



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LGBTQQ MENTORING

SUPPLEMENT TO THE

***ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE  
PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™***

May 2019

# PROGRAMS FOR LGBTQQ YOUTH

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This supplement is intended to provide additional research- and practitioner-informed recommendations for youth mentoring programs that will support them in more effectively serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQQ) youth—as well as LGBTQ volunteers and other stakeholders. Please note that mentoring programs should still strive to adhere to all of the practices recommended in the full *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™*. This list of recommendations is adapted from the more comprehensive guide LGBTQ Supplement to the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™*, developed in collaboration with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, which includes additional information about implementing these practices and a helpful glossary of terms. This guide can be downloaded from the MENTOR website at [www.mentoring.org/lgbtq](http://www.mentoring.org/lgbtq).

## PROGRAM DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT

The following recommendations offer suggested practices for mentoring organizations to ensure that their organizational climate, program services, and staff members are well positioned to effectively serve LGBTQQ youth and the broader LGBTQ community.

### Program Values and Commitment

- Program commits to intentionally providing inclusive, affirming, and safe mentoring services to LGBTQQ youth and LGBTQ mentors.
- This commitment—often embedded in an agency’s overall mission to provide services to all youth in its community—is tied to a formalized process of continually improving and ensuring that programming reflects the unique experiences of LGBTQQ youth, and their parents/guardians, as well as LGBTQ mentors, staff, allies, and others in the program and community. **Such a process must include:**
  - o Ongoing assessment of how the program can be more inclusive and welcoming and a recognition and mind-set that there are always areas for improvement. **This assessment process should include:**
    - An authentic and candid review of the program’s historical interactions with and experiences serving members of the LGBTQ community.
    - A comprehensive assessment of the organizational readiness of the program to serve the LGBTQ community effectively, including examining program leadership (board members, executive team, etc.) and staff members’ ability to work effectively with LGBTQQ youth, LGBTQ mentors, and other stakeholders.



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- o A commitment to safely serving LGBTQ youth and working effectively with LGBTQ participants, even if this requires ending relationships with staff members, prospective mentors, board members, donors, other stakeholders, and even youth participants whose views, behaviors, and attitudes are incompatible with this commitment.
- o Honoring and taking seriously the voices and experiences of LGBTQ youth, supportive parents/guardians of LGBTQ youth, and mentors and other caring adult allies in their feedback about how the program is serving LGBTQ youth.
- o A willingness to maintain program principles of inclusiveness, even in the face of pressure from funders, policymakers, or community members to change their work with LGBTQ youth and LGBTQ mentors in unproductive ways.
- o A general adherence and commitment to the ethical principles detailed in the fourth edition of *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™*, which take on critical importance with respect to serving LGBTQ youth and LGBTQ adults:
  - Promote the welfare and safety of the young person.
  - Be trustworthy and responsible.
  - Act with integrity.
  - Promote justice for young people.
  - Respect the young person's rights and dignity.
  - Honor youth and family voice in designing and delivering services.
  - Strive for equity, cultural responsiveness, and positive social change.

### Policies and Procedures

- Program nondiscrimination policies are explicitly inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression for all youth, parents/guardians, mentors, staff, and other stakeholders.
- Program policies—especially in site-based mentoring programs—include anti-bullying language that specifically mentions bullying related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and are applied to youth and adult participants and stakeholders. Such policies are prominently displayed or shared so that they are well known by all participants and staff.
- Program policies and procedures provide guidance on how program staff and mentors will talk with parents/guardians about a mentee's sexuality and how they will respond to youth who come out or transition during their time in the program.
- Program policies and procedures provide guidance on how program staff and mentors will talk with parents/guardians about a mentee's sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, and how they will respond to youth who experience changes in their orientation, identity, and expression during their time in the program.
- Program develops and implements a confidentiality policy that protects information related to the LGBTQ profile of youth during intake and throughout their time in the programs, especially guaranteeing the protection of information that can impact the safety and well-being of youth who are transitioning. This includes policies about what information regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression is shared (or not) with parents/guardians and other key individuals in the young person's life.



