

A decorative background consisting of horizontal, wavy bands of color in a rainbow spectrum, including yellow, orange, red, purple, blue, green, and yellow. The text is overlaid on this background.

Affirming Care: Supporting LGBTQIA+ Individuals

Presented by Gwen Bonilla, LSW (she/her), and August
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August Tousignant-Stanton (they/them) is a autistic therapist, trainer, supervisor, and speaker through their private practice Affirming Psychotherapy LLC. August holds a masters in social work and a certificate in marriage and family therapy, and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT). August is also the Program Director at Denver Family Institute. August has over 12 years of experience in the field, and specializes in working with LGBTQIA+ youth and their families as well as intimate partner relationships. August has presented to various groups locally and nationally, including medical practices, Sherwin Williams, and Optum Health. They live in Denver with their wife and two young children.



Gwen Bonilla (she/her)

Gwen Bonilla (she/her) is a social worker, instructor, and therapist and currently serves as Clinic Director at Denver Family Institute. Gwen holds a masters in social work and a certificate in marriage and family therapy and is Chair of DFI's Social Justice Advisory Board. Gwen has 20 years of experience in the human services field, and specializes in working with adults with I/DD and their families. Prior to her work with DFI, Gwen spent most of her career in the I/DD field as a caseworker, program manager, and clinician.





The material in this presentation may be uncomfortable to hear about and talk through.

If we can provide you with the tools to create more a affirming environment for your clients from the LGBTQIA community, we can help you create longer lasting placements, prevent placement disruption, help prevent conflict within host home environments, and create opportunity for you to serve a unique population that has been missed for so many individuals and for so long.

What might affirming support look like?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcautkf_ICI

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aieGC9IbI>



Importance of LGBTQIA-Affirming Practices

- LGBTQIA identities cross all cultures, religions, and abilities
- Part of supporting self-determination includes affirming the gender identity and sexual orientation of the client.
- LGBTQIA identities are valid and occur (at least) as commonly among people with disabilities
- Disability and sexual orientation/gender identity are two different things

Politics and Religion: Where the LGBTQIA+ community fits



- LGBTQIA rights are seen as a political or religious issue
- Rights are framed as “values”
- *Reframe*: the LGBTQIA+ community having access to basic rights of health, dignity, and safety are a human rights concern, which does not negatively impact the rights of health and safety to other groups. This is not a political issue, this is not a religious value. This is true for any marginalized community

Remember: Allyship is
not an identity; it is an
action!



Tips for Creating Inclusive Policies



Create an LGBTQIA-Affirming statement for your agency/program (example from Denver Family Institute) and using this to set clear, LGBTQIA objectives and expectations for our agency.

- Provide trainings that support these expectations
- Facilitate LGBTQIA+ experiences for clients
- Identify best practices (refer to handouts) when providers are interacting with clients

Denver Family Institute's LGBTQIA-Affirming Statement

Denver Family Institute's LGBTQIA+ Affirming Statement:

Denver Family Institute affirms all identities in the LGBTQIA+ community and engages in practices to ensure our entire community (faculty, students, staff, clients, and interns) experiences DFI as LGBTQIA-informed. These practices include the following:

- Inclusive forms and paperwork
- Using neutral language before understanding a client's chosen terms (parent vs mom or dad, spouse vs husband or wife)
- Understanding how those in the LGBTQIA community understand themselves, rather than our own interpretation and definition of identities within the communities
- Using the name and pronouns identified by each community member in all circumstances

DFI maintains this stance for all those in DFI's community, including faculty, staff, students, alumni, and resource navigators. DFI offers an environment to teach its community how to provide an LGBTQIA+ environment while holding community members accountable for how their words and actions affect those who identify as LGBTQIA+. When interfacing with those in the community who are using a chosen name and pronouns, DFI asserts it is best practice to use the names and pronouns identified by each community member and will do so in all circumstances. Research shows that using the correct name and pronouns is correlated with positive outcomes in LGBTQIA+ children, youth, and adults, including decreased self-harm, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts. DFI also acknowledges that parents, caregivers, and loved ones can struggle when an individual comes out as LGBTQIA+. It is often difficult to adjust to using a different name and pronouns and it can be hard to accept the changes their loved one is experiencing. Often, families and partners have to "come out" as having an LGBTQIA family member as well, which presents a new, and often frightening, set of challenges. DFI provides a supportive and empathic environment to help parents, caregivers, and loved ones understand the needs of their LGBTQIA+ family and friends.

