http://thesafezoneproject.com/activity/genderbread-person/>

The Genderbread Person activity is a great way to distinguish between the various axes of gender—from identity to expression to role to anatomical sex, as well as to differentiate from sexual orientation. This activity is also useful in helping young people understand that gender affects everyone regardless of how one identifies.

GLAD Alliance Biblical Resources

<http://gladalliance.org/site/resources-category/bible/>

The GLAD Alliance, the open and affirming movement within the Disciples of Christ denomination, lists 17 different books, curricula, and downloadable publications that address LGBT issues in the Bible. Again, though none are specifically intended for youth audiences, several resources (notably, the Human Rights Campaign's Out In Scripture) can be adapted for youth audiences. What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality by Daniel Helminiak addresses each of the 7 so-called "clobber passages" and is a good starting place to create Bible studies, though it may not reflect the most recent LGBTQ-affirming scholarship.

Institute for Welcoming Resources

<http://www.welcomingresources.org/>

A program of the National LGBTQ Task Force, the Institute for Welcoming Resources offers several curricula aimed at walking congregations through how to be LGBTQ-inclusive. Though none are specifically intended for youth audiences, several resources can be adapted for youth audiences. Kol B'mishpachat Elohim (for Jewish communities) and All in God's Family (for Christian audiences) are good options. TransAction is a trans* specific resource.

Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education Curriculum

http://www.ucc.org/justice_sexuality-education_our-whole-lives

<http://www.uua.org/re/owl/>

Developed and jointly used by the Unitarian Universalist Church and United Church of Christ, this curriculum offers scientifically-accurate, LGBTQ-inclusive sexuality education for kindergartners to adults and can be utilized by non-UU and UCC faith communities. It covers six areas: human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, and society and culture. A companion guide, Sexuality and Our Faith, helps participants to align their values with their approach to sexuality. Check out either website above to find trainings for educators in your area.

Crisis Intervention Resources:

The Trevor Project

<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/get-help-now#tc>

The Trevor Project provides a 24/7 LGBT youth-specific crisis hotline focused on suicide prevention, as well as an online chat with other youth, text advice, and general information about LGBT issues. Having the 24/7 crisis hotline number available (866-488-7386) could be a good resource for young people.

The GLBT National Youth Talkline

<http://www.glbtonationalhelpcenter.org/talkline/index.html>

This LGBTQ youth-specific hotline provides peer-to-peer support on issues of coming out, sexual health, and finding community resources 6 days/week during afternoon/evening hours (listed on the website.) The phone number (1-800-246-7743) and a list of over 15,000 other resources are listed on this site.

It Gets Better Project

www.itgetsbetter.org

This video project, started by Dan Savage and his partner Terry, consists of a series of clips by out LGBTQ public figures, their allies, and other LGBTQ people that are intended to communicate to LGBTQ youth that despite negative messages they receive, life gets better. There are 50,000 videos made by people from Barack Obama to Broadway casts to Ellen DeGeneres imploring youth to take care of themselves. The website also includes crisis intervention and other resources for youth to get help if they need it.

Hello, Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks, and Other Outlaws by Kate Bornstein

Written with Bornstein's tongue-in-cheek humor, this book provides tangible hope and concrete self-care suggestions for LGBT teens who are being bullied or in the midst of depression and loneliness. Of course, no book should be used in place of trained mental health professionals or other emotional/spiritual support. If you are concerned about a child you work with, you should follow your community's procedures for crisis intervention.

Picture Books:

The Different Dragon by Jennifer Bryan

A little boy and his two mothers create a tale about a dragon who doesn't want to be fierce anymore. This book not only depicts a family with two moms, but talks about gender expectations in a way children can understand.

King and King by Linda De Haan

A twist on the traditional prince and princess tale, a prince looking for his princess ends up falling in love with one of their brothers, another prince. They live happily ever after with no question of their same-gender love. A sequel, *King and King and Family*, explores the princes' adoption of a little girl after they are married.

10,000 Dresses by Marcus Ewert

This picture book tells the story of Bailey, a child who dreams every night of dresses. Her family does not want to hear about Bailey's dreams, insisting she is a boy. Soon, Bailey meets an older girl who wants to help make Bailey's dreams come true.

The Great Big Book of Families by Mary Hoffman and Ros Asquith

This book depicts a wide variety of family configurations, whether you have two moms, two dads, one of each, stepparents, a cool dad, an annoying dad...and represents several faith traditions as well.

My Princess Boy by Cheryl Kilodavis

This picture book tells the story of a young boy who likes to dress and play with traditionally feminine toys, and the acceptance of his parents and family. This is one of the only books that not only celebrates gender variant youth, but also depicts people of color embracing their identity.

The Boy Who Cried Fabulous by Leslea Newman

An exuberant young boy is so in love with the world that he describes everything as "fabulous." Concerned about what others think of their larger-than-life child, his parents ban "fabulous" from his vocabulary, but that doesn't stop him from being enamored with the world. Great tale about the benefits of being yourself.

Old Turtle by Douglas Wood

This picture book tackles the nature of God through a series of arguments among plants and animals as to what God is like. Is God male or female? Is God up above or present with us here? Simple, but beautiful tale suitable for all ages.

Young Adult Books:

GSA Network's Recommended Books for LGBT Youth:

<http://www.gsanetwork.org/files/resources/books4.pdf>

This recommended reading list for LGBTQ students and school librarians lists 19 non-fiction and 22 fiction books suitable for middle and high school students that focus on LGBTQ characters and issues.

