

ADDITIONAL VULNERABILITY

Supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender young people

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGB&T) young people come from all socio-economic backgrounds, religions, faiths, ethnicities, and cultures. It is estimated that six per cent of the population is lesbian, gay or bisexual, so there's a good chance that in a group of 30 young people, at least two will be or will grow up to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. Most young people will know LGB people too, including family and friends. In addition, a 2010 piece of research, funded by the Home Office, estimated that between 300,000 and 500,000 people in the UK may identify as transgender.

However, LGB&T people remain largely invisible across sports, and two thirds of LGB young people say they do not like team sports. This lack of visibility, as well as the misapprehensions about LGB&T people, contribute to an environment of homophobia and transphobia in sport. This can potentially cause LGB&T young people to feel excluded, isolated, or undervalued. We therefore all have a role to play in dispelling myths about LGB&T people, challenging homophobia, and transphobia when they occur, and creating a bowls environment where everyone feels included. It's important to remember that people know they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender at different stages of their lives; so if a young person seems to identify in a certain way, it doesn't mean they will remain that way in the future.

It's also worth remembering that, when young people come out or identify a wish to reassign their current gender it's often the first time they've told anyone and how they do that will often be in response to the way they think others will react. Let them decide how they feel and what, if any, identity, they feel they have, and be supportive.

"Many lesbian, gay or bisexual people in sport face discrimination simply because they are perceived to be different from the heterosexual 'norm': As well as causing many lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes to leave clubs or sport entirely, in the worst cases such negative treatment has resulted in self harm or suicide".

Source: CPSU Homophobic Bullying in Youth Sport, April 2011

Every young person has the right to be treated with dignity and respect; this includes all young people who are openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender or are thought to be. A club culture that permits casual use of homophobic or transphobic language makes it all the easier for players to suffer name calling and bullying. This can impact on a young person's sense of belonging, self-esteem and therein achievement. Allowing inappropriate language and jokes to take place may hinder a young person in coming out as they may feel they will be subject to discrimination.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender young people have the same needs as any other teenager. They will enjoy, achieve, and stay safe if they:

- Feel able to be themselves
- Feel valued for who they are
- Feel included and part of a community
- Have access to resources and information relevant to them
- Feel safe and supported
- Feel they have people to talk to if things are not going so well

Do not make assumptions; it is impossible to tell whether a young person is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender by the way they act, talk, dress or by who their friends are.

Be positive when young people come out and know what to say; offer them reassurance, listen and be supportive – direct them to where they can get further advice and guidance. Do not discuss a young person's sexual orientation; with their parents/carers without the young person's permission.

Protect young people from bullying; all young people have the right to grow up free from fear of bullying and that includes those young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Be inclusive; any sport setting for young people can make sure it is inclusive by creating zero tolerance for homophobic and transphobic bullying.

For further information visit www.stonewall.org.uk

Reducing Vulnerability

In view of the above it is important for clubs to be extra vigilant in creating a safe culture, including:

- Finding ways of understanding and communicating with all children and young people
- Ensuring best practice.
- Promoting positive environments and behaviors in which difference (in a variety of senses) is embraced
- Raising awareness of what discriminatory bullying is, how you will respond and ensure effective reporting systems are in place to enable players to report incidents
- Implementation of a club code of conduct for spectators and players
- Acceptance of the special role clubs have in setting a good example of the way in which people should behave towards children and young people

It is recognized that empowering children and young people helps to protect them; ensure your club is a LISTENING CLUB, effectively communicating with its young players and listening to their needs and suggestions for change.