

## **Working with Youth Best Practices and Guidelines for PFLAG Chapters**

PFLAG has always worked on behalf of the next generation to create a world where they would be able to grow and thrive, without fear of violence, bullying or discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. As awareness of the bullying and self-harm that plague our children increases, society looks to PFLAG to be an active part of the solution. This includes parents, who now more than ever, are looking to PFLAG to help find or create a safe space for their children.

PFLAG National has developed these best practices and guidelines for chapters to help evaluate your current and proposed efforts. The PFLAG National Board of Directors has also adopted a policy for the Standards of Sponsorship of a Youth Group. Keep in mind though that there are many ways that your chapter can help youth, aside from, sponsoring a youth group which are discussed in these guidelines.

Our recommendation is for chapter leadership to review these best practices annually, to ensure that a chapter is current in its practices, ideology, and approach.

PFLAG National understands that supporting families is a key element of our mission and offers this to provide support in the most legal, safe, and effective manner. If you have questions, or need additional help, please reach out to the Chapter Engagement Team at the national office.

### **Section One: Assess Existing Support for LGBTQ Youth in Your Community**

- ✓ If you are currently supporting youth, this will help you create a collection of other services and opportunities available in your community.
- ✓ This will create a resource guide of other services you can share with families, youth and schools.
- ✓ This can provide your chapter with a roadmap of opportunities, partnerships and strategies.

#### ***Identify what youth need in your community***

Our experience shows that youth want a safe, inclusive environment to build friendships and better understand themselves, while their parents want to know they're safety is prioritized. PFLAG chapters should continually assess what local programs are available and stay current with what is available (or developing). Chapters can create an advantage by:

- Avoiding duplication in the community.
- Establishing valuable community partnerships.
- Increasing inclusion by supporting existing groups and their initiatives

#### ***Conduct a community assessment of capacity***

Which, if any, programs or organizations already exist in the local LGBTQ community and serve youth?

- a. Review the minimum proscribed practices and the other critical questions in this section. If the program or organization meet these best practices and standards, refer youth there. Support these organizations and programs with resources, funding or programs for the youth.

- b. Volunteer with these organizations and let members know about them.
- c. Remember to check local schools for their Gay Straight Alliance (which sometimes are referred in other ways such as Equality or Diversity Alliances).
- d. Become a local resource to existing groups; tell them about your chapter; offer flyers and resources for them to share with their parents; provide speakers. If the school has an interest, but no GSA, PFLAG chapters can refer the school to our partner GLSEN.
- e. List these services and supports on your website and include them in a handout. Review and update this list annually.

What programs or organizations (YMCA, Boys and Girls Scouts, etc.) in your community serve kids in general and what kind of environment do they offer our LGBT youth?

- a. Are they already inclusive? Do they follow the minimum prescribed practices? Can you support these organizations and programs with resources, funding, or programs for the youth?
- b. Are they not currently inclusive but willing to train their staff to be inclusive? You can encourage them to serve our youth. Actively participate with them, volunteer, educate them about the needs of LGBT youth. See if they may want to start an LGBT youth group. And then, if they follow the minimum prescribed practices, you can refer youth there.
- c. Are they non-inclusive or creating a culture of non-acceptance? Then there should be no referrals and you may want to alert youth and their families about the non-supportive environment.

Is there a municipal or county public health department (Children, Youth and Families, Child Protective Services, etc.) or other child welfare/protective services agency with youth-serving programs? The same questions (a, b, and c) from the above question apply here.

If there are no youth-serving organizations in your community, what institutions (schools, churches) engage with youth in your community? The same questions (a, b, and c) from the above question apply here.

Are there LGBTQ youth who are not being served by anyone?

What are the local laws governing youth attendance in your area? Is parental permission required, for example, before under-age youth can be allowed to attend a group (youth group or adult gathering)?

Finally, what emergency services are available to LGBT youth in crisis (child protective services, suicide help lines, youth homeless shelters, etc)?

## **Section Two: Review Your Practices towards Youth Who Reach Out to Your Chapter**

It is difficult when a child is in distress, and PFLAG members are usually deeply moved to support them any way possible. You should continuously educate yourself about how you communicate with youth, and be aware of legal limitations and liabilities for you, your family, and chapter.

