

# LGBT+ young people and sport

**Many children and young people will know that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual, or will have questioned their sexuality or gender identity from a young age.**

A large number don't tell anyone until they are older. This may be because they are scared and worried about others' reactions to their identity.

The window of time between first questioning their identity and starting to accept themselves (or **coming-out**) can lead to young people suffering from lower self-esteem or depression, or feeling a sense of isolation.

Sports organisations should offer support to young people by:

- having an awareness and understanding of all types of sexuality and gender identity
- knowing how and where to direct them to specialist support services
- being inclusive, in a way that's sensitive to young people's needs and reinforces an ethos of acceptance of difference

## **What is LGBT+?**

LGBT+ is an initialism that has been widely used to refer to a community made up of a number of sexualities and gender identities. While these sexualities and identities are referred to collectively, they are all very different.

LGBT stands for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender'. The '+' represents a wide variety of terms relating to sexualities and gender identities, such as asexual, intersex and non-binary.

You can find a full **glossary of terms** on Stonewall UK's website. It's a good idea to familiarise yourself with the different types of sexuality and gender identity terminology. You'll probably encounter some of this terminology when working with young people, who may be seeking your support or wanting to know more themselves.

## Understanding the difference between sexuality and gender identity

It's important not to confuse sexuality and gender identity. People who are referred to as the sexuality or gender identity that doesn't belong to them can find it distressing and it can result in a feeling of being misunderstood or having their identity rejected.

Sexuality is a type of sexual orientation, such as gay, lesbian, bisexual. Sometimes people who are LGB+ may also be trans, or may be gender fluid, but that's not always the case.

The term 'trans' describes people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. It doesn't always relate to their sexuality.

One's sexuality and gender identity is a truly individual concept and may differ from person to person, which is why communication with young people is so important.

## Good Practice Principle

If you're not sure, and a young person has already revealed their identity to you, it's sometimes advisable to simply ask, in an appropriate way and setting. **Many sports organisations already work with a wide range of children and young people from different backgrounds and with different needs. Effectively meeting the needs of LGBT+ young people should be an element of this.**

If you apply the good practice examples below, this will allow LGBT+ young people to feel safe and supported in your sports organisation or club:

- treat everyone with respect and fully implement equal opportunities – tackle homophobia and transphobia in the same way as racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination
- challenge gender stereotypes and celebrate difference
- make sure your anti-bullying policies consider LGBT+ issues and that everyone is made aware of these
- let young people know that, just like with any other issues, they can talk to you and that their privacy will be respected

- promote that your sport's practices and sessions are open and inclusive to all
- do not automatically assume that everyone is heterosexual or identifies with their assigned birth gender
- promote LGBT+ specialist services to everyone in your sport
- staff should have LGBT+ awareness training and understand the needs and vulnerabilities that LGBT+ young people have
- make LGBT+ identity visible in your organisation by encouraging participants to be themselves

**There are things that you can do to help make sure LGBT+ children and young people feel included and valued in sport and at your club or activity.**

Although it's important to remember being LGBT+ isn't a safeguarding risk, young people may want to discuss with you how they feel. A young person might not always be able to articulate at first how they're feeling. They might say things like "I feel like a boy (or girl)" or "I like boys (or girls)".

Young people should be supported to **find the right information** they need to develop and be able to take part in and enjoy sport while feeling comfortable in themselves.

A young person's privacy should be respected. Confidentiality practice should reflect that of your safeguarding procedures, in that if a young person or other young people aren't at risk, information doesn't need to be shared.

**Creating a supportive environment**

The first step towards supporting LGBT+ young people is by making your sport LGBT+ friendly – and promoting that. Make sure your club identifies and challenges **homophobic and transphobic bullying** and has the inclusivity of LGBT+ members written into its safeguarding policies and procedures. Make sure all your members, staff and volunteers – not just LGBT+ individuals – are made aware that there is a culture of acceptance in your sport and people's individuality is welcomed and valued.

It's important to discuss a young person's wants and needs with them and make reasonable adjustments to your sports setting so that they can enjoy and experience sport comfortably, alongside other young athletes.

