

Exploring Questions for Parents

The following are some possible questions that could be used when talking with parents about children or youth during any initial investigation to assess risk and safety – they are not designed to be all inclusive, but to give some ideas for how questions could be framed in a GLBTQ affirming manner. *Answers to questions already answered by a parent should impact which questions are asked further down on the list of questions. The answers may also provide suggestions for rephrasing the question in a way more appropriate for the interview situation you are in.*

Parent's Attitude Toward Child - Parent/Child Relationship

- Tell me about your child.
- What do you think about your child?
- What are your child's favorite activities? What does your child like to do?
- What do you think of your child's behaviors?
- Does your child have any behaviors or attitudes that you are concerned with?

Parent's understanding of Child's Sexual Development

- Does your child have friends?
 - If yes, who are they and what do you think of them?
 - what kinds of things do they do together?
 - If no, why do you think that is?
- Have your child's friends begun to date?
- Do you have rules in your house about dating and relationships?
- Does your child have any special relationships or special friends?
- Does your child currently have someone that is special to them?
 - If yes, what do you think about them?
 - If no, has the child had someone special to them before? What was that like?

These questions can be used during any investigation to assess risk and safety. The idea is to work with the parents/caretakers to develop a heightened understanding of the parent-child relationship in a manner that would allow any parent to feel comfortable in addressing GLBT issues, questions or concerns if they are present within the family. Child welfare practitioners will not know these issues are present unless someone tells them!

Exploring Questions for Children and Youth

The following are some possible questions that could be used when talking with children or youth during any initial investigation to assess risk and safety. These questions, like the questions for parents, are not designed to be all inclusive, but to give some ideas for how questions could be framed in a GLBTQ affirming manner.

Child's Attitude toward Parent – Parent/Child Relationship

- Tell me about your parent/caretaker
- What do you think about your parent/caretaker
- Do you do things with your parent/caretaker?
If yes, what kinds of things?
If no, how does that make you feel?

Child's Self Perception

- What kinds of things do you like to do? Favorite games, TV shows, etc.
What about each of them do you like?
- Do you have friends?
If yes, who are they and what kinds of things do you like to do together?
If no, what do you think about that? (does it bother him/her?)

Child's Gender & Sexual Identity

- Do you like playing with girls or boys more?
- What do your parents/caretakers think of your friends?
- Do you have rules in your house about dating/relationships?
If yes, what does the child think of them?
- Are any of your friends in relationships yet?
If yes, what are their significant others like?
If no, do any of them want to be?
- Are you in a relationship yet?
If yes, what is your significant other like?
If no, do you want to be?
- What would the perfect significant other be like?

These questions start by gathering general information about the child and the family, and then move toward more specific and personal questions. The idea is to use information gained earlier to build upon later in the interview. Questions may be modified or not asked at all depending upon earlier responses. *It is essential to remember when framing questions to children to do so in a manner that allows the child to really tell you what they think.*

Creating a Safe Environment

The following is a list of steps that child welfare practitioners can take to help create safe environments for all youth, including GLBTQ.

1. Recognize and acknowledge that some of the people, children and adults, that you are working with are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or questioning.
2. Enhance your personal/professional knowledge about gays and lesbians through readings, speakers, or by talking with openly gay or lesbian professionals who are willing to act as a “cultural guide” and teach you about gay and lesbian issues.
3. Use gender neutral language such as “partner”, “significant other” or “someone special in your life” when talking about people and relationships – and talk about relationships!
4. Include Gays and Lesbians as a group when talking about diverse groups and other cultures of people (e.g.: Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, Developmentally Challenged, Gays & Lesbians).
5. Interrupt and stop or walk away from derogatory comments, slurs or jokes that are at the expense of any group.
6. If a person you are working with tells you that they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning, acknowledge it and discuss it with them. Explore what it means to them and how it connects to their identity and behaviors.
7. Be clear on the differences between transgendered, transsexual and transvestite. While each is a member of a sexual minority community, transgendered people, transvestites and transsexuals may not be gay or lesbian, and would require different services.
8. Research and stay current on resources for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and questioning individuals in your community. It may be good to visit them and be prepared to escort a person to them who is using the agency for the first time!

Material adapted from Mallon, Gerald P., 1999, Let's Get This Straight: A Gay and Lesbian Affirming Approach to Child Welfare, Columbia University Press, New York.