



*Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me" (Matthew 18.5).
Children and youth are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.*

-Social Principles, ¶162C Book of Discipline of The UMC

-Resolution #3084 Book of Resolutions of The UMC

Our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all children and youth as well as to those who are committed to ministry with them as volunteers and employees. True hospitality means that we are to be inclusive of all children and youth. This process is constantly changing and evolving. Currently, there are a few considerations that we have found useful in making decisions around hospitality and LGBTQ youth:

- Make no assumptions about a young person's sexual orientation or identity.
- Educate yourself and train your staff on proper use of terminology.
(www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com)
- Be intentional about creating a safe environment and culture by awareness and training around homophobic language and bullying.
- Create a policy or behavior covenant that all are aware of and commit to uphold.

Restrooms

Everyday actions such as using the bathroom are complicated and often dangerous for transgender and gender nonconforming people, because our world usually offers only two options: "male" and "female." Consider whether your facility's restrooms must be gender-specific or whether one could be made available to everyone. This need not be complicated; covering the "men" or "women" sign with an "all-gender restroom" sign is sufficient. Remember to do this for temporary, shared, or rental facilities also. You might also want to have private restrooms available as an option for the changing of clothes.



Housing

Ensuring comfortable housing for LGBTQ youth is often a challenge for overnight camps that have traditional “all male” and “all female” bunks or cabins. There is rarely a single solution that meets the needs of every situation. However, it is crucial that open and frank discussions take place, so that all participants involved will feel comfortable.

Here are a few suggestions based upon different situations you might encounter:

There is not a “one-size-fits-all” housing policy for transgender or gender nonconforming youth. It is vitally important to communicate openly with the youth about their needs and desires to create the best solution. Some transgender youth may feel more comfortable housing with the gender that correlates with their full-time presentation and identity; others, with their biological sex. Some may want to room with a few select friends and some, if given the option, may prefer their own room. Also, some flexibility and accommodation choices can be made easier if hotel-type rooms are available and the youth can choose their roommates. Again, it is important to work with the youth to create a reasonable accommodation that best suits everyone.

There is absolutely no reason why a LGBTQ youth shouldn’t bunk with straight-identified peers. The primary concern in this situation is the possibility for bullying and harassment. Counselors and chaperones should be trained to identify and deal with bullying and harassment, and they should seek support from youth directors and/or administration if bullying or harassment persists. Education of parents is also important. Your tolerance policy should be shared; questions should be addressed; and resources should be provided.

See www.kidsinthehouse.com.