

Making Sports Safe for LGBTQ Athletes

October 1, 2015

Dr. Chris Downs

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?

- Coaches?
 - Administrators?
 - Teachers?
 - Others?
-
- For how long?



Shared Agreements

- Peanut Free Zone please
- Confidentiality
- Respect
- Step Up/Step Back
- We are all somewhere on a continuum of learning
- Others?



Plan of Attack

- Rapid review of terminology and basic facts
- Identification and Presentation on 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?
- Strategy – ask them to “school you” on terms you don’t know.
- *“You don’t have to keep up dear, you just have to keep open...”* Anna Madrigal, Tales of the City



Rapid Review of Terminology & Facts

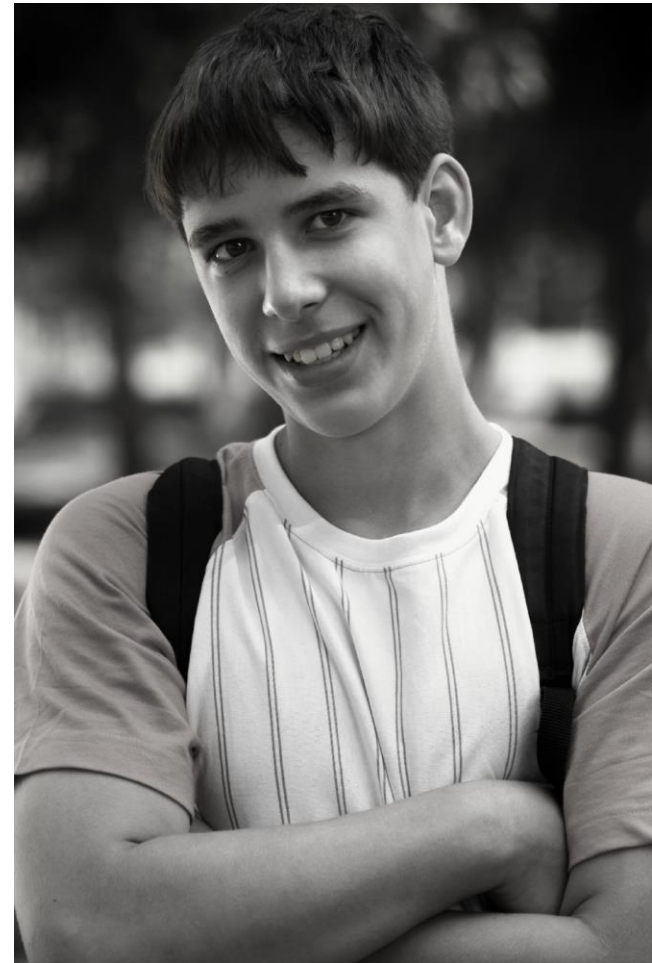
Here are some terms we should avoid using and why:

- 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 people
 - ❑ 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 is the Impact of These Reactions and Discrimination on Athletes?

What are your ideas?



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?



(c) 2015 The Downs Group LLC and Chris Downs



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*



Coming Out Stars Exercise



Coming Out – A Footnote

Exercise:

Take a piece of paper

Jot down something very private and personal

Something you don't want others to know

Fold and hold up when done



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



Risk Factors for LGBTQ Youth and Young Adults

	Heterosexual Youth	LGB Youth
Ever bullied?	16%	25%
Forced into Sex?	6%	16%
Homeless as a teen?	3%	25%
Ever depressed?	23%	44%
Attempted suicide?	6%	22 – 37% (depends on study)
Attempted suicide in past 12 months	4.2%	21.5%
Considered suicide	<1%	50%



Consequences on LGBTQ Athletes

Student athlete Jeffrey Fehr, New Year's Day,
2012 committed suicide

"We will second-guess ourselves forever. But we do know that for years and years, people knocked him down for being different. It damaged him. It wore on him. He could never fully believe how wonderful he was, and how many people loved him."

Jeffrey's Father



Combating these Problems

1. What are some responsibilities of coaches, administrators, and teachers for LGBTQ Youth 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 for supportive treatment of LGBTQ athletes?
5. What challenges have you experienced, or do you predict, in working with your LGBTQ athletes? How might you meet those challenges?



Some Strategies for Working with LGBT Athletes and Coaches: 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.
- ✓ Make your standards clear about behavior and language.
- ✓ Act swiftly to address language, jokes, or actions that put down LGBTQ people.
- ✓ Address any discrimination.
- ✓ Make sure the team locker room is a safe place, free of unwanted sexual attention, taunting or teasing.
- ✓ Use inclusive language whenever possible.



Some Strategies for Working with LGBT Athletes and Coaches: Your Leadership

- ✓ Be aware of your own attitudes and beliefs.
- ✓ Avoid judgments based on rumor or stereotypes.
- ✓ Assume that LGBT athletes are involved with your team.
- ✓ Never ask someone about their sexual orientation or gender identity.



Some Strategies for Working with LGBT Athletes and Coaches: Your Leadership

- ✓ Be ready when (not if) someone comes out to you. Ask for time if you need it.
- ✓ Be a visible ally. “Safe space label”
- ✓ Speak up about LGBTQ issues in an affirmative way.
- ✓ Make it safe for athletes and other staff to be out around you and others.



Some Strategies for Working with LGBT Athletes and Coaches: Your Organization

- ✓ Make sure your organization has a clear policy and/or a code of conduct that prohibits discrimination based on perceived or real sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.
- ✓ Review your policies to make sure they are inclusive and non-discriminatory (this includes selection criteria, dating policies, etc.)
- ✓ Gather as many resources as you can for yourself, your staff, team members and volunteers on LGBTQ athletes.
- ✓ Mandate LGBTQ Training for all staff.
- ✓ Bring in successful local athletes who vary in race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation/gender identity. This underscores your commitment to making your organization safe for all..



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.



Additional Training Resources (also called a shameless plug...)

- The Downs Group LLC provides training on LGBTQ youth issues across the nation, from Honolulu to Florida and everywhere in between.
- We have many outstanding trainers on staff.
- Training can be .5, 1, 1.5 or 2 days in length.
- We work with various size groups – from small to very large. We often customize training based on clients' needs.



Final Questions and Wrap Up

- Final questions?
- Way to contact Chris:

Cdowns@DownsConsultingGroup.com

Get Chris' card

www.DownsConsultingGroup.com

206-251-5075