[Source](#)

Denver Family Institute's Religious Exemption Policy

DFI has an enduring commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice, including religious diversity. DFI honors and respects students' rights to engage in religious beliefs and/or practices and provides an educational environment in which all students are free from harassment and discrimination based on religious and spiritual identities and expressions. As part of this commitment, DFI provides reasonable accommodations for students' religious beliefs or practices. Students are expected to contact faculty in advance of needed religious accommodations. Faculty are asked to be responsive to such requests.

Examples of reasonable accommodations for student absences might include: missing a class to celebrate a religious holiday or event or having extra time to complete an assignment over religious holidays. The student must be given the opportunity to do appropriate make-up work that is equivalent and intrinsically no more difficult than the original activity or assignment. Faculty should keep in mind that religion is a deeply personal and private matter and should make every attempt to respect the privacy of the student when making accommodations.

If a student and course instructor cannot agree on an accommodation, the student may bring the matter to the Educational Consultant or Administrative Team for a decision.

**** Note: Spiritual and religious accommodations do not include exemptions from material related to the LGBTQIA+ community, any religious groups or any other marginalized population, or personal beliefs about reproductive rights. Students are encouraged to discuss any perceived conflict between spiritual/religious beliefs and their ability to serve all of DFI clients with their supervisor.**

Handling Discomfort

This may be brand new for some programs!
Agencies and workers may have negative and stereotyped views of LGBTQIA+ culture, including gay bars, drag queens, and LGBTQIA love and sex

- Provide empathy in that these policies are new and difficult while being firm in asks and limits
- Access resources existing in current DEI departments and identify specific support person or support team to act as a guide or a coach
- Ask for help! The Center on Colfax, as well as many other agencies, provides connections to consultants and educators, PFLAG has helpful resources for parents and friends

LGBTQIA Experiences

- Trips to local LGBTQIA community centers
- Attending Pride events
- Attending drag shows (drag brunch, drag queen story hours, performances at gay bars)
- LGBTQIA interest groups, like LGBTQIA sports teams, music organizations, etc
- Use of Tinder, Grindr, other dating and sex apps
- Ethically-sourced porn (Belleza, OnlyFans)
- Facilitate sexual encounters (Disability and sex video)

<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZPRWnwA8W/>

Barriers to affirming care



We all want to support people in living their lives authentically and with autonomy.

So what are the barriers?

For individuals?

Providers?

Agencies?

Consent



Ensuring consent can feel like a complicated and daunting task, and a scary responsibility.

1. How do you determine what non-speaking people want or don't want in other situations?
 - a. Body language
 - b. Facial expression
 - c. Assistive devices
 - d. Signs/Gestures

1. Like so many other facets of navigating autonomy in the I/DD world, ensuring consent requires patience and a slower pace
 - a. 20 questions game
 - b. Red light/Green light (Uno game)
 - c. Safe word
 - d. Regular and continual checking in

Local and National Resources

Local:

- [Center on Colfax](#)
- [Transgender Center of the Rockies](#)
- [One Colorado](#)
- [Envision: You!](#)
- [Disability Law](#)
- [ARC Advocacy Center](#)
- [Colorado Cross Disability Organization](#)



National and beyond:

- [PFLAG](#) (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)--national and local chapters
- [Transgender Law Center](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign](#)
- [National LGBTQ Task Force](#)
- [Drag Syndrome](#)

Contact Information

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