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- Program defines practices related to the potential fluidity of LGBTQ youth, including how the program will update records over time given changes in sexual orientation, and/or gender identity and expression.
  - Program records (e.g., intake forms or evaluation instruments) are inclusive of diverse LGBTQ populations (i.e., personal gender pronouns, preferred name, etc.).
  - Program intake procedures allow for the program to gather information from mentors and mentees about their own sexual orientation and gender identity/expression to assist with making effective matches or supporting the young person during their time in the program.
- ### Program Leadership
- Program seeks and retains board and staff members representative of diverse LGBTQ populations, as well as allies who can further support the program's work with LGBTQ individuals.
- ### Staff Development and Training
- Program assesses current staff knowledge about and experience working with LGBTQ youth and adults and may consider requesting the support of staff members who have extensive knowledge of, or experience with, LGBTQ youth or the LGTBQ community in designing future training content.
  - Program staff is trained on critical information related to LGBTQ youth:
    - Definitions related to sexual orientation (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, etc.).
    - Definitions related to gender identity/expression (e.g., transgender, genderqueer, nonbinary, etc.).
    - Demographics of LGBTQ youth, including the estimated numbers of LGBTQ youth at the national or state and local levels.
    - Risk factors for LGBTQ youth at home and at school/in the community, including research that documents heightened experiences with homelessness, juvenile justice involvement, victimization, and bullying, as well as deficits in accessing developmental assets often associated with growing into a healthy adulthood.
    - The intersectionality of LGBTQ youth with race, ethnicity, poverty, geography, and other demographic characteristics, as well as how intersectionality can magnify youth risk factors.
    - Common sexual behaviors among youth and youth attitudes about sex and identity (including LGBTQ youth) and how these behaviors and attitudes may differ based on generation.
    - Resiliency and protective factors for LGBTQ youth.
    - Other relevant theories and research applicable to serving LGBTQ youth, such as processes of healthy identity development, the importance of creating a safe and affirming program climate, and/or principles of trauma-informed care.



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- All staff are also trained on attitudes, skills, and procedural activities that will allow them to serve LGBTQQ youth and adults effectively, including:
  - The importance of getting to know each mentee and their unique strengths, challenges, and areas for potential growth and not assuming that being LGBTQQ is inherently determinative of any level of risk or specific negative behaviors or experiences.
  - Barriers to trust that LGBTQQ youth may face when participating in mentoring relationships.
  - Exploring their own biases (conscious or unconscious), attitudes, and levels of comfort regarding serving LGBTQ individuals and how to recognize when these factors can lead to negative interactions, even unintentionally.
  - Understanding the coming out process for LGBTQQ youth, including uniquely experienced developmental milestones for understanding, accepting, and sharing an LGBTQ identity, handling disclosures, understanding youth choices and concerns related to being out, and how to provide support over time during critical moments and changes in identity and expression.
  - Avoiding countertransference of one's own experiences as an LGBTQQ youth or young adult onto the mentee.
  - Managing known information about out status of mentees, which should be articulated in the program's confidentiality policy. These policies should ideally respect mentees' desires around confidentiality and disclosure of information. This can be especially critical for youth whose parents or guardians might not be receptive to changes in their status and for youth who may not be out in all parts of their lives.
  - Responding nonjudgmentally and with empathy to mentees' disclosures about risky or unhealthy behaviors (e.g., sex practices, substance abuse, skipping school, etc.) and engaging in meaningful discussions about such behaviors.
  - Skills for working effectively day-to-day with LGBTQQ youth and adults, such as respectful use of personal pronouns and affirming language to use with parents/guardians of LGBTQQ youth.
  - Awareness of how the intersecting identities of LGBTQQ youth (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion) impact their individual experiences and the support they will, in turn, need from their mentors and the program as a whole.
  - Boundary setting and other relationship skills that can prevent misunderstandings (e.g., not shaming a young person for having same-sex romantic feelings; helping to channel mentor/mentee boundary setting conversations into strategies to help the mentee identify traits and characteristics of healthy, age-appropriate, and respectful relationships).
  - Handling circumstances where parents or guardians of LGBTQQ youth express negative reactions to their child's sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (or changes or disclosures that happen during their time in the program).
  - Local referral resources for the health, safety, and well-being of diverse groups of LGBTQQ youth.



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- Staff are trained on how to communicate effectively with LGBTQQ youth, volunteers, parents/guardians, and community members during recruitment, enrollment/intake, and match support.
- Staff training involves role-plays, scenario-based discussions, and other opportunities to practice reactions to situations and learn effective ways of responding and ensuring youth safety and confidentiality is prioritized.

