

CREATING SAFER SPACES FOR NON-BINARY & GENDER NON- CONFORMING ATHLETES



A guide FOR COACHES, OFFICIALS & PARENTS (and anyone cheering on a team, leading an exercise class or playing a sport)

CURRENTLY IN SPORT...

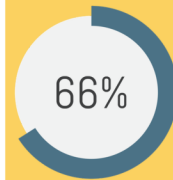
Most sports remain gender-segregated, divided into two 'binary' categories: boys or girls, women or men. In order to take part in sports activities, people generally need to make a choice (or follow specific organizational regulations) to join either the women's/girl's or the men's/boy's team.

CONSIDER...

There are many people whose **gender identity** falls outside of the "binary" humans have created, including individuals whose gender is non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender fluid or two-spirit. In order to play or compete in sports, these athletes must almost always choose one of the binary genders (to compete individually or on a team), or not be involved in sport at all.



non-binary youth in Canada who have avoided joining an organized team sport report witnessing discriminatory comments, and avoided sport because of the non-inclusive actions they observed of coaches and/or team members.



of non-binary youth in Canada who have avoided joining an organized team sport shared the reason was they would have to play on a binary gendered (mens/boys or womens/girls) team.

The positive actions in this resource can support creating safer spaces, even if you aren't aware you are coaching or officiating a non-binary athlete. There may be non-binary people on the team (or in the stands) and your language may have inadvertently hurt or made someone uncomfortable. We can all be part of creating more inclusive spaces by eliminating gender-based assumptions and binary gendered language.

*All Canadians have gender expression human rights protections,
and all have the right to play sports without changing how they express their gender.*

It is important to treat gender non-conforming athletes the same as you would anyone else.

Aim to put the individual first and to ensure that your sport is inclusive and that all people can participate and develop to the best of their abilities, feel safe, and have fun.



Find the most up-to-date version of this resource here:
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Gender Inclusivity in Sport



WHAT YOU CAN DO:

LANGUAGE

1. Aim to use person-centered, gender friendly language that includes everyone when addressing athletes, such as "players", "athletes", "everyone", "folks" (instead of ladies, gentlemen, boys or girls). This includes email/written communication, when gathering the team, or cheering.
2. When talking about the team consider saying something like "the athletes who play on the boys team/girls team" or simply "the team" as this is more inclusive of everyone without assumptions of the gender of the athletes.
3. Try using short-hand for team names in ALL communication. For example, U13B or JVG. Everyone knows what the "B" and "G" stand for, but the non-binary athlete is not constantly bombarded with the gendered words of boys or girls.
4. Support the entire team by using gender friendly (inclusive) language that includes ALL athletes. Avoid gendered language such as ~~"Way to go boys!"~~ or ~~"Good job girls"~~, instead try using:



Team Place
Team Name
Colour

"Way to go Riverside!"

"Great job Gators!"

"Let's go Blue!"



Pronouns are words that replace nouns to help avoid repetition and make our language more concise. They replace a specific object or subject, referring to a specific person, place or thing. Examples of pronouns are: I, we, she, he, they, you, it, etc.

NAMES & PRONOUNS

1. Share your pronouns, and invite others to do the same.
2. Always use the name and pronouns that each athlete has asked to use.
3. When in doubt, use "they/them" pronouns, and words such as child, youth, athlete, parent, grandparent - these are all gender-friendly terms!
4. It can be helpful to pause before using pronouns, cheering or calling the team together, as you practice using gender-inclusive language.

A NOTE about MAKING MISTAKES... it is expected to make mistakes. Avoid over-apologizing, simply correct yourself and move on (whether you recognize the mistake or someone points it out).

HOW TO BE AN ALLY

1. Educate yourself (check out the resource and reference list for ideas).
2. Don't make assumptions. When unsure ask, and begin with gender-friendly language that is inclusive of all.
3. Reflect on your actions and language. **Practice, Try, Apologize and Move on.**
4. Voice concerns in kind & respectful ways. Consider how you can call out & call in others by challenging experiences of transphobia or discrimination to create a safer environment for everyone involved in sport, physical activity and exercise.
5. Be a positive role model. It is the adult's responsibility to ensure all athletes have safe experiences in sport, encouraging life-long physical activity!

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RESOURCES:

Airton, L., 2024. "Gender: Your Guide, 2nd edition - The Gender-Friendly Primer on What to Know, What to Say, and What to Do in the New Gender Culture." <https://www.leeairton.com/genderyourguide>

Egale Canada.

Components of Human Identity - <https://egale.ca/awareness/the-genderbread-person/>

Pronoun Usage Guide - <https://egale.ca/awareness/pronoun-usage-guide/>

Affirming & Inclusive Language - <https://egale.ca/awareness/affirming-and-inclusive-language/>

Tips for Allyship - <https://egale.ca/awareness/tips-on-how-to-practice-lgbtqi2s-allyship/>

2SLGBTQIA+ Terms & Definitions - <https://egale.ca/awareness/terms-and-definitions/>

Resources - <https://egale.ca/resources/#category=resources>

gegi.ca

Tip Sheets & Resources - <https://www.gegi.ca/resources/#tip-sheets>

<https://www.gegi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Gegis-Gender-Friendly-Athletics-Tips.pdf>

OPHEA (Ontario Physical and Health Education Association) and gegi.ca

"Doing Gender-Inclusive Physical Education & Sport" - <https://ophea.net/media/3207/download?inline>

Ontario Hockey Federation (OHF) and Egale - **Pre-Season Chat Checklist**

https://www.ohf.on.ca/media/kebp2sjw/pre-season_chat_checklist-1.pdf

OHL Gender Identity Training - <https://www.ohf.on.ca/coaches/gender-identity-training>

Glossary of Terms - https://www.ohf.on.ca/media/bxdguzna/glossary_of_terms.pdf

Trans Student Educational Resources, 2015. **"The Gender Unicorn."** <http://www.transstudent.org/gender>

Uclan Publishing, 2020. **"Non-Binary Inclusion in Sport."** <https://leapsports.org/files/4225-Non-Binary%20Inclusion%20in%20sport%20Booklet.pdf>

You Can Play. **"LGBTQ+ Inclusion Resource Library."** <https://www.youcanplay.org/resources>

NOTE: New resources are continually being created, language is always evolving and this guide continues to be up-to-date.



