



Rainbow Youth for  
Sporting Equality



QUEER  
SPORT  
SPLIT



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## About Rainbow Youth for Sporting Equality

Rainbow Youth for Sporting Equality (RYSE) is a multilateral European project improving experiences for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer young people in sport by creating training for sports educators on LGBTIQ+ issues and experiences in sport.

RYSE is run by three partners, LEAP Sports Scotland, European University Sports Association and Queer Sport Split. The project started by speaking with young people who outlined what they expect from an inclusive and non-discriminatory sports environment, we used that information to create this charter. RYSE trains youth sports educators to create such an environment through an online training module that can be accessed by sports educators across Europe for free. In all aspects, the project has worked across different youth sports settings, targeting both formal and non-formal education settings.

## Glossary

Language is powerful and can be used to harm or benefit people. It has historically been used to harm LGBTIQ+ people and so it is important to know the right language to use and to consider language that is suitable for individuals you work with as well when referring to groups of people.

We understand that language can be difficult, the correct words for things are constantly changing and our use of language around LGBTIQ+ issues is always improving. Throughout the Charter we may use language that you are not familiar with so we have outlined some basic definitions of these words for you to refer to if you need some extra guidance.

**Ally** - Someone who is heterosexual / cisgendered and actively supports the LGBTIQ+ community

**Asexual** - A person who does not experience sexual attraction. Asexual people can experience platonic attraction but may have no sexual desire or need within their relationships.

**Binding** - Refers to the process of flattening one's breast tissue in order to create a male-appearing chest. A binder may be a vest, or athletic support top, or be wrapped bandages.

**Bisexual** – A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to people of more than one gender or regardless of gender. Historically definitions of bisexual refer to ‘an attraction towards men and women’ however many bisexual people recognise that there are more than two genders.

**Cisgender** – Individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies and their personal identity. In other words those who are not, or do not identify as transgender.

**Gay** - Refers to someone who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender. Some women prefer to refer to themselves as gay women rather than lesbian, although the word gay is most commonly used in reference to men.

**Gender Binary** – The traditional western system of regarding gender as having only two options: men (with all the traditional notions of masculinity) and women (with all the traditional notions of femininity).

**Gender Dysphoria** - Gender Dysphoria is a when someone experiences discomfort or distress because their gender identity does not match their sex assigned at birth

**Gender Expression** – A person’s external gender related appearance including clothing, speech and mannerisms. Usually defined as connected to masculinity or femininity, however we recognise that people express their gender out with these traditional notions.

**Gender Identity** - A person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Gender Policing** - is when gender normative expressions are imposed or enforced on a person whose gender expression does not fit within the gender binary

**Heterosexual/Straight** - Used to describe people who are emotionally and/or physically attracted to people of the ‘opposite’ gender.

**Homophobia** - The irrational fear, dislike or prejudice against people who are or are perceived to be lesbian and gay people. It can also be used as an all-encompassing term to include the irrational fear, dislike or prejudice against bisexual people and transgender people.

**Intersex** – A person whose chromosomes, reproductive organs or genitalia vary in some way from what is traditionally considered clearly male or female in terms of biological sex. This may be apparent at birth or become apparent later in life - often at puberty, or in the case of some women, when they conceive or try to conceive.

**Lesbian** - Refers to a woman who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to other women.

**LGBTIQ+** - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, Plus

**Non-Binary Gender** - Gender identities that are not exclusively male or female are identities which are outside of the gender binary. People can be both male and female, neither, or their gender may be more fluid (i.e. unfixed and changeable over the course of time). Many view gender as a one dimensional spectrum with male on one end, female on the other, and non-binary in the middle – but the reality is that gender is often more complex.

**'Out'** - To come 'out' is when an LGBTIQ+ tells people, family and friends about their sexuality or gender identity, and/or are public with it. Sometimes LGBTIQ+ people can be 'outed' against their will.

**Pronouns** - Words that are used to refer to someone's gender. For example, 'he' or 'she'. Some people use gender neutral language and use pronouns such as they/their

**Queer** – An umbrella term used for diverse sexual orientations or gender identities that are not heterosexual and do not fit within a gender binary. It may be used to challenge the idea of labels and categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. It is important to note that it is an in-group term, and may be considered offensive to some people.