Increasingly, youth are reaching out to PFLAG chapters through social media or email. Volunteers who are responsible for social media or answering email should be sensitive, and informed about their responsibility when creating content and responding. It is not appropriate to extend or accept friend requests from youth, and there should be a clear distinction between their role as a PFLAG volunteer and their own personal social media.

PFLAG chapters are not professional counseling organizations. So it is important that you include crisis resources on your website and that these resources are easily accessible to group facilitators. Know your local resources and have on hand information from our partner, [The Trevor Project](#). If the young person is in crisis, immediately call the appropriate resource (child protective services, suicide help lines, youth homeless shelters, etc) in your community. Other resources include [Stop Bullying.gov](#) and [Talking About Suicide and LGBT Populations](#)

To protect your chapter from liability, we recommend you not advertise your general meetings or events directly to youth. Despite this, sometimes youth will find your chapter and choose to attend meetings or events. If your research revealed that you live in an area where parental consent is legally required, you have an issue. While difficult, you should encourage the young person to come back with a parent or legal guardian. Be sure to provide them with any support materials, and disengage.

Finally, adults involved in PFLAG chapters often bring their own children to meetings or events. When this happens, be sensitive that the dialogue may not be appropriate for youth. Additional guidelines on this issue can be found in the “Standards of Sponsorship of a Youth Group” document found at the end of this document.

### **Section Three: Exploring Youth Group Partnerships or Youth Group Creation**

Based on the review of your practices pertaining to youth who reach out to your chapter, you may conclude that additional resources are necessary. *We encourage considering developing a partnership with an existing organization that operates a youth group.* navigating the requirements of creating a youth group tied to your chapter, or exploring other possibilities in your community. Next steps may include:

- Identifying organizations or institutions with whom you can partner to create welcoming spaces. (You may want to build a coalition, or form a youth group under a separate 501(c)3. This has the added advantage of protecting your chapter from legal responsibility for the group.)
- Working with your board or steering committee to create a welcoming space within PFLAG, and follow the required steps to keep the youth safe and protect your chapter leadership from legal liability
- Whereas the creation of a local PFLAG youth group often appears to be the most immediate response to meeting the needs of youth in your area, it can be fraught with legal hurdles from your locality, city, county, state, and federal jurisdictions; all of whom have passed laws to best protect our youth. As noted, creating youth groups can also increase the personal legal liability of your board of directors, facilitators, and other committee members. Based upon your findings from section 1, are there any groups you could partner with to help support youth? Be sure to consider rather or not this partnership is in alignment with our 501c3 guidelines. For further help, please reach out to the chapter engagement team at National.

**If you have an existing youth group or decide to create one, PFLAG National strongly urges you to review this section on an annual basis to assure that your chapter is compliant with youth program requirements and best practices.**

#### ***Research the laws and regulations in your community associated with youth***

Remember: your chapter, and possibly you personally, could be held responsible for any events or issues. Working directly with youth is a serious commitment, which requires research, preparation, continual work and commitment. You should hold your chapter and volunteers to the standards reviewed

in Section One.

PFLAG strongly recommends you consult a lawyer to help understand the laws impacting your work. Local places of faith or worship, or currently established organizations serving youth may be able to recommend an attorney for you to consult. If youth participate in a group, or chapter meetings, without parental consent (when your state requires it), your chapter could be exposing itself to potential litigation or liabilities. Please connect with an attorney to establish your basic insurance needs, and help understand which types of lawsuits your chapter may be exposed to. Remember:

- Identify the current laws and statutes that apply to working with youth in your state and municipality.
- Identify any federal laws and statutes that may apply, as well.
- Translate those laws and statutes into a checklist to honor when choosing to work with youth

### ***Set the group up for success and longevity***

As previously stated: you (personally) and your chapter, may be held liable if you do not act in accordance with all legal requirements. Additionally, you are making a commitment to youth if you establish a group, so you need to be committed to the success and longevity of your efforts. After your assessment of legal expectations is complete, and you are confident that you are meeting all legal requirements in your community, consider the following best practices to help set up the success of your group:

- Create a written strategic plan that includes the goals and expected outcomes of your chapter's youth group.
- Include in your planning process leaders from throughout your community including those who represent diverse, marginalized and underserved communities, as well as youth who can represent the needs that the youth group is working to address.
- Perform a background check by a third party on all prospective youth group leaders and establish a code of conduct for adults that focuses on the safety and welfare of the youth being served. **We cannot emphasize this enough – the protection of youth is paramount.**
- Train prospective leaders in youth group facilitation.
- Develop clear, written guidelines for the facilitators.
- Remember, if an adult suspects a youth is being abused or is engaged in dangerous activities, there may also be governing laws or rules. Different jurisdictions often have mandatory reporting to the appropriate authorities of suspected abuse.
- Develop clear, written guidelines for group members.
- Develop a written plan for regularly monitoring and evaluating the youth program and its facilitators.
- Implement the plan and document results of the monitoring and evaluation.