### Community Partnerships and Advocacy

- Program establishes partnerships with local, regional, and, when appropriate, national organizations serving the LGBTQ community. These partnerships can be beneficial in a number of ways, such as recruiting mentors and mentees, providing supplemental program activities and learning opportunities, and facilitating referrals to other services to help support mentors, mentees, and families.
- Program participates in national and local LGBTQ awareness campaigns and events, such as Pride, No Name-Calling Week, Transgender Awareness Week, National Coming Out Day, Transgender Day of Remembrance, and others.
- Program encourages staff participation in local and/or national professional development opportunities to raise awareness of strategies for supporting LGBTQQ youth.

### Program Improvement Processes

- Program intentionally provides LGBTQQ youth (and, if appropriate, LGBTQ mentors) with an opportunity to have a voice in programming and provide feedback on feelings of safety and inclusion in the program.
- Program provides LGBTQQ youth (and, if appropriate, LGBTQ mentors) with an opportunity to, either annually or as part of a consistent cycle, review the program's:
  - Recruitment materials and the online presence of the program.
  - Screening materials and processes.
  - Training curricula and other teaching materials.
  - Matching procedures and the criteria considered for LGBTQQ youth.
  - Procedures for checking in with matches and offering ongoing support.
  - Closure practices, including the connection to additional mentors outside of the program.
  - Data collection and evaluation instruments and procedures.

### Physical Space

The program's physical space provides access to safe facilities for transgender and gender expansive youth, volunteers, and families, such as gender-neutral bathrooms, changing areas, or other public accommodations.



### Signals of Inclusivity

After addressing organizational considerations related to program values and commitment, program leadership, policies and procedures, staff development and training, community partnerships and advocacy, program improvement processes, and the program's physical space, the program displays the following signals of inclusivity:

- Safe zone posters, brochures and handouts, poster boards for campaigns, and other visual cues affirming that the agency is a welcoming place for LGBTQQ youth and that youth and their families will receive appropriate services.
- Language or visuals on the organization's website affirming that the organization is a welcoming place for LGBTQQ youth (e.g., rainbow flag, transgender flag).

## 1. RECRUITMENT

### MENTOR RECRUITMENT

B.1.3 Program recruits mentors whose skills, motivations, and backgrounds best match the goals and structure of the program.

- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program offers a written mentor volunteer "job" description that is inclusive of knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with being an ally/advocate to diverse populations of youth, including LGBTQQ youth, as well as noting that the program is committed to serving these youth and enforcing nondiscrimination laws or policies.

- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program engages in volunteer outreach to LGBTQ community groups, including corporate affinity groups, community centers, and places of faith.
- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program engages in targeted outreach to LGBTQ adults who may bring valuable lived experience to the mentoring role when matched with LGBTQQ youth.
- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program uses inclusive and welcoming language for mentors on their website, in recruitment brochures, and in other marketing materials.

### MENTEE RECRUITMENT

B.1.6 Program engages in recruitment strategies that realistically portray the benefits, practices, supports, and challenges of being mentored in the program.

- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Written mentee roles and responsibilities are inclusive of participation in a program that values young people from all backgrounds, including LGBTQQ youth.

B.1.7 Program recruits mentees whose needs best match the services offered by the program.

- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program uses inclusive and welcoming language for mentees on their website, in recruitment brochures, and in other marketing materials.

**(new)** LGBTQ Enhancement: Program uses defined outreach strategies to LGBTQQ youth-serving organizations to recruit mentees.



### 2. SCREENING

B.2.1 Program has established criteria for accepting mentors into the program as well as criteria for disqualifying mentor applicants.

❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program eligibility criteria ensure selected mentors do not exhibit homophobic/biphobic/transphobic behavior, especially given the potential to be matched with a youth who may not be out yet. Prospective mentors who display this behavior are screened out during the intake process or removed from the program if such behavior is discovered after the match has begun.

B.2.3 Program conducts at least one face-to-face interview with each prospective mentor that includes questions designed to help the program assess his or her suitability for mentoring a youth.

❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program interview contains questions or scenario examples intended to assess compatibility in working with LGBTQQ youth or surface homophobic/biphobic/transphobic beliefs.

B.2.8 Program has established criteria for accepting youth into the program as well as criteria that would disqualify a potential youth participant.

❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program eligibility criteria allow for the nonacceptance of youth who exhibit homophobic/biphobic/transphobic behavior, especially in programs where youth will be interacting with one another during their time in the program. Prospective mentees who display this behavior may be screened out during the intake process if the circumstances are severe

enough to warrant it, or may be removed from the program later if such behavior is observed after the mentee has begun participating in the program.

