



Education Department Resource

Creating a Safer Climate for LGBT Athletes and Coaches

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Introduction

Coaches and physical educators are among the most important and influential role models in the lives of students, and the lessons they teach are as important and frequently more long lasting than those imparted in the classroom. It is therefore critical that athletic personnel work to reduce sexism, heterosexism and all other prejudices that limit the opportunities of students and athletes.

The following two checklists developed by author and social justice educator, Pat Griffin, offer a starting point for coaches and physical educators committed to an LGBT-inclusive team environment. The first checklist highlights the many reasons why coaches need to be concerned about anti-LGBT bias. The second provides an assessment survey for determining the needs of specific schools, and includes examples of practice that reflect hostile and inclusive environments.

Reasons Why Coaches Need to Address Anti-LGBT Bias in Athletics

- All schools include lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students, staff, and parents even if they have not made themselves known to the school community.
- Coaches have a responsibility to make their teams safe for all athletes, including LGBT athletes.
- All athletes interact with LGBT teachers, coaches, friends, or family members.
- Athletes will be living in a society and world in which LGBT people are present and increasingly visible. Young people need to have an opportunity to develop attitudes and beliefs not based in fear or ignorance.
- Coaches are important role models in athletes' lives. Coaches are responsible for teaching more than sport skills and strategies. They are also responsible for setting examples of acceptance for difference.
- In 2001, the American Journal of Public Health reported that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are more than 2 times as likely to be suicidal as their straight counterparts and that 15% of young people with an attraction toward the same gender had considered or attempted suicide, compared to 7% of other youth. College and high school coaches are working with this age group.
- Statistics show that hate crimes and harassment directed at many minority groups including LGBT people are often committed by high school and college

aged young men. Coaches can provide leadership to stop this violent behavior.

- Discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender coaches and athletes is often not addressed because they are too afraid to protest or because there is no legal protection in place.
- Because few LGBT coaches or athletes feel safe enough to disclose their identities, other athletes and coaches, in the absence of accurate information, believe that destructive stereotypes of LGBT people are true.
- Naming LGBT people in athletics as the problem, rather than anti-LGBT bias, perpetuates ignorance, fear, and bigotry.
- LGBT athletes learn to feel shame and self-hatred and hide their identities at great psychological cost.
- Some heterosexual young people are defensive and fearful because their prejudices about LGBT people are unchallenged. Anti-LGBT bias affects

heterosexual young people because they are afraid of being thought to be LGBT. They restrict extracurricular interests, career choices, and friendships to avoid association with being LGBT.

- Anti-LGBT bias is used as a way to limit and marginalize women's sports. Many women do not choose to participate in sport because they fear being called lesbians.
- Anti-LGBT bias is used to make men and boys fear expressing feelings and interests that are outside rigid traditional conceptions of masculinity.
- Unless coaches take action against anti-LGBT bias, the next generation of young coaches and athletes will inherit the same prejudices of previous generations of coaches and athletes.
- Because it is the right thing to do.

Assessing the Athletic Climate for LGBT Athletes and Coaches

HOSTILE ← =====> CONDITIONALLY TOLERANT ← =====> OPEN & INCLUSIVE

The following questions will help you to determine what changes need to be made in your school to create a safer and more affirming athletic environment for students. The questions are followed by specific examples of practice that reflect "hostile," "tolerant," and "open" athletic environments so that you can see where your school fits in and how to move it toward the inclusive end of the spectrum.

1. Is sexual orientation and gender identity/expression included in athletic department non-discrimination policies?
2. Is protection against employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression included in professional union contracts?
3. How supportive of addressing LGBT issues are athletic department administrators?
4. How supportive of addressing LGBT issues in the athletic department are school administrators (Chancellor, President)?

