# Creating a Safe, Affirming Environment for LGBTQ Youth in Transitional Living Programs

**3/40 BLUEPRINT**

## In a Youth's Own Words

> I feel like I've never had a **SENSE OF PRIVACY** or the ability to make choices for myself . . . if somebody is trans, they'll give you your own room so you can have your own privacy.

> To live in a household where I can **BE MYSELF—** I wasn't able to do that with my own family—it feels like stability.

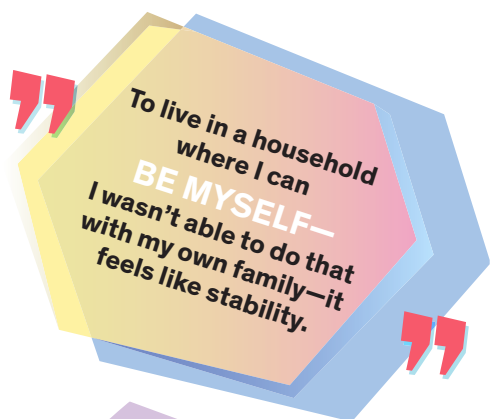> They have a **GAY RIGHTS BILL** I thought that was amazing the second I heard about that.

## Achieving Physical and Emotional Safety

**1**

**Primary Needs: Contributors to Physical Safety**

- A stable, consistent environment where basic needs are met
- Facilities in low-crime areas
- Appropriate on-site security including video surveillance and restricted entry
- Confidential housing locations
- Creating a space free from harassment, threats, and physical violence

**2**

**Once Physical Safety is Achieved: Contributors to Emotional Safety**

- Safe and affirming staff
- Clear, universally enforced policies and practices
- Symbols that indicate an LGBTQ-affirming environment
- Use of inclusive language
- A diverse staff with identities similar to the youth
- Privacy, especially for transgender residents
- Creating a space free from verbal harassment
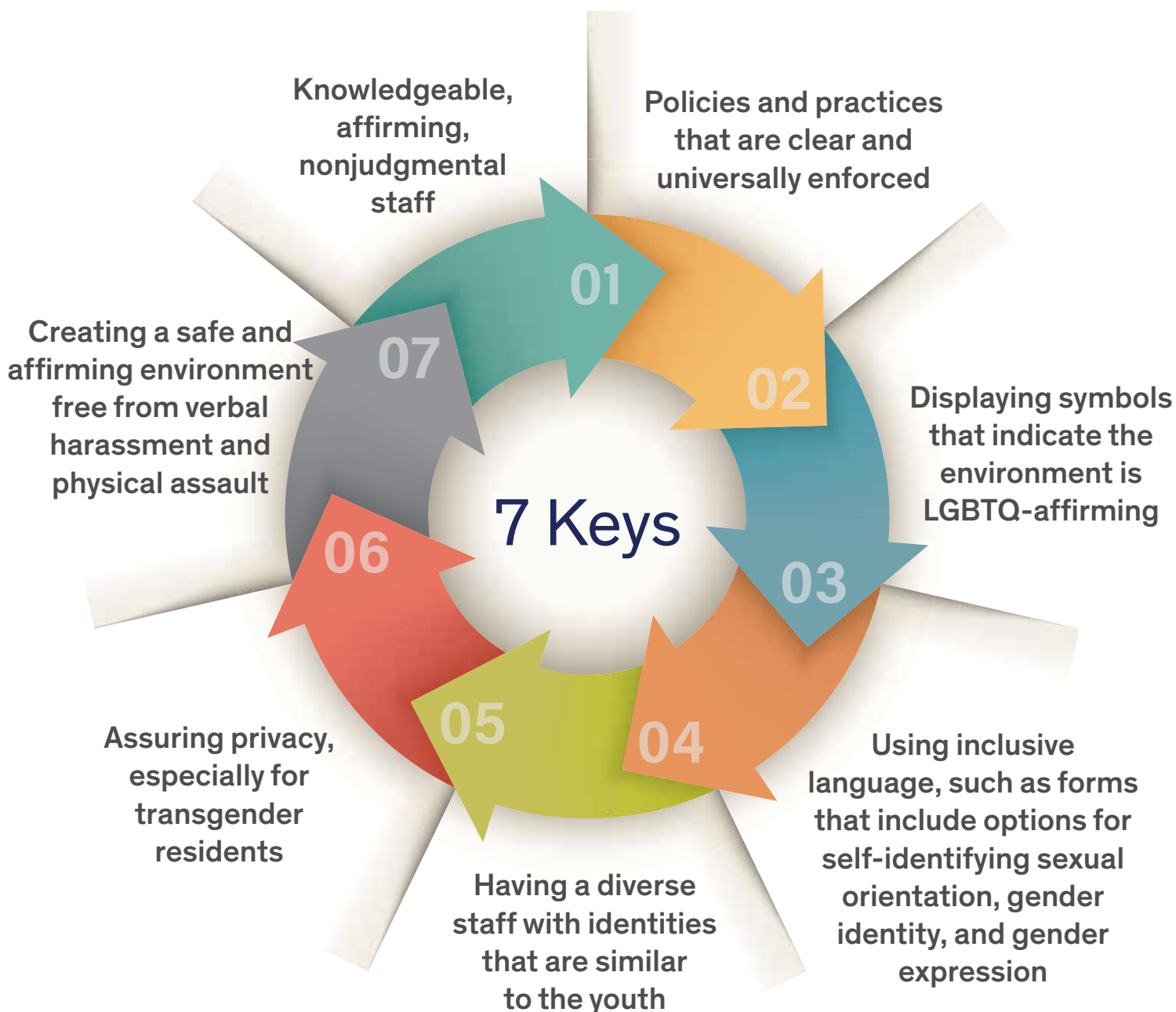
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# 7 Keys to Emotional Safety

