

A halftone-style image of a person holding a trophy, rendered in shades of blue and yellow, serves as a background for the top half of the page. The person is seen from the side, holding the trophy high with their right arm.

PLAY TO WIN

IMPROVING
THE LIVES OF
LGBTQ YOUTH
IN SPORTS

A SPECIAL LOOK INTO THE STATE OF
LGBTQ INCLUSION IN YOUTH SPORTS



INTRODUCTION

For millions of Americans, sport embodies our ideals of equality, fairness, perseverance, discipline and integrity. On the field, court or track, in the ring, on the ice, or in the stands, we transcend our differences in the spirit of honest competition and perseverance.

But in too many places, sports are not always a safe or affirming space for aspiring LGBTQ athletes.



Despite the growing visibility of LGBTQ athletes, coaches and officials, and the incremental gains in professional and collegiate sports, youth sports continues to lag behind. Too many LGBTQ youth report that they have witnessed or been the targets of anti-LGBTQ treatment or exclusion. They fear discrimination from coaches or officials, which may force them to conceal their identities from their teams.¹

Transgender and gender expansive youth face even greater barriers to sports participation. Anti-transgender policies work to keep trans youth off the field. Even in jurisdictions with more inclusive policies, a lack of education, awareness and training among coaches and parents can make the experience actively hostile for trans youth.

¹ Dennison E, Kitchen A. (2015). Out on the Fields: The First International Study on Homophobia in Sport. Nielsen, Bingham Cup Sydney 2014, Australian Sports Commission, Federation of Gay Games. <http://www.outonthefields.com/media/#United%20States>

84%

OF AMERICANS
SURVEYED HAVE
WITNESSED OR
EXPERIENCED

ANTI-LGBTQ ATTITUDES IN SPORTS*

* Survey findings from: Dennison E, Kitchen A. (2015). Out on the Fields: The First International Study on Homophobia in Sport. Nielsen, Bingham Cup Sydney 2014, Australian Sports Commission, Federation of Gay Games. <http://www.outonthefields.com/media/#United%20States>. Survey materials asked participants about experiences with "homophobia", so answers may only be directly applicable to LGBTQ discrimination.



BUILDING CHARACTER THROUGH INCLUSION

Sport plays an enormous role in the lives and identities of young athletes across America.

Though physical health benefits of participation are well known, sport can also instill life skills including accountability, leadership and dedication.

Participation in sport also goes hand in hand with achievement and positive outcomes. Youth who play sports tend to do better academically. They develop teamwork and problem solving skills. They make better health decisions, and are less likely to engage in various risk behaviors.²

When LGBTQ youth are excluded from sport, they miss out on these important character-building lessons and benefits. Moreover, so long as any young athlete is kept on the sidelines or excluded altogether simply for being who they are, all youth are being deprived of the true spirit of sport – and its ideals of fairness, competition and integrity.

This type of inclusion is particularly critical in team sports, where participation is linked with increased self-esteem and self-confidence, and lowered stress, anxiety and depression rates.³

Inclusion doesn't just benefit individual athletes – it teaches all team members how to build camaraderie, foster community, emphasize diversity and teach discipline and responsibility to one another.

UPHOLDING THE TRUE SPIRIT OF SPORT REQUIRES PROMOTING AND CELEBRATING THE INCLUSION OF ALL YOUTH IN SPORT.

² Jessica L. Fraser-Thomas, Jean Côté & Janice Deakin (2007) Youth sport programs: an avenue to foster positive youth development, *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 10:1, 19-40.

³ Marion Douall, Ryan J. Watson, Annie Smith, Yuko Homma, & Elizabeth Saewyc. 2018. Are we leveling the playing field? Trends and disparities in sports participation among sexual minority youth in Canada. *Journal of Sport and Health Science* 7 (218-226).

LEFT ON THE SIDELINES

Sport plays an influential role in the lives of young Americans. A nationally representative study from the University of Michigan found that 68% of high school seniors play at least one sport.⁴

Comparatively, just **24 percent** of LGBTQ youth, and only 21% of high school seniors, currently play on a sports team for their school, with 13 percent of reporting that they avoided playing sports altogether because they **“do not feel [they] will be accepted on the team because [they are] LGBTQ.”**

⁴ Johnston LD, O'Malley PM, Miech RA, Bachman JG, Schulenberg JE. Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use: 1975-2016: Overview, Key Findings on Adolescent Drug Use. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Institute for Social Research; 2017. Note: HRC Youth Survey asked specifically about school sports whereas Monitoring the Future asked about sport participation both in and out of school. However, only 4 percent of respondents to the HRC sample report that they did not participate in sports at their school due to already playing an outside-of-school sporting activity.

