

## WORKING WITH LGBTQ+ YOUTH: A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

### Topic

In this video, Meri Viano of Justice for Families describes considerations and strategies for working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, plus (LGBTQ+) youth and family members.

### Relevance of Topic to System-Involved Youth

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) and non-gender-conforming youth are significantly over-represented in the juvenile justice system. Research suggests that there are more than twice as many LGBTQ+ youth in the juvenile justice system than in the general population. LGBTQ+ youth, especially those from minoritized racial groups, are at high risk of experiencing trauma. These experiences can include assault, harassment, bullying, inappropriate treatment, lack of access to appropriate health care and other serious challenges. Traumatic experiences can happen prior to involvement with the juvenile justice system, throughout the process of engaging with the system, as well as after re-entering the community. In addition, policies often discount, discriminate against or fail to appropriately include and engage parents, caregivers or family members who identify as LGBTQ+ or non-gender-confirming. It is critical that systems serving these youth and their families have:

- Current, accurate information about the experiences and needs of the LGBTQ+ community
- Culturally appropriate and on-going professional development for all staff
- Assurance that all programs, policies, and procedures provide safety, inclusion, and engagement for LGBTQ+ and gender-non-conforming youth and families

### Relevance to Youth with Disabilities

Youth with disabilities are at greater risk for involvement with the juvenile justice system and are less likely to have their needs met by this system. Youth with disabilities who also identify as LGBTQ+ or gender-non-conforming often describe themselves as being “invisible to both communities”. They often lack access to basic physical and mental health care that fully meets their needs. This can lead to worsening physical and mental health and fewer opportunities to improve their own well-being.

### Recommendations for Creating Systems Change

- Assess the degree to which policies, programs, forms, and practices effectively and safely engage, include, and support LGBTQ+ identified youth and/or family members.
- Ensure that all parents are included in family engagement and Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) compliance.
- Increase family voice within the system by utilizing Family Focus groups, Family Advisory Councils, Family Navigators, Family Peer-to-Peer programs, and/or hiring family members for paid positions and ensure that all efforts include both youth and family members who identify as LGBTQ+.



- Provide initial and on-going training to all staff regarding culturally appropriate, safe engagement, inclusion and support for LGBTQ+ youth and their families, and/or LGBTQ+ identified parents or family members of youth served.
- Take measures to reduce sexual or gender-based assault, bullying and harassment and improve protocols for addressing these harmful behaviors when they occur.
- Provide access to appropriate health care services, clothing, hygiene products and other needs of non-gender-conforming youth and/or youth who identify as LGBTQ+.
- Provide opportunities for parents, family members and caregivers who identify as LGBTQ+ or gender-non-conforming to have access to peer support from other families; be particularly mindful of youth and family members who identify as transgender.
- Consider using model resources, professional development, and practice guidelines from the All Children, All Families Project to guide improvement in policy and practice.

## Learn More

[Exploring the intersection of LGBTQ identity and Disability](#)

Movement Advancement Project (MAP): [LGBTQ Individuals with Disabilities](#)

National Institute of Health: [LGBTQ Population and Health Disparities](#)

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill LGBTQ Center: [Disability and LGBTIQ+ Identity](#)

[Supporting Families of Individuals with LGBTQ Identity:](#)

Caitlyn Ryan, Family Acceptance Project - in multiple languages:

[Overview of Project](#)

[Family Education Booklet](#)

[LGBTQ Youth in the Juvenile Justice System/System Improvement](#)

Center for American Progress: [Report on LGBTQ Youth in the Juvenile Justice System](#)

The Human Rights Campaign: [All Children- All Families Program](#)

Coalition for Juvenile Justice: [Resource List- LGBTQ Youth](#)

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: [Literature Review on Model Programs LGBTQ Youth](#)

[Family Engagement](#)

Justice for Families- [Analysis of the Juvenile Justice System and Youth & Family Outcomes](#)





## Presenter Information

**Meredith (Meri) Viano** is a consultant for Justice for Families (J4F), a national organization committed to ending the youth incarceration epidemic. J4F is founded and run by parents and families who have experienced the juvenile justice system with their children. As a parent of young adults with developmental and mental health disabilities, Meri supports families through leadership, training and advocacy. Meri's areas of expertise include mental health policy, LGBTQ policy, working with police departments and family- and youth-driven voice and advocacy across multiple systems. To learn more about Meri and J4F, go to [Justice for Families website](#)