**7 Keys**

**01** Policies and practices that are clear and universally enforced

**02** Displaying symbols that indicate the environment is LGBTQ-affirming

**03** Using inclusive language, such as forms that include options for self-identifying sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression

**04** Having a diverse staff with identities that are similar to the youth

**05** Assuring privacy, especially for transgender residents

**06** Creating a safe and affirming environment free from verbal harassment and physical assault

**07** Knowledgeable, affirming, nonjudgmental staff

From *3/40 Blueprint: Creating the Blueprint to Reduce LGBTQ Youth Homelessness* | www.340blueprintproject.com

# Barriers to Safety and Affirmation for Runaway and Homeless LGBTQ Youth

**3/40 BLUEPRINT**

## Individual, Agency, and External Barriers to Safety and Affirmation

### 01 Individual barriers:

- Limited knowledge about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE)
- Biases—seeing LGBTQ youth as "other" or not "normal"
- Inconsistent enforcement of policies
- Perceptions that staff who are not LGBTQ can't relate to LGBTQ youth

### 02 Agency barriers:

- The physical environment, such as a lack of single-stall restrooms
- Government and funder demands
- Policies that promote exclusion
- Staff turnover or programming changes
- Lack of resources to meet LGBTQ youth needs

### 03 External barriers:

- Lack of awareness about affirming TLPs
- Challenges identifying supportive, safe, and affirming job training, healthcare, and legal partners
- Lack of community support
- Peers in the larger community may not be supportive and affirming

## Homeless LGBTQ youth are more likely to experience:

Depression · Substance abuse · High-risk sexual behavior · Mental health issues · Suicide attempts

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# Top 5 Takeaways

**Top 5**

**1**
Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE) education is not only for heterosexual or cisgender youth—all youth can benefit from additional information, as well as how to use affirming language.

**2**
Training can help ensure staff are not perpetuating myths or disseminating incorrect SOGIE information, especially around transgender-specific issues.

**3**
All three aspects of SOGIE must be understood as distinct, non-binary concepts, and providers must affirm identities that fall along the gender and sexuality spectrums.

**4**
Providers must continually work against conceptualizing LGBTQ youth as "other" and heterosexual and cisgender identities as the norm.

**5**
Coaching can help providers identify and address SOGIE-based bullying, establish a language-positive approach, and better communicate with LGBTQ youth.

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## Do your policies enhance—or detract from—youth perceptions that your transitional living program is safe and affirming?

### Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE) knowledge.

Do your staff understand the various aspects of SOGIE? Are they trained in using affirming language and discussing SOGIE in ways that help youth open up?

### Staff engagement.

Do staff make youth feel affirmed by being physically and emotionally present? Do they build family-like relationships? Do they encourage and empower youth to set goals and work toward achieving them?

### Policy enforcement.

Do staff immediately intervene in cases of bullying or harassment? Are rules applied consistently across all residents?

### Affirmation and individualization.

Do providers merely accept LGBTQ identities or affirm them? Do they recognize how all of a youth's ethnic, racial, religious, SOGIE, and other identities intersect to create a unique individual with unique challenges?

### Hiring.

Does your staff reflect the race, ethnicity, and SOGIE identities of the population you serve? Is your staff stable, with minimal turnover?

### Transparency.

Are changes necessary for programming or services communicated to youth? Is the staff prepared to tell youth why personal data are collected and how it will be used?

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