**IN THE 33 STATES THAT STILL HAVE ANTI-LGBTQ
SPORT PARTICIPATION POLICIES,**

ONLY

20%

**OF LGBTQ YOUTH
REPORT THAT
THEY PARTICIPATE
IN SPORT⁵**

⁵ Anti-LGBTQ sport participation policies include states with no policies, states that require transgender athletes to undergo unnecessary medical intervention, states that require birth certificate changes, and/or states that make judgements on a case-by-case basis. Information from TransAthlete.com.

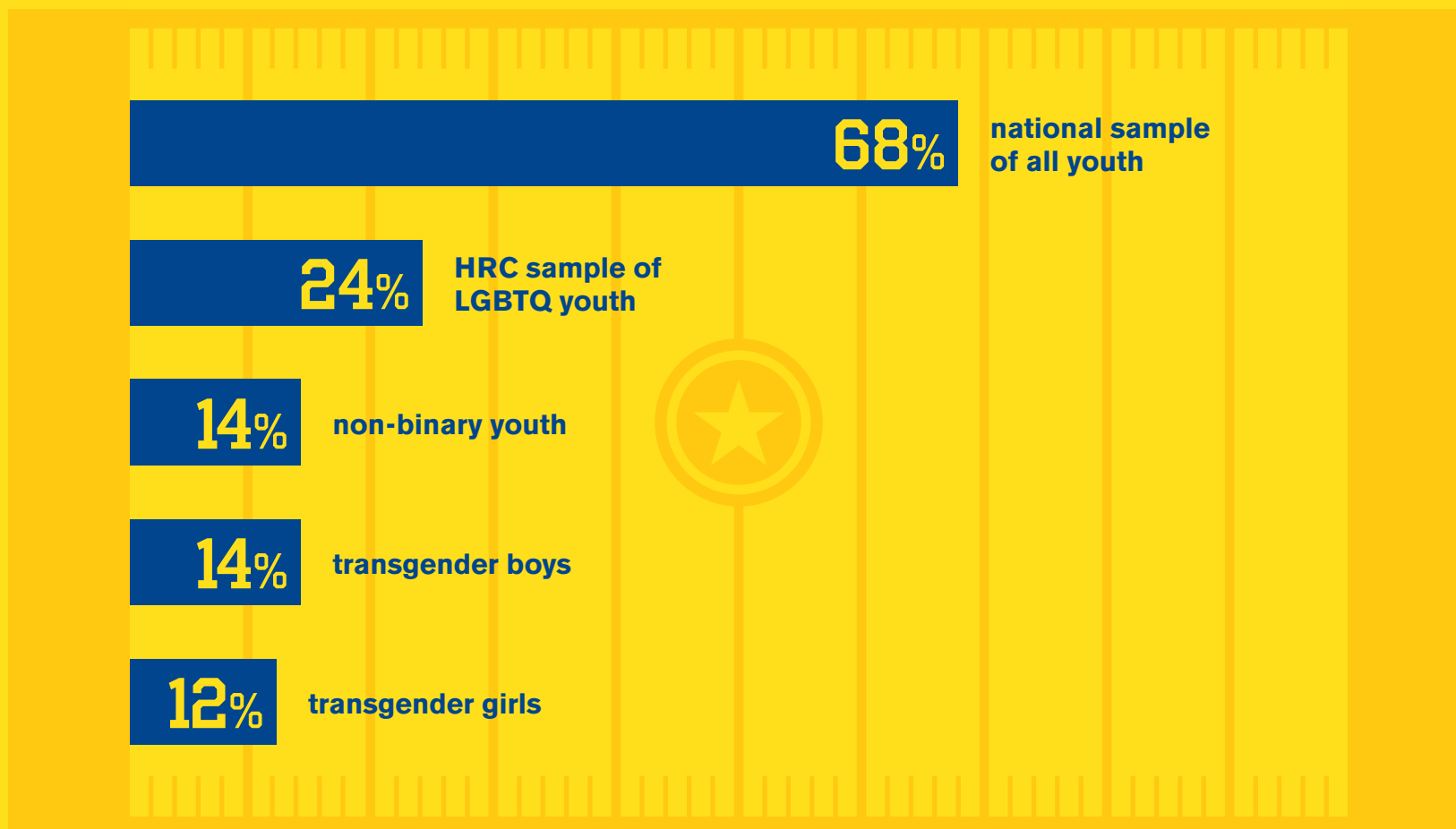
WHAT KEEPS THEM AWAY FROM SPORTS PARTICIPATION?