**Sex** (The noun) – Refers to physical differences between male and female bodies, including the reproductive system and/or other biological characteristics. Sex is most commonly divided into the categories of male and female however 'Intersex' is also possible.

**Sexual orientation** – A person's identity based on emotional and/or physical attraction to individuals of a different gender, the same gender, or more than one gender. Sexual orientation can also be seen as a complex mix of an individual's identity, attraction and behaviour. However, identity is the most important aspect as sexual orientation can only be determined by the individual; attraction and/or behaviour alone do not determine someone's sexual orientation.

**Transgender** - An umbrella term for those whose gender identity or expression differs in some way from the gender assigned to them at birth and conflicts with the 'norms' expected by the society they live in. Included in the overall transgender umbrella are transsexual people, non-binary gender identities and cross-dressing people.

**Transsexual** - When a person's gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned at birth based on their biological sex. Transsexual people may have medical treatment, such as hormone treatment or surgery to bring their physical appearance more into line with their gender.

**Trans Man** - A transgender person who was assigned female at birth but whose gender identity is that of a man. Trans men should be treated as men and male pronouns should be used.

**Trans Woman** - A transgender person who was assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is that of a woman. Trans women should be treated as women and female pronouns should be used.

**Transphobia** – The irrational fear, dislike or prejudice or discrimination against those who are or are perceived to be transgender. Transgender people can also experience homophobia when in same-sex relationships or for not conforming to gender norms.

## Gendered Sport

### The Problem

We often see sport through a gendered lens, by this we mean that different sports are frequently seen as either masculine or feminine. Examples of this are that football and rugby are for boys while dance and gymnastics are for girls. The more feminine a sport is seen as the weaker the sport is and men who take part are assumed to be gay, while if a sport is seen as masculine it is thought of as strong and women who take part in it are assumed to be lesbians. The gendering of sport in this regard can be harmful for people as it promotes negative stereotypes about men, woman, lesbians and gay men, and because it can 'out' people as LGBTIQ+ who wish to play certain sports. Young people then avoid certain sports in an attempt to not be seen as LGBTIQ+, or become completely disenfranchised and stop taking part in sport altogether.

The other problem that comes with gendering sports is in respect to trans and non-binary people. Trans people are often forced to take part in sports that align with thier sex assigned at birth rather than their gender identity, which can cause poor mental health and dysphoria. For non-binary people who do not identify with any gender, gendered sports can be harmful as it aligns them with a gender they do not identify with and can have similar consequences to trans people playing gendered sport.

Another issue that arises with gendered sport is in regards to uniforms and the sexualisation of people playing certain sports. Often sports will require uniforms that may be revealing, for example swimming and swimming costumes, gymnastics and lycra etc. Young people find it uncomfortable enough to expose their bodies at that age, but it can be much worse for trans people who suffer from gender dysphoria which can make them extremely uncomfortable and unhappy with their bodies. Gender dysphoria can be aggravated by having to wear clothes that are form fitting or are traditionally associated with certain genders. In terms of the sexualisation of sport we see a lot of women's sports being given sexualised uniforms, for example, womens beach volleyball. This sexualised uniform amplifies gender stereotypes and can cause distress for both women, men and non-binary people.

### What can you do?

1. You can stop promoting sports as gendered through the way you speak about them. Be aware of the types of words you use when describing different types of sports, as

well as the way you refer to individuals who play those sports. Try and neutralise the way you speak about things, for example instead of saying 'guys' you can say 'team' or instead of 'stop running like a girl' you can say 'run faster'.

2. Try and encourage individuals to take part in sport regardless of their gender. For example, if a girl wants to play football don't tell her it is only for boys, try and find a way she is able to play whether it is creating a girls team or finding one for her to join. If a boy wants to do gymnastics you can encourage him and coach him like you would anyone else.
3. Wherever it is possible to have mixed gender groups. This will mean that everyone feels welcome trying out any type of sport and that trans and non-binary people won't have the pressure and anxiety of being grouped with the wrong gender.