***Note: Please inform the Chapter Engagement Team at the national office, as well as your regional director if your chapter includes a youth group, or if you choose to create one. They can provide guidance and support so that your chapter can more easily meet these best practices and comply with these guidelines.***

### ***Reach out to partners for support***

Identify organizations or institutions (see your assessment from Section One) who may be able to support you and consider these questions:

- Is a local church, YMCA, or other organization willing to donate space and cover the cost of insurance on that space?
- Is a local professional who works with youth (and has a license to do so, is insured against liability and has passed a background check, etc.) willing to facilitate the group? Remember, you will need two facilitators, as no one adult should ever be alone with a child.
- Will you provide parents a waiver form to sign for their child's attendance?
- What other partners could help you meet the checklist of requirements set forth by your lawyer?

## A FINAL NOTE:

These best practices and guidelines are tied to the support aspects of the PFLAG mission. Remember, there are a variety of ways to support youth in your community through education and advocacy strategies, especially around safe schools and partnerships.

- **Work to make schools safer.** Working in local schools with teachers and faculty can help make the climate better for all students. There is a lot that can be done in local schools and at the district and state levels.
- **Educate social services agencies.** Help agencies better understand the needs of LGBT youth and how better to meet them.
- **Advocate for better policies.** Learn what policies exist on the local, state and national levels and advocate for better legislation and policies to prevent bullying and make schools safe.

### **PFLAG Standards of Sponsorship of a Youth Group**

*(Approved by the PFLAG National Board of Directors 7/17/00 and approved as revised 10/2013)*

Ensuring that LGBTQ youth know that PFLAG is there to support them is an important part of PFLAG's mission. In some cases, PFLAG is the only organization in the community that offers such support. In doing this work, it is essential that we uphold standards that protect LGBTQ youth and PFLAG. For purposes of this document, LGBTQ youth are defined as individuals under the age of eighteen.

The following are requirements for chapters who have legal responsibility (i.e. primary financial and decision-making authority) for an LGBTQ youth group. In addition, these requirements offer important guidance for any chapter that supports youth groups in any way.

PFLAG chapters sponsoring youth groups shall:

1. Complete a community assessment to determine whether a PFLAG-sponsored youth group is the best approach.

2. Consult with an attorney to ensure that the program is in compliance with the relevant federal, state and local laws
3. Create a written strategic plan for the youth group involving diverse community leaders and youth
4. Perform a background check by a third party on all prospective youth group leaders.
5. Train prospective leaders in youth group facilitation.
6. Develop clear, written guidelines for the facilitators and youth group members.
7. Research and obtain the necessary liability insurance. (PFLAG National's liability insurance does not cover chapters.)
8. Develop a written plan for regularly monitoring and evaluating the program and facilitators.
9. Forward the required documentation to your PFLAG National Staff. Forward to your Chapter Engagement Coordinator or the Chapter Services Coordinator.
10. Meet with PFLAG National Staff to review the information provided, and get explicit permission to work with youth.

### ***Hosting Youth at a Chapter Meeting***

On occasion, most PFLAG chapters will have visitors under the age of 18, either accompanied by a parent, accompanied by an adult non-parent, or unaccompanied. Each chapter must determine relevant state law and local law to determine if hosting unaccompanied youth or hosting youth accompanied by a non-parent affects the chapter's legal liability. If it is determined that additional liability is incurred, the chapter must refer the unaccompanied youth to another agency for support.

*Note: PFLAG National does not authorize, support, affiliate with or allow the use of the PFLAG name or logo by any chapter sponsoring a youth group or hosting youth at a chapter meeting that fails to comply with the foregoing requirements. Failure to comply with these requirements may result in losing chapter affiliation and the right to use the PFLAG name.*