Youth
respondents
said:

“I WOULD NEED TO PROVE
MY MASCULINITY TO MY
TEAMMATES – THAT ISN’T
WORTH HOW MUCH I
LOVED PLAYING SPORTS.”

“THE GUYS ON
SPORTS TEAMS...
CALL EVERYTHING
THEY DON’T LIKE ‘GAY’.”

PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH WHO CURRENTLY PLAY ON A SPORTS TEAM



CALLING THE PLAYS

Coaches set the tone both on and off the field. Their actions and attitudes shape the team environment and greatly impact a player's experience.

Unfortunately, too often a coach's attitudes, behaviors and biases – whether explicit or implicit – can prevent the creation of an environment where LGBTQ youth feel safe disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**“I WAS BULLIED
BY COACHES AND
ATTACKED BY
MY TEAMMATES.”**

4 IN 5

**LGBQ YOUTH ARE NOT OPEN
TO THEIR COACHES ABOUT
THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION***

*Based on number of LGBQ youth who have a coach or coaches, n=7494.

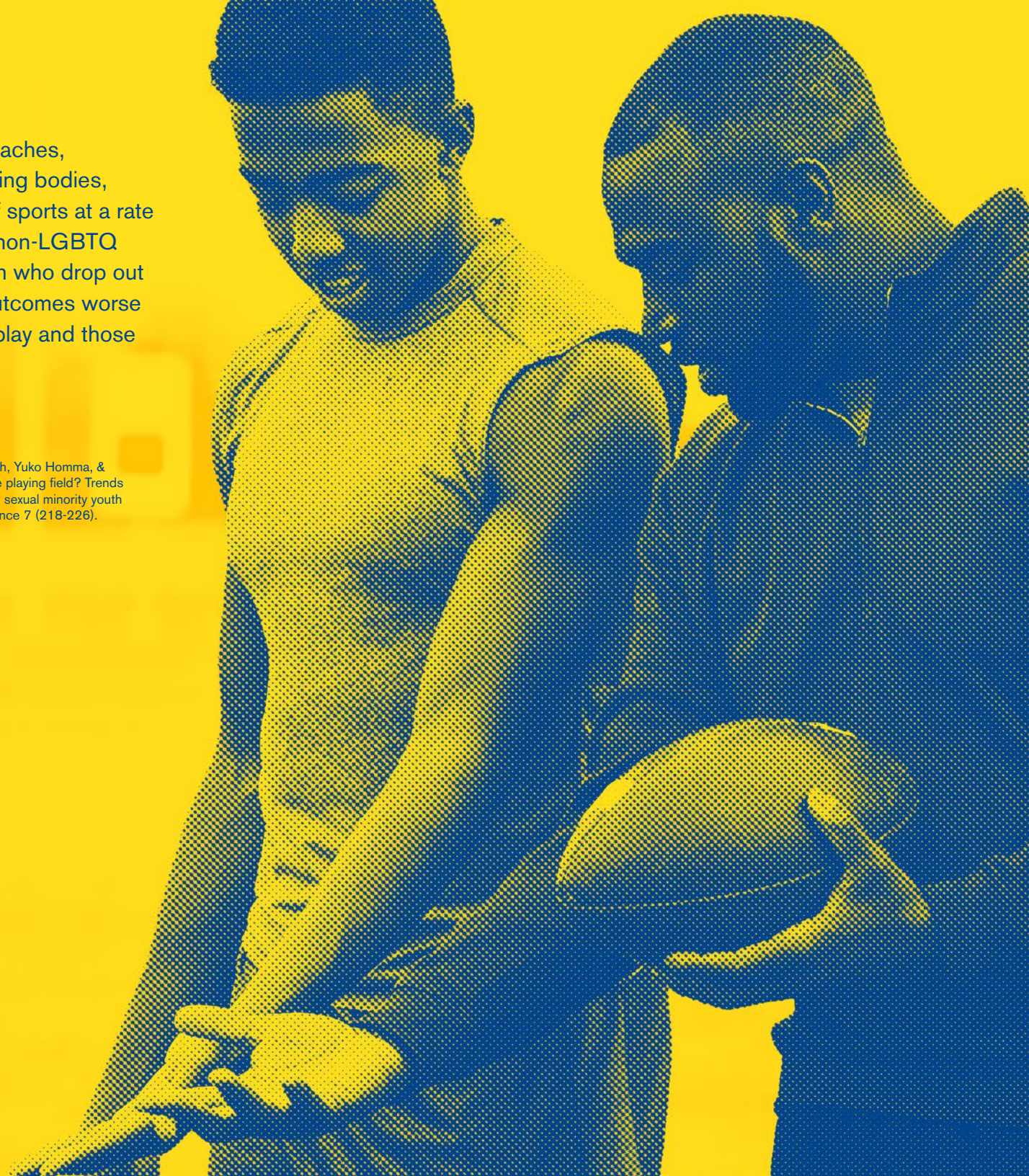
**“I WAS BULLIED
FOR BEING
TRANSGENDER.”**

