

# LEADING THE WAY: Working with LGBTQ Athletes & Coaches

## A Practical Resource For Coaches

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*Leading the Way: Working with LGBTQ Athletes and Coaches* is a comprehensive resource designed for coaches, and is based on the lived experiences of Canadian athletes and coaches. The resource highlights current issues in Canadian sport, from playground to podium, and aims to make sport a more welcoming place for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (transgender), two-spirited, queer or questioning (LGBTQ). *Leading the Way* provides information to help coaches understand LGBTQphobia and the negative impact it has on everyone in their sport. It suggests best practices for creating a sport environment that is safe and respectful for all.

*“Athletics teams are, like work teams, made up of people from different cultures, religions, genders, races, abilities, political perspectives and sexual orientations ... It does not require every member of a team to agree with everyone else on the team about political points of view, sexual orientation, religion or anything else.*

*It does not mean that every member of a team approves of how every other member of a team lives her or his life. The goal of inclusion and respect is that team members recognize and agree to work together respectfully across differences. These goals invite student-athletes and coaches to build a winning team and nurture a team climate in which all members are valued for their contributions to the team and for their individual character and commitment, regardless of their individual identities or philosophies.”*

– National College Athletic Association (NCAA) Champions Of Respect

### LGBTQphobia

An umbrella term to describe a number of phobias, including homophobia, bi-phobia, and transphobia that encompass a range of negative feelings toward those who are (or assumed to be) LGBTQ. LGBTQphobia can be manifested in hostile or derisive language, or other negative actions directed toward those who are (or assumed to be) LGBTQ.

## Strategies for Working with LGBTQ Athletes and Coaches

### 1. Establish an inclusive environment of openness and respect for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, religion, class, size, or sexual or gender identity:

- a. Understand your own beliefs and feelings about LGBTQphobia, and recognize and act upon the important leadership role you play as a coach.
- b. Assess how welcoming your team environment is to those who are LGBTQ.
- c. Describe acceptable behaviours, clarify disrespectful behaviours, and highlight behaviours that demonstrate an inclusive environment of openness and respect.
- d. Act quickly to address LGBTQphobic language, jokes and actions that ridicule or put down LGBTQ people, women or any minority groups.
- e. Deal with any discrimination or problems that the athlete or coach encounters from teammates, training staff, parents, supporters or other coaching staff.
- f. Ensure the team locker room is a safe place, free of unwanted sexual attention, taunting or teasing.



- g. Use language and images inclusive of diverse families, friendships, and sexual and gender identities; for example, extend invitations to include boyfriends and girlfriends, husbands, wives and partners or significant others.
- h. Be aware that many other countries still have strict laws about being LGBTQ. Take the time to know whether a country or city is safe for all team members.

**2. Provide strong, positive leadership that models fair and respectful behaviour:**

- a. Be mindful of your own attitudes and beliefs.
- b. Avoid assumptions or judgements based on stereotypes or rumour. Assume there are LGBTQ members involved with your team - either directly as athletes, coaches or training staff, or indirectly as family members or friends.
- c. Never ask someone about their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- d. Be ready for when someone who is LGBTQ comes out to you.
- e. Make your support for LGBTQ team members visible and intentional, using LGBTQ inclusive language.
- f. Be open to speaking with athletes, coaches or other support staff who have questions or express concerns.
- g. Become a visible ally, show your support by wearing a positive space pin or sticker or taking part in other ally initiatives.
- h. Become more familiar with LGBTQ issues in sport. Know what resources are available to assist those who are LGBTQ and may be struggling.
- i. If you are LGBTQ yourself, consider taking steps to live your sport life more openly as an “out” coach.

**3. Put in place the necessary organizational frameworks to assist you in working with LGBTQ athletes and coaches:**

- a. Ensure your organization has an equity policy and/or code of conduct that prohibits discrimination on the basis of perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.
- b. Ensure your policies and processes are inclusive and non-discriminatory (e.g., selection criteria, playing time, dating policies, leadership nominations).
- c. Educate staff, team members and volunteers on their responsibilities for being respectful and non-discriminatory to all, regardless of their own personal beliefs.

“As a coach of both male and females in my sport, I see a general pervasive and negative attitude at all levels around those who are gay. This is largely conveyed through the use of inappropriate language. Homophobic and often sexist language is not restricted to one gender, age group, or ability level. It starts with young children and persists throughout our sport. We need to clean up the talk because it perpetuates a negative stereotype about those who are LGBTQ and women.”  
**- Male Coach, 2013**

*“In order for an athlete to compete at their highest level, I believe it’s important to have a high level of self-worth and confidence. When you are in an environment that accepts you regardless of race, age, religious affiliation or sexual orientation, then and only then can an athlete really push the limits in competition. I realize there is a separation between what we do and who we are but the second we feel as though we have something to hide, our performance suffers. This is the best I have ever played and I think it’s a direct reflection of being proud of who I am, on and off the field.”*

**– Erin Mcleod, Goalkeeper and Olympic Bronze Medallist Canada’s Women’s Soccer Team In London 2012**



A full version of the Leading the Way resource for coaches is available in both official languages and can be accessed, at <https://womenandsport.ca/resources/publications/leading-the-way/>



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