Non-fiction/Biography:

Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit by Randy P. Conner, David Hatfield Sparks, and Mariya Sparks

This volume, written in 1997, contains over 1,500 entries (arranged alphabetically) of deities, saints, religious figures, spiritual communities, and seminal events that highlight the connections between queer and trans* people and spirituality. Informed by traditions and folklore from around the world and a variety of disciplines, this book is a great place to locate queer and trans* spiritual ancestors as well as to start discussion about the myriad ways the divine manifests itself.

Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Traditions by Starhawk, Diane Baker, and Anne Hill

This book explores ways parents and spiritual leaders in Goddess and earth-centered traditions can create rituals and activities for young people. It provides recipes, projects, and meditations that can be used with youth during eight traditional pagan holidays, but can be adapted for many life events and transitions. Many could be adapted to honor a young person's coming out process and other rites of passage.

Facing the Music: Discovering Real life, Real Love, and Real Faith by Jennifer Knapp

The former Christian singer details her faith journey and her resulting struggle with her sexuality, finally reconciling both to claim an identity as a gay Christian.

***Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America* by Mel White**

White, a former evangelist and ghostwriter for Religious Right figures like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, writes about his experiences coming out after 25 years of marriage and decades of anti-gay organizing. This book is about his personal experience coming out later in life, but also about the political history of Christian-based anti-LGBT sentiment.

***Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentary on the Hebrew Bible* edited by Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser, David Schneer, and Judith Plaskow**

Following the calendar cycle of the reading of the Torah, this volume lifts up LGBT-inclusive interpretations of the 54 weekly portions and 6 major Jewish holidays. Many diverse voices from important figures in modern Judaism tackle issues of social justice, solidarity in community, and some of the most difficult passages of the Torah.

***Transgendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith* by Justin Tanis**

Tanis, a transgender ordained minister, offers several perspectives on the spiritual journeys of trans* and gender variant people, while also providing an overview of gender variance in the Bible and how to create a faith communities that are truly trans* inclusive.

For parents:

The Family Acceptance Project

<http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>

The Family Acceptance Project, based out of San Francisco State University, conducts research and creates resources with and for families with LGBT children, with a focus on increasing family acceptance to mitigate negative health outcomes for LGBT youth who become disconnected from this vital support system. Their website's "Publications" section offers several downloadable pamphlets that summarize their research and offer evidence-based suggestions for how families can best support their children as they come out. This also includes a Latter-Day Saint-specific booklet that addresses the theological concerns of Mormon families.

TV Series:

"New GLAAD TV Study Reveals an Undeniable Youthquake in LGBT Programming," by Joanna Robinson. *Vanity Fair*. October 1, 2014.

<http://www.vanityfair.com/vf-hollywood/2014/10/glaad-tv-study-youthquake>

This article provides an overview of GLAAD's 2014 Network Responsibility Index, which evaluates television representation of LGBT characters by network. Robinson's piece gives examples of shows listed that are youth-oriented and provides links to the GLAAD report itself. This piece is a good place to start if searching for current, youth-focused programming, and provides ratings based on content and comparing networks' LGBT competency.

Movies:

"A Jihad for Love" (documentary)

Filmed in nine languages in twelve countries, from India to Egypt to France, this film tells the stories of multiple same-gender loving Muslims, illuminating the historical, scriptural, and theological struggle of homosexuality within Islam. While focused on communities outside America, both the possible embrace of LGB Muslim people and couples and the often fatal repression within multiple sects and traditions is represented.

"Call Me Malcolm" (documentary)

This documentary follows an openly transgender man who is going through the ordination process in the United Church of Christ during his last year of seminary. He visits friends, family, and even a former high school teacher, exploring what it means to reconnect with people who knew him before his transition and reflecting on his own spiritual development as a transman.

"Camp Out" (documentary)

Featuring aforementioned camp the Naming Project, this 2008 documentary follows 10 young people as they attend the inaugural camp and discuss the struggle of coming out as Christian in their LGBTQ community as well as coming out as LGBTQ in their faith community.

"For the Bible Tells Me So" (documentary)

"For the Bible Tells Me So" interviews five different families of faith with gay or lesbian children, discussing the family's reaction when their loved one came out, and how it changed over time. Scriptural, theological, and scientific perspectives on homosexuality are discussed from both Christian and Jewish perspectives.

“Save Me”

Starring Chad Allen, Robert Gant (of “Queer as Folk”) and Judith Light, this movie follows Mark, a gay man who is encouraged by his family to attend an ex-gay inpatient center as he attempts to get off drugs. He meets another ex-gay identified Christian man, and the two struggle with whether their love for each other is acceptable by God or not.

“Saved!”

This dark teenage comedy takes many conservative Christian tropes (sexual purity, etc.) and exaggerates them to expose the viciousness that exists within and without Christianity over topics important to teenagers. Homosexuality is addressed as just another sexual issue to contend with among many others. This film could be a springboard to talk about multiple ethical concerns—school bullying, integrity, and sexuality in general, but is NOT appropriate for children. Rated R.

“Trembling Before G-d” (documentary)

This 2001 documentary tells the story of several Hasidic and Orthodox Jews who also identify as gay or lesbian, exploring the historical, scriptural, and theological tensions for those who want to reconcile their faith and sexual orientation.

Advocacy:

Soulforce

www.soulforce.org

Founded by Mel White (mentioned above), Soulforce uses non-violent resistance to counter anti-LGBT messages originating in faith communities. Though much of its activism is focused on Christian organizations that condemn LGBT people, it is an interfaith organization that encourages its members to use their participation in organizing and direct action as a spiritual practice, and to cultivate compassion for anti-LGBT adversaries in order to engage in true dialogue.



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Our Mission: To advance the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people and to transform faith communities and the wider society by taking a leading role in shaping a new public discourse on religion and sexuality through education, research, community building and advocacy.