82% OF TRANSGENDER
AND GENDER
EXPANSIVE YOUTH
**ARE NOT OUT TO THEIR COACHES
ABOUT THEIR GENDER IDENTITY***

*Based on number of transgender youth who have a coach or coaches, n=2393.

Without the support of coaches, teammates and/or governing bodies, LGBTQ youth drop out of sports at a rate almost twice that of their non-LGBTQ peers.⁶ Furthermore, youth who drop out deal with mental health outcomes worse than their peers who still play and those who never played at all.

⁶ Marion Douall, Ryan J. Watson, Annie Smith, Yuko Homma, & Elizabeth Saewyc. 2018. Are we leveling the playing field? Trends and disparities in sports participation among sexual minority youth in Canada. *Journal of Sport and Health Science* 7 (218-226).





BOXED OUT

Exclusionary policies and environments in youth sports pose even greater barriers for young transgender and gender expansive athletes.

Too many are forced to play on teams that are inconsistent with their gender identity because of exclusive, inconsistent and arbitrarily enforced policies.⁷ These policies, coupled with hostile practices and compounded by a lack of awareness and understanding among coaches and teammates, keep transgender and gender expansive youth from fully participating in sport.

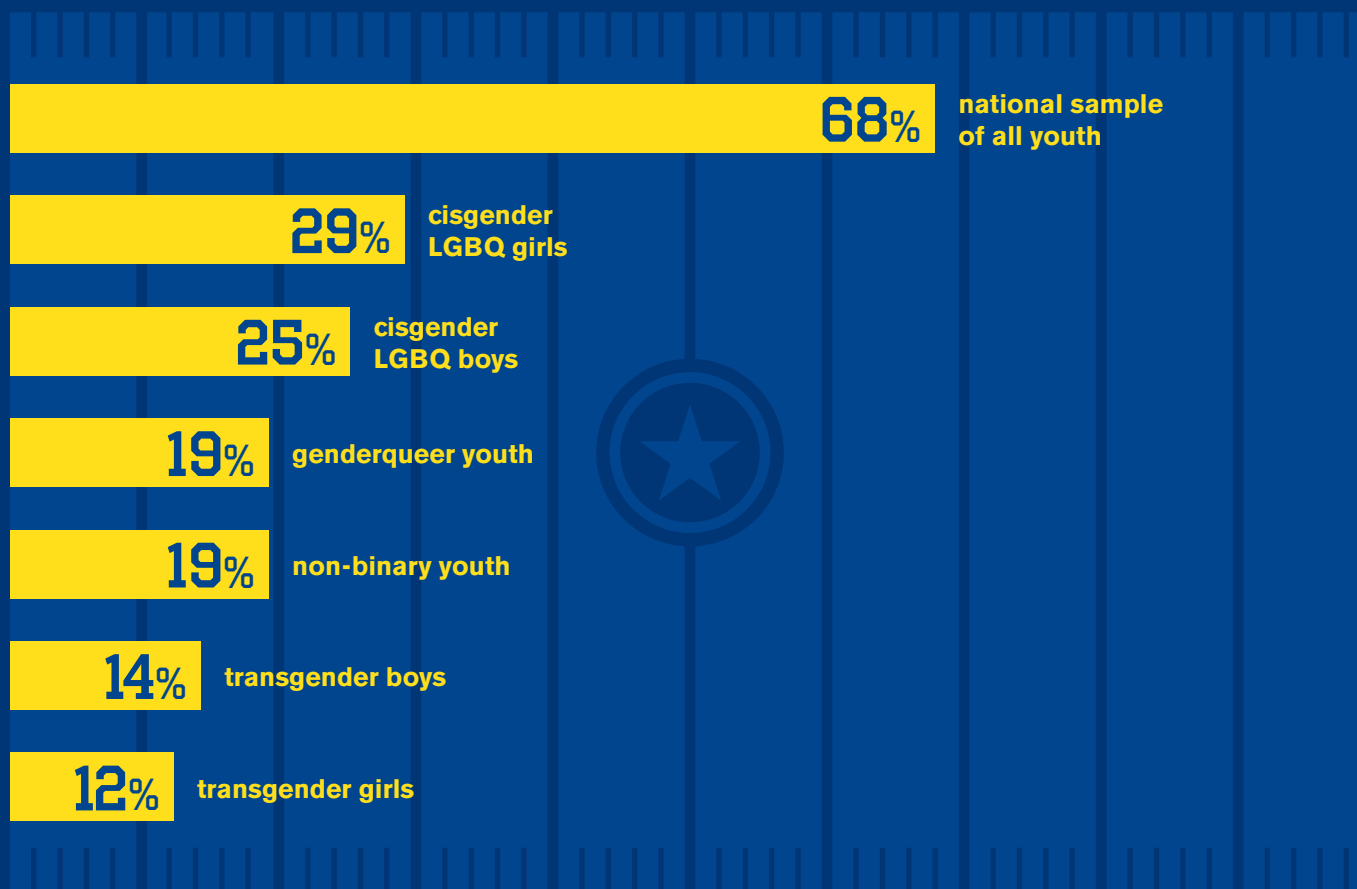
⁷ Whether transgender athletes are allowed to compete in a sport or play on a team that is consistent with their gender identity varies widely across states, school boards, and sporting associations. Erin E. Buzuvis, (2016). *As Who They Really Are: Expanding Opportunities for Transgender Athletes to Participate in Youth and Scholastic Sports*, *Law and Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 34:2 https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/lawineq/vol34/iss2/2/?utm_source=scholarship.law.umn.edu%2Flawineq%2Fvol34%2Fiss2%2F2&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages



**“I DON’T KNOW WHICH TEAM I’D
BE PLACED INTO – THE GIRLS
TEAM OR THE BOYS TEAM.**

**IN ADDITION, MY PARENTS
WOULD FIND OUT IF I WERE
PLACED INTO A BOYS TEAM
AND I’D BE FORCED TO COME
OUT TO THEM.”**

SPORT PARTICIPATION BY GENDER IDENTITY⁸



⁸ Cisgender: A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>

"I DON'T FEEL SAFE IN THE LOCKER ROOM."

An alarming number of LGBTQ youth **don't feel safe participating in sports.**

Practice and competition aren't the only times when young LGBTQ student-athletes are fearful of discrimination.

11%

**OF LGBTQ YOUTH
REPORT THAT THEY
NEVER FEEL SAFE IN
THE LOCKER ROOM**

INCLUDING

41% of transgender boys

34% of transgender girls

31% of non-binary youth

51%

**OF TRANS YOUTH NEVER
USE THE SCHOOL LOCKER
ROOM ALIGNED WITH
THEIR GENDER IDENTITY**

OUT OF THESE

16% currently play a sport

32% used to play a sport, but stopped

52% have never played a sport

78%

OF AMERICAN
SPECTATORS
AND ATHLETES
BELIEVE THAT

YOUTH TEAM SPORTS **AREN'T
SAFE FOR LGBTQ PEOPLE***

* Survey findings from: Dennison E, Kitchen A. (2015). Out on the Fields: The First International Study on Homophobia in Sport. Nielsen, Bingham Cup Sydney 2014, Australian Sports Commission, Federation of Gay Games. <http://www.outonthefields.com/media/#United%20States>. Survey materials asked participants about experiences with "homophobia", so answers may only be directly applicable to LGBTQ discrimination.

