

Making Sports Safe for LGBTQ Athletes

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The Downs Group LLC

Improving Services and Outcomes for Older Youth



Your Presenter

- Chris Downs
- Developmental Psychologist
- Worked on youth issues for 35+ years, specializing in older youth issues
- University, Transition Center, National Foster Care Foundation
- The Downs Group LLC, offices in Seattle and Denver



Who are you?

- Specialty?
- Area of country?
- Why this topic?



Shared Agreements

- Peanut Free Zone please
- Confidentiality
- Respect
- Suspend Judgment; Listen with “Wonder”
- Step Up/Step Back
- We are all somewhere on a continuum of learning
- Others?



Plan of Attack

- Rapid review of terminology and basic facts
- The problems for LGBTQ Athletes
- Impact of the problem
- Ways to combat the problem
- Resources and ways to learn more



Rapid Review of Terminology & Facts

- Basic terms: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer
- “Coming Out”
- LGBTQ Youth may use terms you don’t know or don’t like.
- They might sometimes use the term “queer.”
What to do?



Rapid Review of Terminology & Facts

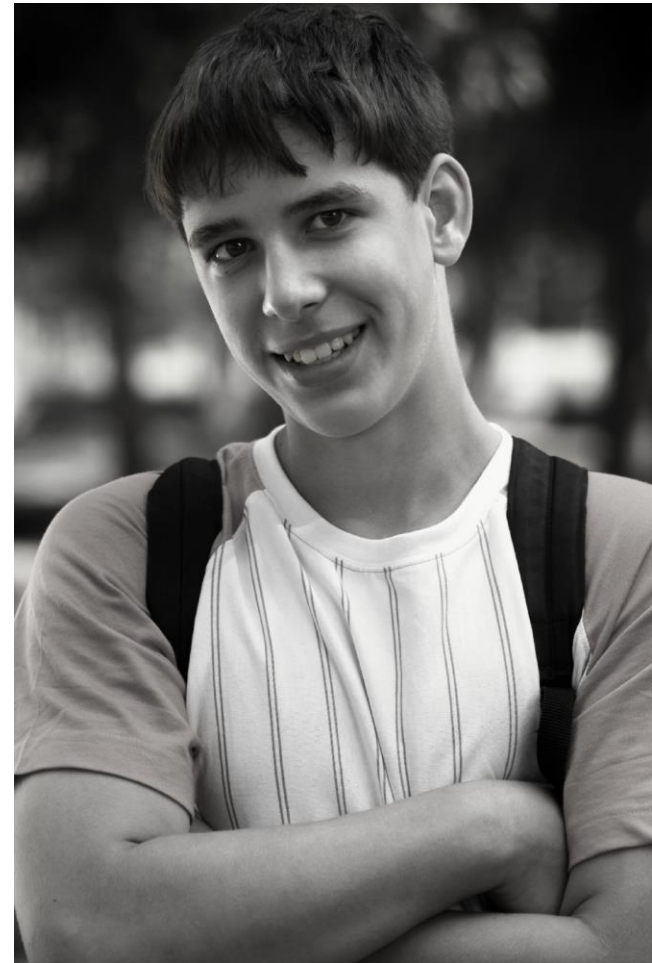
Here are some terms we should avoid using and why:

- Queer (although youth are reclaiming this)
- Faggot, Dyke
- She-he, He-she, Shim, It, Tranny
- Homosexual, Hermaphrodite
- Lifestyle, Preference, Choice, Alternative Family
- Gaydar
- Note: you may hear LGBTQ people use these terms; please don't assume you can if you are not LGBTQ



Rapid Review of Terminology & Facts

- Awareness of being different than others:
 - Age 4 - 6
- Attraction to same-sex others?
 - Age 9 - 11
- Awareness that one is lesbian, gay or bisexual?
 - Ages 14 – 16



What is the Problem?

When it comes to bullying, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students are prime targets in gym class (and in sports in general).

*Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network
(GLSEN)*



Some recent statistics:

(from GLSEN)

- ✓ More than 28% of LGBT student athletes report being harassed or assaulted while playing on a team because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.
- ✓ LGBT students commonly avoid athletic spaces at school because of feeling unsafe.
- ✓ 74.9% of LGBT students said they felt uncomfortable talking to their PE teachers or coaches about LGBT issues



“I went to a Christian high school, and I was on the football team. When I ended up coming out to those around me, the coach asked me to leave the team, because he felt like it wasn’t morally safe for me to be on the team with the other guys... And then I stopped playing sports altogether.”

A Student Athlete in Southern California



“Out in the Fields” Study

- ✓ 9500 people in six countries, including US
- ✓ US had the highest percentages of verbal threats and slurs directed at LGB athletes
- ✓ 24% of gay men chose not to try out for team sports because of anti-gay experiences in PE
- ✓ 54% said they were “not accepted at all” or “accepted a little” in sports
- ✓ 84% of all US participants (straight and LGB) witnessed homophobia



Out in the Fields Study (continued)

	Gay Participants	Lesbian Participants
Called “faggot” or “dyke”	89%	82%
Received verbal threats of harm	29%	19%
Been bullied	35%	20%
Physically Assaulted	19%	8%



Out in the Fields Study (continued)

- ✓ Of the 2,064 US athletes surveyed,
 - ❑ 78% believed that youth team sports are not safe for LGB athletes
 - ❑ 83% of gay youth and 63% of lesbian youth said they were at least partially in the closet and hid from their teammates, fearing rejection and discrimination from other athletes and coaches



What has been your experience?