### 3. TRAINING

#### MENTOR TRAINING

B.3.2 Program provides pre-match training for mentors on the following topics (see *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™* for full listing of training topics):

- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** When applicable and appropriate, prospective mentors are trained, ideally pre-match but early in their experience at the very least, on key information related to LGBTQ experiences:
  - Definitions related to sexual orientation (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, etc.).
  - Definitions related to gender identity/expression (e.g., transgender, genderqueer, nonbinary, etc.).
  - Demographics of LGBTQQ youth, including the estimated numbers of LGBTQQ at the national or state and local levels.
  - Risk factors for LGBTQQ youth at home and at school/in the community, including research that documents heightened experiences with homelessness, juvenile justice involvement, victimization, and bullying, as well as deficits in accessing developmental assets often associated with growing into a healthy adulthood.





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- o The intersectionality of LGBTQQ youth with race, ethnicity, poverty, geography, and other demographic characteristics, as well as how intersectionality can magnify youth risk factors.
  - o Common sexual behaviors among youth and youth attitudes about sex and identity (including LGBTQQ youth) and how these behaviors and attitudes may differ based on generation.
  - o Resiliency and protective factors for LGBTQQ youth.
  - o Other relevant theories and research applicable to serving LGBTQQ youth, such as processes of healthy identity development, the importance of creating a safe and affirming program climate, and/or principles of trauma-informed care.
- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Prospective (and current, if needed) mentors of LGBTQQ youth are further trained, ideally pre-match, on key skills and perspectives that will allow them to effectively mentor LGBTQQ youth, including:
- o The importance of getting to know each mentee and their unique strengths, challenges, and areas for potential growth and not assuming that their LGBTQQ status is inherently determinative of any level of risk or specific negative behaviors or experiences.
  - o Barriers to trust that LGBTQQ youth may face when participating in mentoring relationships.
  - o Exploring their own biases (conscious or unconscious), their attitudes, and their levels of comfort regarding serving LGBTQQ individuals and how to recognize when these factors can lead to negative interactions, even unintentionally.
  - o Understanding the coming out process for LGBTQQ youth, including uniquely experienced developmental milestones for understanding, accepting, and sharing an LGBTQ identity, handling sudden disclosures, understanding youth choices and concerns related to being out and how to provide support over time during critical moments and changes in identity and expression.
  - o Avoiding countertransference of one's own experiences as an LGBTQQ youth or young adult onto the mentee.
  - o Managing known information about out status of mentees, which should be articulated in the program's confidentiality policy. These policies should ideally respect mentees' desires around confidentiality and disclosure of information. This can be especially critical for youth whose parents or guardians might not be receptive to changes in their status and for youth who may not be out in all parts of their lives.
  - o Responding nonjudgmentally and with empathy to mentee disclosures about risky or unhealthy behaviors (e.g., sex practices, substance abuse, skipping school, etc.) and engaging in meaningful discussions about such behaviors.
  - o Skills for working effectively day-to-day with LGBTQQ youth and adults, such as respectful use of personal pronouns and affirming language to use with parents/guardians of LGBTQQ youth.
  - o Awareness of how the intersecting identities of LGBTQQ youth (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion) impact their individual experiences and the support they will, in turn, need from their mentors and the program as a whole.



- o Boundary setting and other relationship skills that can prevent misunderstandings (e.g., not shaming a young person for having same-sex romantic feelings; helping to channel mentor/mentee boundary setting conversations into strategies to help the mentee identify traits and characteristics of healthy, age-appropriate, and respectful relationships).
- o Handling circumstances where parents or guardians of LGBTQQ youth express negative reactions to their child's sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (or changes or disclosures that happen during their time in the program).
- o Local referral resources for the health, safety, and well-being of diverse groups of LGBTQQ youth.

**(new)** LGBTQ Enhancement: Mentor training, ideally pre-match, utilizes role-playing exercises and other training techniques that allow mentors to practice positive, nonjudgmental responses to sudden disclosures about the youth's identity, behaviors, or challenges (e.g., coming out to the mentor, revealing drug use, reporting victimization, etc.). This training should also reinforce information learned about confidentiality policies and respecting youth preferences around disclosure of information.

## 4. MATCHING AND INITIATION

B.4.1 Program considers the characteristics of the mentor and mentee (e.g., interests; proximity; availability; age; gender; race; ethnicity; personality; expressed preferences of mentor, mentee, and parent or guardian; goals; strengths; previous experiences) when making matches.

❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** The matching criteria considered by the staff includes parent/guardian, youth, and mentor preferences related to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Matching policies and procedures address the potential for matching mentors and youth based on similar shared orientation and/or gender identity/expression, among other criteria (e.g., mentor's ability to serve as an ally).

B.4.2 Program arranges and documents an initial meeting between the mentor and mentee as well as, when relevant, with the parent or guardian.

❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Because of the potentially elevated risk to LGBTQQ youth from a failed or quickly terminated match, programs provide ample time during an initial introductory meeting for the mentor, mentee, and the youth's parent or guardian to spend time together to assess the "fit" and comfort level of the potential match before formally committing to the relationship.

E.4.2 Program sponsors a group matching event where prospective mentors and mentees can meet and interact with one another and provide the program with feedback on match preferences.



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- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Given the potentially elevated risks for LGBTQQ youth if they are rejected by their mentor or otherwise have a short-term, negative mentoring experience, program allows matches some time to get to know one another in a group format for a period of time before committing to a matched one-to-one relationship.

### 5. MONITORING AND SUPPORT

B.5.9 Program provides mentors with access to relevant resources (e.g., expert advice from program staff or others, publications, web-based resources, experienced mentors) to help mentors address challenges in their mentoring relationships as they arise.

- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Mentor handbook or other match support literature includes referral information to LGBTQ and LGBTQ-friendly resources and organizations.
- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program considers offering in-person (or online) support groups to mentors working with LGBTQQ youth so that they can share effective strategies, offer tips on overcoming specific challenges, get referrals to other community organizations, and receive and provide support for this often challenging work.
- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program considers offering in-person or online discussion groups to mentors and youth on topics relevant to the LGBTQ community as a supplement to program activities or training allowing mentors and youth to deepen their knowledge or share their perspectives on topics that arise in their relationship.

**(new) LGBTQ Benchmark:** When appropriate, the program provides enhanced support to mentors of youth who have experienced rejection or estrangement from their family and friends, including offering strategies or tools that can help them navigate rebuilding positive family and peer connections.

E.5.2 Program hosts one or more group activities for matches and/or offers information about activities that matches might wish to participate in together.

- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program offers group activities for LGBTQQ youth (e.g., peer sharing, engaging in social justice activities).
  - ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program offers opportunities for LGBTQQ youth to build safe and supportive peer connections while in the program (gay-straight alliance types of programming).
- (new) LGBTQ Enhancement:** When relevant and appropriate, program offers opportunities for mentors and mentees, either through the program or in partnership with other community organizations, to engage in leadership opportunities, community-building initiatives, and local political engagement activities.



### 6. CLOSURE

B.6.7 and B.6.8 Regardless of the reason for closure, the mentoring program should have a discussion with mentors (and mentees and their parents/guardians) that includes the following topics of conversation (see original *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™* for original listing of closure topics):

- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program includes discussion in the closure process that focuses on identity growth during the relationship.

E.6.3 Program staff should provide training and support to mentees and mentors, as well as, when relevant, to parents or guardians, about how mentees can identify and connect with natural mentors in their lives.

- ❑ **LGBTQ Recommendation:** Program creates opportunities within mentoring relationships for LGBTQQ youth to learn how to identify and recruit mentors and allies who can serve as positive in-person role models, so that they can grow a larger web of support for their post-mentoring journey.

### PROGRAM EVALUATION

The following recommendations offer ways in which mentoring programs can more effectively serve LGBTQQ youth by tracking and evaluating services provided and specific outcomes.

- Program evaluates the effectiveness of staff training in increasing employees' knowledge about, and skills for working effectively with, LGBTQQ youth.
- Program evaluates the effectiveness of mentor training in increasing mentors' knowledge about, and skills for working effectively with, LGBTQQ youth.
- Program considers documenting and tracking outcomes relevant to LGBTQQ youth (e.g., improved feelings of social support or sense of belonging; reductions in gender identity-related stereotype threat or certain risky behaviors), noting that many of these outcomes will be relevant to other youth subgroups as well.
- Program directly involves LGBTQQ youth in evaluation planning, which honors their input into how success is defined and can facilitate gathering feedback on how well the organization is serving them.



The logo icon consists of four interlocking cubes in red, orange, blue, and teal, arranged in a 2x2 grid.

# MENTOR