**“MY PARENTS TOLD
ME I’D HOLD THE
TEAM BACK BY NOT
BEING [CISGENDER].”**

THE IMPACT OF ATHLETICS ON LGBTQ YOUTH

When LGBTQ youth are given an opportunity to play, they thrive. These young athletes may also be better able to manage difficulties elsewhere in their lives than their non-athlete peers.

THE POSITIVE EFFECT OF SPORTS ON LGBTQ YOUTH

“I ALWAYS FEEL SAFE IN MY CLASSROOM.”

“I HARDLY EVER FELT DEPRESSED OVER THE LAST WEEK.”

“I HARDLY EVER FELT WORTHLESS OVER THE LAST WEEK.”

Currently plays a sport	32%	29%	35%
Never played	25%	21%	27%
Used to play	24%	20%	25%

Although there is still much work to do to support LGBTQ youth, sports participation can play a significant role in helping LGBTQ young people build their self-confidence and improve their overall well-being.



GAME ON! LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

.....

All coaches, parents, fans and officials have the opportunity to make youth sports a safe, affirming and welcoming place for all athletes. By championing LGBTQ inclusion, we uphold and promote the ideals of fairness and equality and level the playing field for LGBTQ youth in sport.



CHAMPION

★ FOR ★

LGBTQ INCLUSION

CREATE safe spaces for all athletes, coaches, and fans at all times — on the field, in the locker rooms, in the stands, at home, and in the community.

HOLD players, coaches, teammates, and fans accountable for non-inclusive language or actions. Creating an inclusive team environment is everyone's responsibility.

ARM yourself with information and resources about the laws and policies that impact your LGBTQ players, staff, and their families.

MODEL inclusive behaviors by weaving respect, diversity, and inclusion into your team's culture on day one.

PROMOTE allyship and respect on and off the field of play. Your team culture isn't just formed at practice.

IMPLEMENT LGBTQ inclusion policies. Make sure you have an inclusive non-discrimination statement, trans inclusive participation policies, competent data collection policies, LGBTQ-inclusive travel and uniform policies, and a fan code of conduct.

ORGANIZE inclusion trainings for players, coaches, and parents. Like in sports, it's hard to improve without practice and learning.

NEVER ASSUME someone's sexual orientation, gender identity, pronouns, or experiences.



VISIT

www.HRC.im/sports
TO LEARN MORE



ABOUT THE STUDY

In 2017, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation partnered with researchers at the University of Connecticut to deploy a comprehensive survey capturing the experiences of LGBTQ youth in their family settings, schools, social circles, and communities. Over 17,000⁹ youth aged 13-17 participated in the survey, with representation from all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

More information about the survey process, materials, and respondent profiles can be found in the methodology in HRC's full Youth Survey report, which can be found [here](#).

⁹ Play to Win utilized answers from all respondents who completed 10% or more of the survey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Human Rights Campaign Foundation Public Education & Research

The HRC Foundation's Public Education & Research Program spearheads a wide variety of LGBTQ advocacy and outreach campaigns, working to ensure that the HRC Foundation's resources and programs are timely, impactful, and inclusive. In addition to publishing resource guides, informational materials, and reports, the team conducts original quantitative and qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQ people. The program also collaborates with academic researchers and provides guidance to other HRC initiatives in support of efforts to advance LGBTQ equality and well-being

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BIOS

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Ashland is a former Division I athlete, a sports equality advocate, and seasoned LGBTQ rights advocate. She currently leads the Human Rights Campaign's public education, research and sports inclusion efforts. As a civil rights advocate, she focuses on the intersection of law, policy and public education with an emphasis on engaging underserved communities. Several key issue areas include health equity, sports equality, economic justice, trans inclusion, reproductive justice and racial justice. Ashland is a graduate of Furman University where she was a member of the women's basketball. She graduated with a J.D. from the

University of Georgia School of Law as a National Point Scholar and a Bill and Anne Shepherd Equal Rights Scholar. In 2016, she was named as one of the best LGBTQ lawyers under 40 by the National LGBT Bar Association. Ashland currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Point Foundation.