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REFERENCES:

Austin, F., Wright, K.E., Jackson, B., Lin, A., Schweizer, K., & Furzer, B.J., 2024. "A scoping review of trans and gender diverse children and adolescents' experiences of physical activity, sport, and exercise participation." in Mental Health & Physical Activity. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhpa.2024.100576>

Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, 2016. "Creating Inclusive Environments for Trans Participants in Canadian Sports." https://www.the519.org/wp-content/uploads/PDF_Download/CCES_TransInclusionPolicy_2016_r5.pdf

Coaches Association of Ontario, 2020. "Safe Sport 101: Inclusive Language." <https://safesport101.coachesontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Safe-Sport-101-Inclusive-Language.pdf>

Keyser-Verreault, A. & Demers, G., 2023. "Transgender and non-binary athlete needs: Challenges and best practices." in Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching (Vol. 23, No. 2). <https://coach.ca/sites/default/files/archive/2023-03/Transgender-and-non-binary-athletes-need-Challenges-and-best-practices-Apr2023.pdf>

Gumprich, M., & Hare, N., 2023. "The Canadian Non-Binary Youth in Sport Report." <https://ankorstransconnect.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/non-binary-youth-in-sport-report.pdf>

Uclan Publishing, 2020. "Non-Binary Inclusion in Sport." <https://leapsports.org/files/4225-Non-Binary%20Inclusion%20in%20sport%20Booklet.pdf>

WHY I CREATED THIS GUIDE:

Hi! I'm Heidi (she/her). I am the mother of a non-binary teen athlete who loves sports, and we've been navigating the world of sport for many years. I have always taken time to connect with coaches to ensure my child will feel safe on each team. When I'm sitting in the stands, I often I hear cheers using gendered language, (intended for good) and those cheers don't include my child and it breaks my heart (and their spirit) a little every time. I wished I could share a guide to support coaches, officials and parents. Not finding anything - I started creating this resource. Together, through small shifts, let's ensure everyone feels safe and included in sport. Our language matters and makes a difference!

I wish to thank all the trans non-binary folks who offered their feedback and support in the creation of this guide. Your input was incredibly valuable! Keep being you!

To everyone reading this guide, thank you for reading, considering, engaging and sharing!

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ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS:



FACILITY

- Ensure there are individualized (private) spaces for bathroom and changing, and when possible non-gendered or all gender bathrooms & change rooms.
- Check ahead of time at facilities you will be visiting and inform the athlete so they can be prepared.
- Advocate and educate facilities that need to create more inclusive options!



UNIFORM

Consider uniform options that could be used by all, and ensure all athletes feel comfortable in the provided uniform or have options available. Currently many uniforms for girl's/women's teams tend to be tight-fitting and many uniforms for boy's/men's teams tend to be loose-fitting. Be willing to work with athletes to find a solution.



POLICIES

- Ensure there are policies about respect in sport, diversity and inclusivity... AND check that all your language and actions ensure a felt-sense of belonging and inclusion.
- Engage with members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community when developing policies. Ensure your organization is a living example of your policies and values.
- Constantly re-evaluate and be responsive to making changes.
- Policies protect, but people's words & actions create safe spaces. It is our responsibility as coaches, parents and referees to model and support all athletes.



LANGUAGE

Consider and update language on website, emails, policies, sign up sheets, information posters, registration forms or when addressing a crowd be inclusive of all genders.

Instead of:

Co-ed (which implies 2 genders)
Include a member of the opposite gender
Female or male players
Boys & Girls
Ladies & Gentlemen

An Idea to Try:

All gender or Mixed gender
Include a member of another gender
Female-matching or Male-matching
Children, Athletes or Youth
Friends & Family or Everyone Gathered



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A FEW MORE CONSIDERATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS:

CONSIDER:

- Continue to consider options for sport competition where gender-based competition can be eliminated, and all genders can compete together or based on skill, strength, or other components. See the reference and resource list for some creative options, or begin exploring this yourself.
- A note about registration forms. Consider if gathering gender and/or sex information is essential, if not, don't ask. If you ask, ensure that gender non-conforming athletes are able to register for teams of either team (where binary gendered teams exist).
- When posting a sign-up sheet, consider having all athletes sign-up on one page for a specific sport. This allows all interested athletes to show interest and the coach or athletic director can create teams, and/or connect with individual athletes.

A note about language (see more definitions on resource page):

A trans man/ male/ boy is a man/male/boy,
a trans woman/female/girl is a woman/female/girl,
and a non-binary person is simply a person.

GET SUPPORT:

- Support is available.
- When in doubt ask. Include voices from members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community
- Get outside eyes to edit and review your documents.
- Re-read before sending an email with the lens of gender inclusivity.
- Engage in education, training or presentations.
- Remember mistakes are expected. Practice, Try, Apologize and Move on.

NOTE: Language is always evolving, best practice continues to evolve and this guide continues to be up-to-date to reflect changes. Please check back regularly to ensure you have the most current version.



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