



Being an Ally: Working with and Advocating for LGBTQ+ Unaccompanied Youth

Webinar Handout - Tips and Role Play for Discussing Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation with Youth

A child should not be forced to share information they are not ready to share. However, we understand that having a conversation about a child's gender identity and/or sexuality can be important to their immigration case, to their access to resources, and to feeling accepted.

For some advocates it might be difficult to find the words to best approach this topic. We wanted to provide you with a copy of the role play presented during the webinar and some tips for consideration. Keep in mind that all situations are different and that this is just one way to approach a conversation.

Tips on Communicating

If you are going to be explaining sexual orientation or gender identity to a child/youth, here are some things to keep in mind:

- **Use simple and relatable language.** Start by using language that the child can understand based on their age and development. Avoid using complex terminology and focus on conveying the main concepts in a clear and concise manner.
- **Emphasize love and respect.** Explain that everyone is unique and special, and that people have different ways of loving others. Emphasize that it's important to treat everyone with kindness, respect, and acceptance, regardless of who they love or how they identify.
- **Define sexual orientation and gender identity.** In simple terms, explain that sexual orientation is about who people are attracted to or have romantic feelings for. Mention that some people are attracted to people of the opposite gender, some to people of the same gender, and some to both or other genders.
- **For gender identity, explain that it's about how people feel inside and how they understand and identify themselves.** You can say, "Sometimes, a person may feel like they are a girl/female even if they were assigned as a boy/male at birth, or they may feel like they are a boy/male even if they were assigned as a girl/female at birth. Or some do not feel like either. There are other genders. It's important to listen to how someone feels and respect their identity. "
- **Answer questions honestly and age-appropriately.** Encourage the child to ask questions and provide honest answers based on their level of understanding. If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest about it and offer to find more information together.

- **Highlight diversity and inclusivity.** Emphasize that it's wonderful that people can be different and that diversity makes the world a richer and more interesting place. Teach the child to embrace and celebrate the differences they see in others, fostering an attitude of inclusivity and acceptance.
- **Reinforce the importance of acceptance and kindness.** Teach the child the value of treating others with kindness, respect, and empathy, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Encourage them to be a friend to everyone and to stand up against any form of discrimination or bullying they may witness.

Remember, it's important to be patient, open to ongoing conversations, and to provide continuous support and guidance.

Role Play

Advocate: Diego, I know that I have been asking questions that might appear intrusive or too personal and want to make sure you are feeling ok before I move on to more questions.

Do you need to stand up and stretch or drink some water?

Diego: I'm doing ok.

Advocate: I have more questions. These questions are about sexuality. I know that these questions can be awkward or uncomfortable for some to talk about. Is it ok that we talk about this?

Diego: Not sure what you mean!

Advocate: Do you know what "sexuality" means?

Diego: I think I do but why do we have to talk about that?

Advocate: Yes, I know that is probably the last thing you want to do, especially with an adult you just met. But this will help me learn more about you and know how to better support you.

Diego: What if I do not want to answer some of those very personal questions?

Advocate: Excellent question! Please know that even though I'm asking these questions, you have a choice and a right to choose if you want to answer/talk about this with me. Also, know that it's your choice who you want to share information about your sexuality or anything else in general.

Does that make sense?



Diego: Yes, I understand.

Advocate: Is it ok if I ask you more questions?

Diego: Yes, it's ok.

Advocate: Thank you! Diego, can you tell me in your own words what sexuality means to you?

Diego: Is it about boys and girls liking each other?

Advocate: Well, that's part of it, but it's actually about more than just boys and girls liking each other.

Diego: So, like when you like someone more than just being friends?

Advocate: Something like that. But let me explain sexual orientation to you.

Sometimes people might like or be attracted to someone of the opposite gender, just like you say, when girls or boys like each other. People who are attracted to the opposite gender can be referred to as heterosexual individuals. However, some people might feel attracted to someone of the same gender, like a girl liking a girl or a boy liking a boy, people who are attracted to their same gender can be refer as a "gay" or "lesbian". And there are also people who might feel attracted to the opposite or same gender, and the term for that is "bisexual."

However, there is a lot more about sexual orientation than what I just told you, but I did not want to overwhelm with information.

Any questions so far?

Diego: No. I think I understand.

Advocate: Now, regarding gender identity. Gender identity is different from sexual orientation. Regarding gender identity, some might find themselves identifying with the same gender they were assigned at birth (boy/girl) while others find that they feel like they are something other than their assigned gender at birth. For example, someone who is assigned as a boy but feels or identifies as a girl. And Some can identify to both or neither gender.

I know that's a lot of information, I want to pause here to check-in with you.

Do you have any questions? Do you want me to explain or expand on any of this?

Diego: This has helped me understand better.



Advocate: I want to ask you about your sexuality and gender identity. This may help me better understand you, your case, and identify any resources that may be helpful to you. Regardless of what you tell me, I accept you and am here to help you. There's no wrong answer. Does that make sense?

Diego: Yes, I understand.

Advocate: Great. To start, I wanted to ask you about your sexuality. Can you tell me of a time you had crush or were attracted to someone?

Diego: Before coming here I liked this girl that was in school with me, but we never dated. But I met this guy during my journey that I bonded with, but we did not date. I'm confused now, I do not know if I like guys or girls, but I know that I feel like a male inside. But why are we talking about this again? Why would you need to know this to help me?

Advocate: Great question and I'll explain but let me first start by saying that it's ok if you do not know if you like girls or boys. Some might know early how they identify but others may not know until much later, and that's perfectly all right. Also, sexual orientation/gender identity can be fluid, which means it can change throughout life.

What do you think about that?

Diego: That makes sense and makes me feel better.

Advocate: As to your second question, the reason why I'm asking is because it will help me identify needs and potential risks/challenges. It may also be relevant to your immigration case, for example, if you've suffered in some way because of your sexuality or gender identity. There's more. Young people who identify as lesbian/gay/bi-sexual/transgender or other, have certain protections under the law here in the U.S. because they can experience challenges and discrimination from others who respond negatively to their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

So, if that is your situation, I want to be able to provide all the resources and information about any immigration relief, rights, protections, and any support and guidance that you need. Secondly, I want to help you connect with the right people and give you the tools that you need in your community.

Diego: I understand. Thank you for that!

Advocate: You indicated you are not sure if you like boys or girls. Have you ever explored this with anyone?

Diego: I did talk to my clinician a little bit. I'm not ready to talk more about it.



Advocate: I respect that! Please know that only you can decide when the time is right and who you would like to share this part of yourself. I understand your reservation because sometimes people are very quick to judge and label others who they perceive as “different”; however, that’s on them and not on you.

Diego: People do judge, and they can be mean.

Advocate: Yes, they can be. The important thing for you to know is that you are important and that you matter regardless of your sexual orientation or gender identity. Who you are and how you feel, especially that you feel safe, that’s what is most important. Also, you do not have to use any of the terms, like heterosexual or gay, or any other of the terms I mentioned earlier, to describe you, but if you do - that is your decision to make and not the decision of others. We want you to feel that you are in a safe space where you are being treated with respect and dignity.

Has anyone made you feel unsafe/uncomfortable here or anywhere else?

Diego: No, everyone has made me feel welcomed and respected.

If Diego were to say that he does not feel safe, offer to explore that with them. Ask him about the reason he does not feel safe and what can be done in the shelter to make him feel safe. Has anyone made him feel unsafe or uncomfortable outside of the shelter, etc.

You can continue exploring with Diego but if this has been a heavy conversation, maybe end the conversation soon and offer to follow up with him later. We recommend you conclude the meeting with a debrief/grounding exercise.

