



CHANGING THE GAME



GLSEN®



Game Plan for
**LGBTQ+ Athletes
and Allies**

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Introduction

All students have a right to feel a sense of inclusion and safety at school. Whether you're in physical education class or playing a competitive sport, you have a right to play and feel like you belong, regardless of your sexual orientation or gender identity.

The research is clear about the benefits that sports provide for LGBTQ+ youth. Participation in sports improves an overall sense of well-being, increases feelings of connection to school, and provides physical, social, and emotional benefits.

“Playing sports is one thing, but as a trans person, being part of a team where I belong, building friendship with people, AND playing the sport I love all at the same time? That’s what I wish all sports teams would be focused on.”

— Esmée Silverman she,her,hers, 12th Grade, Massachusetts

LGBTQ+ inclusion in sports has made a lot of progress; despite this, there is still a long way to go. Not all coaches are supportive or create an inclusive team culture, and there can be barriers for trans and nonbinary athletes. Sometimes teachers, coaches, and school staff are not aware of the laws and policies in place to protect LGBTQ+ students. But, as an LGBTQ+ athlete and student, you do have rights. And if you are an ally, there are ways that you can be supportive for your teammates and to ensure that they have access to safe, affirming, and inclusive experiences at school and in sports.

If you are out, thinking of coming out, or want to support your LGBTQ+ teammates and peers, this resource is for you.

Know Your Rights

LGBTQ+ harassment is against the law. You can learn more about your rights by reading GLSEN’s resource on [LGBTQ+ Student Rights](#).

Many states already have specific policies that protect LGBTQ+ athletes. To see if your state is one of them, check out the [GLSEN Policy Maps](#).

If you’re being bullied, harassed, or discriminated against based on race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status, or sex characteristics, you have the right to file a complaint. To see how it’s done check out [GLSEN’s Claim Your Rights](#) resource.



Considerations When Coming Out

LGBTQ+ athletes and students are coming out more often than ever before. But if this doesn't feel like an option for you, that's OK, too. Coming out is a personal choice and no one should pressure or disclose private information about you without your consent. Remember, there is no right or wrong time to do this. The important thing is that you get to decide how, when, and where you come out.

If you are thinking about sharing your identity with your team, it might help to discuss with a trusted friend or teammate first to talk about your options and next steps. This is a good time to share what kind of support you need from them. Some athletes have shared their identity through a presentation, some have written a letter, or made a social media post, and others have simply not discussed it unless it came up. You get to decide how you want to engage and interact with your teammates and what support you need from them. GLSEN's **Coming Out** resource offers several ideas and tips for how to navigate this process.

There are also several ways you can ensure that your coaches, teachers, and school are providing you with what you need to feel safe and comfortable. Find a trusted adult who you can share with and let them know how they can support you.

Access to Inclusive Facilities

Many LGBTQ+ athletes and students don't feel safe in the locker room because coaches or teachers aren't usually around to see when bullying or harassment takes place. If you are being bullied or harassed and don't feel comfortable confronting the bully directly, you may want to reach out to a supportive adult who you trust to see what your options are. You deserve to feel safe and comfortable in all team spaces, including the locker room.

What to Know. What to Do.

- You have the right to use the locker rooms and bathrooms where you feel most safe and comfortable.
- Find a friend who you feel comfortable with to walk in and out of the locker room with you. Having supportive people surrounding you can be a deterrent for bullies.
- Let your coach, teacher, principal, or other trusted adult know if you feel unsafe or uncomfortable. They may be able to offer an alternative place for you to change.
- If your coach, teacher, or school does not allow you to use the locker room or restroom because of your gender identity or sexual orientation, you can file a complaint with your school, at the school district, or at the **Office of Civil Rights**.



Overnight Trips

All students, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, deserve safety and privacy on trips. If you are feeling anxious about an overnight trip with your team or P.E. class, here are some tips for working with your coach, teachers, volunteers, or trusted teammates to create a safety plan for your trip.

What to Know. What to Do.

- Ask your coach or P.E. teacher if they have a safety plan for overnight trips.
- Tell your coach or P.E. teacher what you need to feel safe and comfortable on the trip.
- Set up check-ins with your coach, P.E. teacher, or another trusted adult during the trip.
- Identify someone on the team or in your class who you are comfortable rooming with, and request to room with this person. If there are random room assignments, speak with your coach about the situation and ask for this option instead.
- You do not have to disclose your identity to anyone. Your identity should remain private unless you consent to sharing.

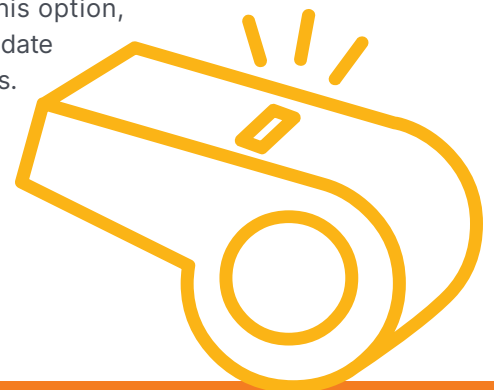
Transgender and Nonbinary Students

If you are trans or nonbinary, there are things that your coaches, teachers teammates/classmates can and should do to make sure you feel supported, safe, and included.

Most students have to choose between binary team options in sports, which can be difficult if you are nonbinary. If you are unsure which team to participate on, try choosing based on the team that feels most validating to you, or the team you feel the most comfortable and safe. If your school sports team does not feel like a good fit, there may be co-ed or LGBTQ+ sports clubs in your area that will be more accepting and affirming.