Small groups

Share your experiences



The Importance of Others' Reactions to Coming Out

Dr. Caitlin Ryan and
colleagues

Family Acceptance Project

Four Types of Family
Reactions:

- Extremely Accepting
- Very Accepting
- A Little Accepting
- Not at All Accepting



The Importance of Others' Reactions to Someone Coming Out

Family Acceptance	Lifetime Suicide Attempts	Clinical Depression	Illegal Drug Use, last 6 months	STD Diagnosis ever
Extremely Accepting	25%	17%	48%	25%
Very Accepting	55%	33%	51%	20%
A Little Accepting	43%	46%	68%	33%
Not at all Accepting	81%	70%	78%	60%



#1 Predictor of Successful Young Adulthood?

Optimism/Hope for a Personal Future



From Ryan's study (2012)

Family Acceptance	See a Happy Future as an Adult?
Extremely Accepting	92%
Very Accepting	77%
A Little Accepting	59%
Not at all Accepting	35%



The Reality of Being “in the closet”

What might be some of the consequences for an athlete who remains in the closet – for fear of others or for other reasons?



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The Impact of Silence Exercise

1. Three people who are very important to you.
2. Three very important events in your life.
3. Three groups with which you affiliate.
4. Three things you really like to do, such as hobbies.



The Impact of Silence Exercise

- ✓ Find someone you don't know
- ✓ Take your paper with you. Do not show your paper to anyone else.
- ✓ Get to know the new person. Ask questions of them. Try to find out about their lives, what they like to do, etc.
- ✓ Do **NOT** reveal anything listed on your piece of paper.



The Impact of Silence Exercise

- ✓ Who found this easy to do?
- ✓ Who found it more challenging?
- ✓ What were the challenges?
- ✓ Did any of you fib or outright lie?
- ✓ How might this be similar to what LGBTQ athletes go through if they are not “out” to you?



LGBTQ People Make Decisions about being out almost Daily

*A brief interlude:
Chris LOVES to fly*



Don't Out Someone!

- Takes control of the information away from the owner
- Extremely upsetting to most; has been associated with suicidal ideation and suicides
- Ask youth who already knows they are LGBTQ
- Ask with whom you can share this information



Famous Out LGBT Swimming & Diving Athletes

Diving	Swimming
Scott Cranham	Amini Fonua
Tom Daley	Bobby Goldsmith
Matthew Helm	Bruce Hayes
Patrick Jeffrey	Johan Kenkhuis
Greg Louganis	Dominik Koll
Matthew Mitcham	Daniel Kowalski
David Pichler	Diana Nyad
	Ian Thorpe

Combating the Problems of LGBTQ Athlete Safety

1. What are some responsibilities of athletes for LGBTQ athlete safety?
2. What should you do when you hear anti-LGBTQ language? (e.g., “Faggot”)
3. What are your expectations in how other athletes treat LGBTQ athletes?
4. How do you convey your expectations to support LGBTQ athletes?
5. What challenges have you experienced, or do you predict, in working with LGBTQ teammates?



Some Strategies for Working with LGBT Athletes : The Environment

- ✓ Think about and understand your own beliefs about LGBTQ athletes. Seek more information if you struggle or need more information.
- ✓ Take a hard look at your team environment – does it welcome all athletes?
- ✓ Act swiftly to address language, jokes, or actions that put down LGBTQ people. If you don't confront it, you condone it.
- ✓ Make sure the team locker room is a safe place, free of unwanted sexual attention, taunting or teasing.



Some Strategies for Working with LGBT Athletes: Your Leadership

- ✓ Be aware of your own attitudes and beliefs.
- ✓ Avoid judgments based on rumor or stereotypes.
- ✓ Assume that LGBT athletes are on your team.
- ✓ Never ask someone about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Remember, your job is to create a safe environment; they get to choose to come out to you or not.



Some Strategies for Working with LGBT Athletes: Your Leadership

- ✓ Be ready when (not if) someone comes out to you. Ask for time if you need it.
- ✓ Be a visible ally. Speak up!
- ✓ Make it safe for athletes to be out around you.



Reflections on Our Work Today

- Basic terminology; ask when you don't know or don't understand!
- There are specific terms not to use
- Awareness and attraction to same-sex others develops very early
- Very large numbers of LGBT students are uncomfortable with PE teachers and coaches in talking about LGBT issues



Reflections on Our Work Today

- Athletes in the US experience high levels of homophobia and rejection
- 78% of US Athletes believe that youth team sports are not safe for LGB athletes.
- The results of being “Extremely Accepting” when LGBT people come out are amazing!
- The impact of only “a little accepting” or “not at all accepting” are devastating.



Reflections on Our Work Today

- Being in the closet is HARD WORK.
- Every LGBTQ person must decide on coming out on a daily basis.
- Never out someone.
- Risk factors for LGBTQ youth in general are scary.
- There are many things that you can do in your situation – your environment, your leadership, your organization.



Final Questions and Wrap Up

- Final questions?
- Way to contact Chris:

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Get Chris' card

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