## Changing Rooms

### **The Problem**

LGBTIQ+ people often experience changing rooms as one of the key barriers to participation in sport. This project has reaffirmed that LGBTIQ+ people still see the changing room process as a point of great anxiety and often view changing rooms as non inclusive spaces. Issues of homophobia and abuse have at times been given greater amplification in changing rooms and are often under-reported and under policed. The simple act of even entering a public bathroom or changing room was cited as often highly stressful and sometimes scary experiences.

Issues around trans-identifying people in changing rooms are of significant relevance. The idea of “gender policing” is particularly highlighted through changing rooms whereby anyone dressed or groomed in a way that doesn’t conform to someone else’s idea of gender can bring about bullying and harassment. The changing rooms often enhance gender dysphoria because people are forced to use rooms that don’t match their gender identity or expression, similarly young people have to undress in front of each other which can be extremely uncomfortable or out them as trans, which opens them up to bullying and harassment. The changing room process has seen LGBTIQ+ people experiencing negative impacts on self-confidence, decreased body image and bullying and harassment.

Aside from trans issues lesbian, gay or bisexual young people can get bullied and harassed in changing rooms, one of the most common things LGB people are told is that they are looking at people in the changing rooms or being ‘perverted’ in some kind of way. This is very misguided and a very hurtful and false statement. LGB people can feel like they can’t participate in changing room conversations or jokes as much as they risk being bullied or accused of inappropriate behaviour.

One of the big problems with changing rooms is that they are often not monitored by sports educators for privacy and safeguarding reasons. Sports educators then rely on people reporting incidents and word of mouth. People frequently do not report out of fear of being bullied further and teachers are unaware of the bullying and harassment that happens in the changing rooms.

### **What can you do?**

Solutions to these issues are not as clear cut as black and white however strategies and solutions can be put in place to assist LGBTIQ+ people when faced with issues around changing rooms.

1. Sports educators can adopt best practice approaches for monitoring and managing changing rooms to support LGBTIQ+ people. This could be by promoting your reporting systems, appointing a student or young person liaison, or having a private section in the changing rooms where you can hear what is being said.
2. Take time to consider your reporting system and make sure that young people feel safe to tell you if bullying has happened e.g. have zero tolerance posters. If you don't have a reporting system you can create one in a way that best works with your group.
3. Best practices for changing rooms is to create individual changing facilities, this could be cubicles or even hanging up fabric to create separate changing areas for individuals. If you are unable to achieve this, making sure there is an alternative space for anyone who does not feel comfortable using the changing room is also helpful. This could be a toilet or individual cubicle. If you have created an alternative space for people to use, make sure the young people know it is available and make sure they are able to ask to use it without the rest of the group being aware, as this can cause similar problems to group changing rooms.
4. The use of signs in changing rooms to enforce and encourage acceptable behaviour of all persons when using changing rooms. These could be a code of conduct, encouragement of inclusion, information about your reporting process etc.

## Language

### The Problem

Language is a powerful tool of communication, and the words we use have direct as well as indirect meanings and effects. While using insults and slurs can be easily identified, some words or phrases are used without realizing the impact they may have on others. Also stereotyping, even if used inadvertently, is offensive, harmful, spreads misinformation and can lead to provocations. Inappropriate use of language can lead to verbal abuse, bullying or mobbing by forcefully criticizing, insulting, or denouncing another person or group of people.

Some examples of inappropriate and abusive language:

“faggot, pufter, dyke, lezzie, tranny, shemale, hermie, queer, etc” are slurs directly targeting LGBTIQ+ people for their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

“That is so gay” also if used to mark things that are uncommon, even if it does not necessarily imply sexual orientation or gender identity, it is hurtful and stigmatizes LGBTIQ+ community, as well as those who might be perceived as part of it.

“You run/play/throw/jump/etc like a girl” is sexist and insulting, diminishes the position of women, placing them in an inferior position regardless of which gendered person it is referred to.

“What kind of guy becomes a cheerleader?” is an example of a stereotype, ridiculing both the person as well as sport/activity. Reinforcing negative gender stereotypes is anything but harmless.