Respect Your Name and Pronouns

Your coaches, teachers, and other students must respect and use the name, gender, and pronouns you choose, even if they are different from your legal documentation. If you have not submitted name and gender change paperwork to your school, you can start visiting the administrative office to find out what the process is. Many schools do not require any legal name change documentation to update their system with your correct name and gender. If the school computer system is not capable of this option, ask your guidance counselor or principal to email your teachers to ensure they update their roster manually and immediately start using your correct name and pronouns.



Provide You with Gender-Affirming Uniforms

As a student athlete, you should be able to wear the uniform that matches your gender identity and makes you feel most comfortable. If you feel uncomfortable in your sports uniform, ask your coach about gender-affirming uniform options. Have your coach check with your athletic governing body to make sure this doesn't disqualify you from playing.

For Allies

If you want to be an advocate and ally but are unsure of how to support your LGBTQ+ teammates and peers, the best place to start is by asking your teammates what they need. Engaging in allyship is all about meeting the needs of the people you are hoping to support. If you're not sure where to begin, you can start by doing your own research. It can be tiring for LGBTQ+ people to constantly educate friends or answer all their questions about LGBTQ+ identities. There are a number of online resources you can check out first, like **GLSEN's Solidarity Week** campaign.

- Ask your coach to create an inclusive code of conduct for your team. The code of conduct should be created by everyone and include zero tolerance for anti-LGBTQ+ slurs, name-calling, bullying, and harassment.
- Call out and address anti-LGBTQ+ language, bullying, and harassment when you hear it or see it.
- If someone uses the wrong name or pronoun for a teammate or peer, correct them. It can be difficult for transgender and nonbinary people to constantly correct people about their name and pronouns. If your friend is OK with you advocating for them, always do the right thing and correct people.
- Celebrate Pride. You can show your support for LGBTQ+ teammates and peers by attending Pride events with them.
- Participate in **GLSEN's Day of Silence**. This student-led demonstration happens every April. LGBTQ+ students and allies all around the country — and the world — take a vow of silence to protest the harmful effects of harassment and discrimination of LGBTQ+ students in schools.
- Join your school's **Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA)**. GSAs are student-run organizations that unite both LGBTQ+ and allied students to create a community and organize around the issues that are impacting them in their schools and communities.



Be a Game Changer

Join the team and become a Changing the Game ambassador!

This program is for student leaders like yourself and all allies of any age who continue to take a stand for LGBTQ+ rights. Your advocacy is powerful and necessary to ensure school leaders, officials, and competitors engage in good sportsmanship and that includes respecting ALL student athletes.

Ambassadors are committed to speaking out about anti-LGBTQ+ behavior and celebrating LGBTQ+ student athletes, and supporting inclusive LGBTQ+ policies. That's not all! Receive the Changing the Game quarterly newsletter, training and webinars, swag giveaways, and more!

Bring GLSEN's Changing the Game program and resources to your school and support students, physical education teachers, administrators, coaches, and families.

Key Terminology

Transgender and nonbinary students may use different terms to describe their lives and experiences of gender. Terminology and language differ and evolve based on region, language, race or ethnicity, age, culture, and many other factors. Some examples of terms used by some youth include: trans, trans girl, trans boy, nonbinary, genderqueer, gender fluid, demi girl, demi boy, Two Spirit (amongst Native American, American Indian/Alaska Native, First Nation, or Indigenous communities), and many more. Some trans youth prefer simply to be referred to as boys or girls except when their trans status is specifically relevant. These terms often mean different things or refer to different experiences of gender. Staff and educators should reflect and use the terms that students use to describe themselves, and avoid terms that make these students uncomfortable.

These definitions are provided not for the purpose of imposing labels, but rather to assist in understanding this guide and LGBTQ+ identities. Students may or may not use these terms to describe themselves or their experiences.

GENDER IDENTITY: A person's deeply held knowledge of their own gender, which can include being a man, woman, another gender, or no gender. Gender identity is an innate part of a person's identity. One's gender identity may or may not align with society's expectations with the sex they were assigned at birth (male, female, or intersex).

GENDER EXPRESSION: Expression of gender, whether through hair styles, makeup, or personal fashion, changes over the course of a person's lifetime.

TRANSGENDER/TRANS: An adjective describing a person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. A trans woman is a woman whose sex was assigned male when she was born. A trans man is a man whose sex was assigned female when he was born. Some transgender people are not male or female, and may use terms like nonbinary to describe their gender (see below).

GENDER NONCONFORMING: A term sometimes used to describe people whose gender expression differs from social expectations, such as “feminine boys,” “masculine girls,” and people who are perceived as androgynous in some way. Being gender nonconforming is distinct from being transgender, though some trans people may consider themselves to be gender nonconforming. For example, a cisgender woman who has short hair and likes sports might consider herself gender nonconforming, but may not identify as transgender.

NONBINARY: A term used to refer to people whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female, including those who identify with a different gender, a combination of genders, or no gender. Nonbinary may be considered a subset of transgender or a distinct identity. Other similar or more specific terms may include genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, or Two-Spirit (for Native American students).

CISGENDER: An adjective describing a person whose gender identity corresponds with the gender society typically associates with the sex they were assigned at birth. The majority of people are cisgender, while a minority are transgender. For example, a cisgender woman was assigned female at birth and identifies as female her gender as a woman.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A person’s romantic and/or sexual attraction to other people. This includes being straight, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, or many other terms used to describe sexual orientation. This is different and distinct from gender identity. Transgender and nonbinary people may be straight, gay, lesbian, asexual, or any other sexual orientation.

TRANSITION: The process in which a person begins to live according to their gender identity. Transition is a process that is different for everyone, and it may or may not involve specific medical treatments or changes to official documents. There is no one step or set of steps that an individual must undergo in order to have their gender identity affirmed and respected.

QTBIPOC: This is an acronym for Queer/Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

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