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| 5. Are LGBT people included in school definitions of multicultural concerns? | × People believe that addressing the needs of LGBT athletes is not part of the department mission. |
| 6. Are LGBT issues included in school-wide diversity programs? | × People believe that LGBT issues only have to do with sex. |
| 7. Are any LGBT athletes or coaches publicly out? | × No one in the athletic department has publicly affirmed that they are LGBT. |
| 8. How are athletes or coaches who come out treated? | × Anti-LGBT slurs or comments are commonly used by athletes and are not interrupted by coaches or other staff. |
| 9. What resources on LGBT-related topics are available for coaches and athletes? | × Anti-LGBT jokes or comments are unchallenged among coaches or other staff. |
| 10. What kind of staff development programs on LGBT-related topics has the athletic department sponsored for coaches, support staff, administration, or athlete? | × LGBT issues are not included in department diversity programming. |
| 11. How do supportive coaches and staff make themselves known to athletes? | × Anti-LGBT graffiti is on walls, windows in locker room, bathrooms. |
| 12. How are anti-LGBT slurs, jokes, or comments by coaches, athletes, or other staff addressed? | × People who believe it is important to address LGBT issues in the athletic department are afraid to say so. |
| 13. How are anti-LGBT actions and behaviors addressed (graffiti, property damage, harassment, intimidation, violence)? | × People who say it is important to address homophobia and the needs of LGBT athletes are assumed to be or teased about being LGBT themselves. |
| 14. How are coaches prepared to address parental concerns about homosexuality in ways that do not discriminate against LGBT athletes or coaches? | × Administrators avoid addressing LGBT issues because it is too controversial or because it has nothing to do with athletics. |
| 15. Are school counseling services trained to address LGBT-related issues in LGBT inclusive ways? | × LGBT coaches or those thought to be are discriminated against (fired, not hired, harassed). |

HOSTILE

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| × School and department non-discrimination policies do not include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. | × LGBT people would never bring a same-sex date or partner to team or department social events. |
| × No one talks about LGBT people or concerns or people only talk about them in negative ways. | × LGBT athletes or those thought to be are isolated or harassed by teammates or coaches. |

- × A coach's perceived sexual orientation is a factor in hiring: Heterosexual coaches are preferred.
- × Department personnel assure parents of athletes that no LGBT athletes or coaches are present in the department.
- × Coaches have formal or informal policies barring LGBT athletes from their teams.
- × It is commonly believed that all the male coaches and athletes are heterosexual and that all the women coaches and athletes are lesbian.

CONDITIONALLY TOLERANT

- School policies on non-discrimination and harassment include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, but few people are aware of it and there is no direct connection between the policies and programming.
- LGBT coaches and athletes are tolerated as long as they keep their identities secret and hidden.
- Administrators allow individual coaches or teams to address LGBT issues but prefer that it be done privately.
- People believe that LGBT issues are only relevant to LGBT people.
- The needs of LGBT athletes are treated as individual counseling issues.
- If parents or athletes complain about the athletic department addressing LGBT issues the program is immediately in jeopardy.
- LGBT coaches or athletes who become too visible in the community or on-campus are warned that their visibility is a problem.

OPEN AND INCLUSIVE

- ✓ LGBT coaches, staff, and athletes are publicly out if they choose to be.
- ✓ School non-discrimination policies include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression and are known and used by staff and athletes.
- ✓ LGBT athletes and staff are welcomed to bring partners to department or team social events.
- ✓ LGBT athletes have access to school-based support and social programs designed to meet their needs.
- ✓ All athletic department staff members participate in staff development programs designed to help them address anti-LGBT bias among athletes and to respond to the needs of LGBT athletes.
- ✓ The athletic director publicly supports programming to address anti-LGBT bias in athletics and the needs of LGBT athletes.
- ✓ Making athletics safe for LGBT and heterosexual athletes is regarded by coaches and staff as a part of their professional responsibilities.
- ✓ Athletes who engage in anti-LGBT actions are disciplined.
- ✓ Parental complaints or concerns about LGBT coaches or athletes are received cordially, but administrators support and coaches value diversity in the athletic program.
- ✓ A coach or athlete's sexual orientation and or gender identity/expression is not a factor in determining their eligibility for teams or coaching positions.