### What Can You Do?

1. Use inclusive or neutral language for example instead of saying boys and girls, you could say team. By neutralising your language you include everyone and do not risk misgendering anyone. This can also help to prevent stereotypes surrounding different types of sports and who can participate.
2. Ask people for their pronouns. Asking for pronouns e.g. She/her, He/Him, They/Them helps you become more inclusive of trans and non-binary young people.
3. Not use any stereotyping.

4. Use positive affirmations. This can encourage further participation for LGBTIQ+ young people and can also prevent people for being LGBTIQ+phobic to begin with as it encourages young people to see each other in a positive way.
5. Respect diversity.
6. Embrace and encourage inclusion.
7. Address the inappropriate and offensive language, by providing explanations or sanctioning (see Consequences).

## Consequences

### **The Problem**

In order for participants in sport to be motivated to change their behaviors that are hurtful to others it is sometimes important that they feel the consequences of their actions.

Without consequences young people can feel encouraged to act in a way that is harmful to others as they may believe it is acceptable. For young LGBTIQ+ a lack of consequences can cause disengagement with sport as they may feel it is too much of a risk that they will get bullied or harassed. Without consequences LGBTIQ+ people can face harassment in changing rooms where there is little or no monitoring from sports educators, or whilst taking part in sport.

### **What can you do?**

This should not be treated as an isolated activity, separate from education processes and internal social/group dynamics (especially youth and youth workers). In respect to this and other reasons, like type, scale, frequency and context of offense/harm done, the consequences could vary:

1. For verbal abuse out of ignorance, the participants should be pointed to the issue immediately and educated on why what they said was wrong and how they can improve their language in the future as soon as possible (if not on the spot).
2. In case the situation has gone beyond a single person's capabilities, an informative/educational group discussion should be organised on the topic at hand with support or in presence of an expert, like a social worker.
3. In the case of a physical or verbal violence that was intentional and harmful, the incident needs to be reported instantly to the sports educators or the person in charge. A clear plan for dealing with the consequences should be made ideally based on the internal regulations of your group or school; from expelling/banning for hard offenses, to suspensions or voluntary/communal work.  
As for online bullying/harassment, these should be considered as an act of verbal violence in public space and consequences dealt with as such, but with an additional need for public-online apology.
4. In all situations where harm has been caused the offending party should have to apologise for their actions.

5. Group reflection and learning can be created from negative situations, this can help prevent anything similar happening again in your group.

Consequences should be prepared in advance and your group should know what will happen if they do not follow the statement of inclusion (see following chapter). Ideally participants would be committed to the processes that include possible work with both victim and offender if needed.

## Statement of Inclusion

### **The Problem**

For its gender binary division and homophobic/transphobic reputation LGBTIQ+ people often do not feel welcomed and safe in sport environments. Even if a group is inclusive or has inclusive members it can be very intimidating for a LGBTIQ+ individual to join if they don't know this. Representation is a big issue for LGBTIQ+ people as they often don't see themselves represented in groups or events which can put them off attending. We know already that there are a number of reasons why LGBTIQ+ disengaged with sport, but for those who are trying to re-engage it is very difficult to do when they cannot tell if the group they are joining is inclusive and this frequently stops them trying to participate in sport.

As well as this without a statement of inclusion in schools or group young people can feel very vulnerable to bullying and harassment and even feel like they cannot report this to the sports educator. This often leaves young people feeling incredibly isolated, lonely and that it is unsafe to continue to play sport in that group.

### **What can you do?**

Creating a Statement of inclusion is a way to change this.

1. A sports group or Physical Education class can make their environment inclusive by simply stating their inclusion policies. It can be in the form of a poster stating that LGBTIQ+ people are welcome or more general statement that welcomes people of different genders, sexualities, abilities, races, nationalities, religions, classes, etc.
2. Statements of Inclusion can be promoted through websites and social networks. Consider using images that are representative and relatable to make young people feel included and safe within the group.
3. You could make it clear to the group, at the beginning of each session or on a regular basis, what the statement of inclusion is.
4. Furthermore, signing our charter and linking it to your website will assure everyone of the inclusive policies implemented in your organisation or venue and make it a safe space for everyone to practice their desired sport activity.