Liam Miranda, *Senior Research Manager,*
Public Education & Research

Liam Miranda conducts, synthesizes and collaborates on research and data analysis that helps shape and strengthen the HRC Foundation's public education and programmatic work. Liam has worked on research initiatives and campaigns within a variety of intersecting issue areas: including sports equality, racial justice, trans inclusion, attitude formation, moral decision-making, youth well-being, workplace inclusion, and more. He is also involved in principal data analysis and/or collection for a variety of current projects – ranging from assessing LGBTQ public health campaigns to increasing diversity and equity in nonprofit leadership. Liam is a former student-athlete and holds a degree with distinction in psychology with minors in both neuroscience and philosophy from Duke University.

Mark Lee, *Senior Writer,*
Public Education & Research

Mark Lee serves as project manager, content strategist and editor for a wide range of LGBTQ-focused public education campaigns and research studies within the HRC Foundation, including surveys, polls, op-eds, blogs, reports, guides and other resources. Prior to joining HRC, Mark was the Manager of Research & Strategic Insights at Government Executive Media Group, leading a team that studied policy implementation and federal agency management. He has authored

governmentwide workforce studies on diversity & inclusion and telework initiatives, presenting at major conferences and for agency leaders within the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Department of Labor and General Services Administration. Mark holds a degree in business administration from the UC Berkeley Haas School of Business.

SPECIAL THANKS

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CHECKLIST FOR CREATING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

Youth-serving professionals have an ethical obligation to ensure all young people feel safe, included and affirmed. Unfortunately, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) youth continue to experience disproportionate rates of rejection, bullying and violence, which are impacting their school attendance, academic performance and overall well-being. According to HRC Foundation's analysis of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance \(YRBS\) data](#), LGBTQ youth urgently need our attention.

- + **31% of LGBTQ youth, 43% of transgender youth** and **40% of questioning youth** have been bullied at school, compared to 16% of their non-LGBTQ peers
- + **24% of LGBTQ youth, 35% of transgender youth** and **41% of questioning youth** have skipped school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to school, compared to 8% of non-LGBTQ youth.
- + **54% of LGBTQ youth, 61% of transgender youth** and **61% of questioning youth** are battling symptoms of depression, compared to 29% of non-LGBTQ youth.
- + **35% of LGBTQ youth, 45% of transgender youth** and **40% of questioning youth** have seriously considered attempting suicide, compared to 13% of non-LGBTQ youth.

These findings are a [call to action](#) for all youth-serving professionals to address the many disparities including the root of the issue; dismantling anti-LGBTQ bias and stigma. The need is greatest among LGBTQ youth of color who sit at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities and are at greater risk of facing multiple forms of oppression, including racial bias.

This checklist produced by HRC Foundation's [Project THRIVE](#) campaign, representing more than 5 million youth-serving professionals across the country, provides a research-based guide for schools and youth-serving organizations to create safe, inclusive and affirming environments for LGBTQ youth.

*This checklist was inspired by [HRC's Welcoming Schools Program](#) and the checklist developed for secondary schools on creating LGBTQ and gender-inclusive schools.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Our [non-discrimination policy](#) explicitly includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, both for students/clients and for employees.
- Our [anti-bullying policy](#) specifically names sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression as protected categories.
- We support trans and non-binary students during their social transitions ([support checklist](#)).
- All school/agency forms such as registration, attendance and class lists allow students to accurately reflect their [gender identity, names and pronouns](#).
- We provide [all-gender restrooms](#) and private changing options for all students/clients.
- We have an [all-gender dress code](#) that is inclusive of all gender expressions and free of racial bias; students are safe and welcome to wear the clothes, hairstyles and accessories that reflect their intersecting identities.
- We have a policy that explicitly asserts the [confidentiality](#) of information pertaining to a student's sexual orientation and gender identity.
- We have a policy that respects the [First Amendment rights](#) of youth to attend events with a date of any gender or sexual orientation, or to wear clothing aligned with their gender identity in yearbook photos, etc.
- We have a [suicide prevention policy](#) that addresses at-risk populations, including LGBTQ youth.
- We have certified/credentialed LGBTQ-affirming mental health professionals (MHP) serving young people of all ages with a youth-to-MHP ratio as recommended by [ASCA](#), [NASP](#) and [SSWAA](#).

