

QUICKLY ASSESSING REFERRALS FOR LGBTQ+ COMPETENCY

When you are looking for a referral for someone who identifies as LGBTQ+, here are three simple questions to learn about their level of competency in working with this community. None of these questions is meant to definitively indicate whether or not a place will be LGBTQ+ competent. Rather these questions aim to help people quickly determine a general level of capability.

1. Has your agency ever worked with someone who identifies as LGBTQ+? How did that go?

Often the most information from this question can be learned from the subtleties of someone's response. Do they hesitate to answer? How comfortable are they talking about LGBTQ+ identities? Do they use current terminology? Trip over the words? Use the right pronouns? The goal is not to expect perfection, but to get a general sense of comfort.

If you are calling on behalf of a transgender person, specifically ask if they have worked with transgender clients before. Not all places that are competent with gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer people are also competent with transgender people.

2. When was the last time the staff at your agency were trained on LGBTQ+ cultural competency?

Many things about LGBTQ+ culture and best practices move quickly: terminology, state and federal laws and regulations, standards of care, and best practices. If they respond that their last training was within the past year, great!

If the agency has had a training in the last three years they might be a little out of date, but could still be competent. If an agency has never had education on LGBTQ+ identity, they are not prioritizing this population and may not be competent.

3. Does your agency include “sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression” in your non-discrimination and harassment policy?

This is a quick check to see if they have taken the time to update their policies to match current best practices. Most agencies have “sexual orientation” included. Many agencies also have “sex” or “gender” listed, however some lack “gender identity *and expression*”. Using this specific language explicitly protects transgender and gender non-conforming people. “Gender expression” provides protection for anyone who does not fit into our society's expectations of what men and women are *supposed* to look or dress like.

If you're calling on behalf of a transgender person, it is also a good idea to ask about the agency's policies regarding placement based on gender, practices for searches, availability of gender neutral bathrooms, and whether their intake forms recognize more than two genders.