

A photograph of a woman and a child holding a large rainbow flag. The woman is on the right, wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt, and the child is on the left, wearing a plaid shirt. They are both looking towards the flag. The background is a blurred crowd of people.

# 5 THINGS TO CONSIDER ABOUT LGB YOUTH IN CHILD WELFARE

1. *Everyone has a SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression). SOGIE is one of many important aspects of our identity just like, race, ethnicity, gender or nationality. Healthy sexual and gender identity development is important for all youth as they move toward adulthood.*
2. *Approximately 15.5% of all youth over the age of 11 in child welfare openly identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Many other youth are still in the process of understanding their sexual orientation. Some understand their sexual orientation at a very young age, while others begin to explore and understand it more as they become older. This is just a normal part of adolescent development.*
3. *In many ways, LGB youth are just like non-LGB youth in terms of what puts them at risk for abuse, the types of abuse they experience and the types of homes that they come from. Regardless of their sexual orientation, all youth deserve to be treated with respect and have safe and affirming homes.*
4. *LGB youth experience high levels of mental health and substance abuse concerns. LGB youth consistently show higher levels of depression, trauma and substance abuse than their non-LGB peers. These issues can be improved significantly if youth reside in environments that affirm all aspects of their identity. Attempts to change youths' SOGIE are ineffective and may result in traumatizing vulnerable youth even further.*
5. *Some youth may be reluctant to discuss their sexual orientation because of safety concerns or because they think that their caregivers or workers will judge them or not understand. Talking about sexual orientation can be uncomfortable, but it's important for youth to be able to discuss all aspects of what makes them who they are. Questions about sexual orientation should be a part of the regular questions that are asked of every youth coming into contact with child welfare. Like other aspects of their identity, youth's sexual orientation needs to be considered when thinking about their service needs and how to best ensure their safety, stability and permanence.*