During your career as a child welfare professional, you will have transgender and nonbinary youth in your care that need gender affirming materials. Surveys of young people between the ages of 12-21 in foster care indicate 30% to 34% of the population identifies as LGBTQ+ (Matarese, et al., 2021; Sandfort, 2021; & Baams et al., 2019). Further, between 8-10% of young people surveyed identify as transgender (Sandfort, 2021; Matarese, et al., 2021), compared to 1.4% found in the general population (Herman, et al., 2022). Research has also shown that this population is at increased risk of suicide, depression, increased anxiety, and other negative mental health outcomes. For example, the Trevor Project has found that more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth have considered suicide (Trevor Project, 2022). Access to affirming spaces, materials, and care reduces this risk greatly. For more information on these data and further gender affirming best practices, visit: lgbtqequity.org/supporting-trans-youth and sogiecenter.org/offerings/resources/federal-guidance.

In 2022, the Administration for Children and Families published an Information Memorandum offering guidance to title IV-B and IV-E agencies on serving LGBTQIA2S+ children and youth, with explicit support for gender affirming care. Further guidance from the Children's Bureau indicates that child welfare agencies may be able to use Chafee funding[1] to purchase gender affirming items for young people in their care, especially in consideration of the health benefits that access to these materials bring. It is important that agencies have protocols in place for funding and distributing these resources, and that it is clear to staff that these items are not rewards, but rather necessary items to preserve and improve the mental wellbeing of young people who identify as transgender or nonbinary. Community LGBTQ+ organizations can be an excellent resource to support understanding and providing gender affirming information and resources.

As you and your agency become more familiar with the needs of transgender and nonbinary young people, this resource offers a list of common items that may be purchased using Chafee funding:

[1] Please see pages 30-31 of ACYF-CB-PI-23-01 for more information.
Affirming clothing and accessories that make young people feel good about themselves and take pride in their identity. Agencies can purchase clothing and jewelry outside of regular clothing allowances that display PRIDE or are needed for gender affirmation. Some examples include clothing and accessories with a flag depicting a youth’s identity, a rainbow, or something else that is meaningful to them.

Self-care workbooks and books for caregivers that break down what it means to be LGBTQ+ in simple ways. The Trans Self-Care Workbook is an example. Further, agencies should also invest in parenting resources, such as books on parenting transgender and nonbinary youth. For other educational materials and resources for families, visit lgbtqfamilyacceptance.org.

Cosmetic and hygiene items that may be purchased to support gender affirmation are hair products, wigs, make-up, razors, and other hair removal products. These items should be chosen by youth so they are individualized and specific to the youth’s needs and comfort levels.

Binders are purpose-built undergarments, often using spandex or other synthetic fiber, that are used to flatten breasts and create the appearance of a flatter chest. For more information on binders, visit gc2b.co. Gc2b binders are designed by LGBTQ+ people, are swim-friendly and comfortable, and offer many styles and shades. They have detailed sizing information, videos, and measurement details, including how to determine the proper fit. They also offer personal sizing assistance, binder care guidance, and safety all on their website where young people can go to discreetly learn what’s best for them.

Gaffs are compression underwear that smooth out the appearance of outer genitalia. For more information on gaffs, visit pointofpride.org/blog/gaffs-101-tucking-safely-and-comfortably.

Packers and stand-to-pee devices can be used as prosthesis that allow trans boys and masculine people the appearance and feeling of having male genitals. For more information on packers, stand-to-pee devices, and other accessories, visit ftmessentials.com. This website has a variety of packers in all different shades, sizes, and styles. They have packing underwear and harnesses in many styles along with other accessories to reflect trans pride.

Overall, these items do not take long to acquire but specific measurements are needed to order many of these items (binders, gaffs, packers, etc.). It is best to ask youth to pick these items out for themselves so that you are meeting their specific wants/needs. This could include size, fabric, or color tone needs.
Conversations with young people about gender affirming care can begin by normalizing that strict gender roles don't apply to most people. Even child welfare staff carry unique styles and interests that blend what is stereotypically expected of feminine and masculine behavior. Youth will feel safer having these conversations with individuals who model openness to diverse gender roles, gender identities, and ways to express individual style. It is also important to affirm every aspect of gender identity that a child or young person may express. Children and young people are watching what you do, and you have the opportunity to be the affirming adult they need!

Citations