**Reasonable adjustments for LGBT+ athletes**

This could mean:

- using a separate changing space to that of fellow athletes to ensure their privacy
- arriving early to or leaving later from practices and events to change in privacy and to avoid questions from other young people
- having mixed gender groups, so that male and female teams aren't separated, and young people aren't forced to choose which gendered team they belong to
- using the gender terms they're comfortable with in reference to themselves (for example, a young person who you previously referred to as 'he' or 'him' may now wish to be referred to as a female and want you to use the terms 'she' or 'her' during sessions)

Sports shouldn't assume any young person would want to be separated or excluded based on the awareness that they are LGBT+. In fact, some LGBT+ young people may not want you to make any changes – and that's great. Communication is key.

However, for the benefit of that young person and of all young people in your sport, a culture of acceptance should still be reinforced by challenging transphobic attitudes and celebrating difference.

### **Signposting to specialised services**

LGBT+ specific services aim to improve outcomes for LGBT+ young people by working to ensure they receive the same entitlements and quality of service as any other service user in a 'safe' environment.

Try to make information about specialist services and your sport's culture of acceptance prominent to anyone taking part or wishing to do so.

Click the resources tab above (or below, on mobile devices) for links to specialist organisations that can provide support to young people.

### **Involving parents and carers**

Children and young people who are LGBT+ are more likely to be happy and positive about their sexual orientation or identity if their parents or carers are supportive and understanding.

However, not every LGBT+ young person will want their parents to know about their sexual orientation or identity, and this will need to be managed

carefully. It's best practice not to disclose a young person's sexual or gender identity to their parents without their prior consent.

When a young person begins to question their identity or comes out, it can sometimes be a difficult time for parents and other family members. It is important to try to offer them support and point them towards **resources and guidance** as well.

If a young person has disclosed their sexuality or gender identity to their parents, get them involved in the conversation from the start. Discuss their child's experiences of sport and how they think things could be improved.

**Let young people and parents know that your sport is working towards being inclusive of everyone and discuss any decisions with them to achieve an outcome that works for everyone. CPSU and NSPCC resources**

- [Homophobic and transphobic bullying in youth sport](#) – CPSU briefing, which includes how to prevent and respond to incidents of homophobia
- [Raising awareness of LGBT issues within voluntary, community and sports sectors](#) – CPSU webinar presentation (PDF)
- [Safeguarding LGBT+ young people in sport](#) - CPSU webinar, June 2018
- [Sexual and gender identity](#) - Childline guidance for young people on sexual orientation, identity, transgender identity, transition and sexuality

**Sports resources**

- [Transsexual people and competitive sport](#) – the Sports Council Equality Group's guidance for national governing bodies of sport
- [Equality and diversity for clubs](#) - Swim England
- [Guide to engaging trans people in swimming](#) - Swim England
- [Make sport everyone's game](#) – A sports toolkit from Stonewall
- [Policy and procedures for trans or transgender hockey players- guidance for local hockey organisations](#) - England hockey
- [Rainbow Laces](#) – an LGBT+ campaign from Stonewall
- LGBT+ resources from the Football Association ([the FA](#)):
  - [The FA policy on trans people in football](#)
  - [The FA policy on trans people in football – FAQs](#)
  - [LGBT football](#) – further FA information and resources
- [You can play](#) – Play by the Rules Australia campaign to tackle homophobia in sport

**Other useful resources and websites**

- [Ditch the Label](#) – one of the UK's largest anti-bullying charities
- [EACH \(Educational Action Challenging Homophobia\)](#) – set up to challenge homophobia, it offers training and consultancy, and runs an action line for people to report homophobic bullying

- [FFLAG \(Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays\)](#) – charity established to support the friends and families of people who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual
- [Gendered Intelligence](#) – a not-for-profit community-interest company that aims to increase understanding of gender diversity
- [Inclusion For All \(IFA\)](#) – making children's lives free from homophobic bullying and language
- [Just Like Us](#) – LGBT+ charity working directly with schools and supporting LGBT+ young people through mentors
- [LGBT Consortium](#) – national membership organisation for LGBT groups and charities
- [Mermaids](#) – support group for gender variant children and teenagers, and their families
- [Press for Change](#) – organisation that campaigns and provides legal support for trans people in the UK
- [The Proud Trust](#) – community organisation offering advice for young people and education resources
- [Queer Youth Network](#) – national LGBT youth organisation in the UK
- [Stonewall](#) – working for equality and justice for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals
- [Stonewall FC](#) – London's famous gay football club. The club provides a platform for openly gay players of all levels and abilities to play competitive football

## **Publications**

- [Homophobia in sport](#) (Feb 2017) – House of Commons report on homophobic attitudes in sport