- We use [restorative justice-type approaches](#) to address bullying behavior.
- We use an [intersectional approach](#) to address all forms of oppression (i.e. racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Our workplace provides ongoing [professional development](#) to improve critical skills to address [bias-based bullying](#) behaviors.
- Our staff members are specifically trained to prevent and respond to [bullying incidents](#) involving gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.
- Our mental health professionals are provided with specialized training in the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to provide LGBTQ-affirming social, emotional, and behavioral health services.

CLIMATE, CULTURE AND COUNSELING SERVICES

- We support youth in using facilities ([restrooms and locker rooms](#)) aligned with their gender identity.
- Our school or program has a [GSA](#) (Gender and Sexuality Alliance).
- LGBTQ staff know they are safe to be open about their LGBTQ identity [at work](#).
- Staff are empowered to utilize [teachable moments](#) when anti-LGBTQ comments are made.
- Materials in the office/classroom reflect [LGBTQ people](#) and the full spectrum of [gender expression](#).
- We have established processes to ensure that every LGBTQ youth has one or more [caring adults](#) in the building/organization.

- ❑ We acknowledge relevant awareness months, days and weeks, such as [National Coming Out Day](#), [Ally Week](#), [No Name-Calling Week](#), [LGBTQ History Month](#), [LGBTQ Pride Month](#), etc.
- ❑ Staff have visible cues in the office/classroom conveying the environment as a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ youth, e.g. posters, signs, literature (print and display the poster on the last page of this checklist).
- ❑ We provide opportunities for LGBTQ youth to [share their experiences and recommendations](#) to improve the climate and culture.
- ❑ We collect [school or program climate data](#) that allow for the analysis of LGBTQ youth responses compared to their non-LGBTQ peers.
- ❑ We provide LGBTQ youth with resources, such as [coming out guides](#), finding [scholarships and grants](#) for post-secondary education, LGBTQ-inclusive [colleges](#), LGBTQ-inclusive [workplaces](#), etc.
- ❑ We use inclusive, non-heteronormative, [non-gendered language](#).
- ❑ We have discontinued [grouping youth activities by gender](#) — including choir, physical education, class rosters, competitions, student royalty, etc, and we actively work to eliminate [gender stereotypes](#) with youth.
- ❑ We normalize [pronoun sharing](#), including [lesson plans](#) that teach youth about gender-neutral pronouns.
- ❑ Our LGBTQ youth have equal access to LGBTQ-affirming counseling services and resources.
- ❑ We recognize that a student's sexual orientation or gender identity is likely to have a functional and/or academic impact in the absence of LGBTQ-inclusive and affirming counseling support services.

LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE MATERIAL AND RESOURCES

- ❑ Staff use LGBTQ-inclusive curricula for [elementary](#) and [secondary-level](#) youth.
- ❑ Our sexual health curriculum is [inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities](#) and includes HIV prevention and treatment information.
- ❑ Our [academic curriculum](#) includes a full spectrum of gender identity and sexual orientation perspectives, voices, histories and current events.
- ❑ Our [elementary](#) and [secondary](#) school libraries include books and resources about people with a broad spectrum of [gender identities](#), [sexual orientations](#) and [family structures](#).
- ❑ We are aware of the local, regional or national LGBTQ-resources that support LGBTQ youth and/or their parents/caregivers.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- ❑ Educators and staff are aware that under FERPA they [must protect the confidentiality](#) of students related to their gender identity and sexual orientation and show great caution not to share a student's sexual orientation and gender identity without that student's permission, [even to the student's parent or guardian](#).

The following page is a poster intended for display in a classroom or office to show support for LGBTQ youth. Visuals like these help LGBTQ young people easily identify trusting adults and improve feelings of safety and connectedness.

PROJECT THRIVE

A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT LGBTQ YOUTH



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN
FOUNDATION

DO YOU NEED SUPPORT?

ASK ME!

I PROUDLY AFFIRM LGBTQ YOUTH



American Academy of Pediatrics
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN

