

Transgender
Equality
Network
Ireland

Inclusive Physical Education in Irish Schools

A Resource for Sports
Coaches, P.E. Teachers
and Peers to Learn How
to Best Support and
Include Trans People in
School Sports



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



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introduction

Despite significant progress in the past years, Ireland remains a place where it is difficult for trans people to lead safe, healthy and integrated lives. TENI is dedicated to ending transphobia, including stigma, discrimination and inequality through activities that promote the equality and well-being of trans people in Ireland. We work nationally in five main areas: healthcare, employment, education, family and legislation.

This booklet aims to give PE teachers and anyone else who coaches a school sports team a resource to increase their understanding of what being trans means and how to best support young people in your class/peer group. This is designed as a '101' resource, giving readers a foundation of knowledge about trans identities and participation in sport. We hope it is an accessible and easy to read document.

Sports can help improve wellbeing, develop one's sense of self, and give a feeling of belonging in the wider community. Multiple studies have shown that sports can reduce the impact of stressful experiences. Nobody wants to see a young person giving up on sports!

Inside this booklet you will find:

- Background information about the current climate for trans youth in schools.
- A terminology guide of helpful terms associated with the trans community.
- How to support a trans student that wants to take part in P.E. and extracurricular activities.
- Some advice to help make a safe and supportive environment for the trans community within your school.
- Additional resources of what other organisations are doing for sports inclusion outside of Ireland.



Terminology

Here's a list of terms to help guide you in understanding some of the things you may encounter when engaging with trans players. This list is not exhaustive but is meant to be a gateway for you to explore further.

Assigned Sex:

The designation of a person at birth as either male or female, based on biology and anatomy.

Cis/Cisgender:

Someone whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Deadname:

The birth name of someone who has changed their name, a term sometimes used by the trans community.

Gender Identity:

The personal sense of one's own gender (the knowledge that you are a man/woman/non-binary etc).

Gender Dysphoria:

Distress caused by a mismatch between someone's gender and their sex assigned at birth or how they are, or feel they are perceived.

Non-Binary:

An umbrella term covering a wide range of genders which are neither male or female.

Out:

The state of a person being open about a particular aspect of their identity either in general, or with a particular group of people.

Outing:

The act of revealing an aspect of somebody's identity to somebody they are not already out to.

Pronouns:

Used to refer to a person other than their name (e.g. he/him, she/her, they/them). If you are unsure of someone's pronouns, just ask. Apologise if you get it wrong, correct yourself, and then move on.

Trans/Transgender:

An umbrella term for those whose gender does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Background

Despite significant progress for the LGBTQ+ community in the last number of years in terms of legislation, policies and national strategies to protect the community, primary and secondary schools have been shown to not be a safe place for the LGBTQ+ community. In 2022, Belong To, in partnership with the Teachers College, Columbia University, conducted the School Climate Survey to understand the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in schools in the Republic of Ireland. The key findings from the survey highlighted a number of issues within the school environment. From a sample size of 1208 LGBTQ+ young people:

76%

of LGBTQ+ students feel unsafe at school.

69%

of LGBTQ+ students hear homophobic remarks from other students.

58%

of LGBTQ+ students hear homophobic remarks from school staff.

1ⁱⁿ3

LGBTQ+ students skip school to avoid negative treatment because of them being LGBTQ+.

LGBTQ+

students avoid certain spaces and activities due to safety concerns:

- Bathroom- 45%
- PE-39%
- Sport Facilities - 29%
- Locker Rooms- 28%
- Lunch Area - 22%

1ⁱⁿ10

LGBTQ+ students are unsure they will complete the Leaving Certificate.

In 2018, the Outsport Survey asked 49 LGBTQ+ people, from 28 EU states, who had dropped out of sports about the type of negativity they had experienced. They were able to break it down to 7 types of discrimination and harassment that the former athletes experienced:



The survey asked a follow up question to the participants about who the most frequent sources were for the negativity they experienced:



This is further emphasised for young transgender and non-binary kids and adolescents. The post-primary school experiences of transgender and gender diverse youth in Ireland by McBride et al (2020) highlights a number of overlapping challenges that negatively affected trans and gender-diverse young people's physical and mental health, sense of safety within the school, and ability to participate fully in education such as:



This has been shown in single gendered schools, where PE activities conform to gender stereotypes which restrict the types of activities in PE, and mixed gendered schools, where gender segregation is a common practice and activities are gendered.

Aoife Neary and Ruari-Santiago McBride's 2024 study "Beyond inclusion: Trans and gender diverse young people's experiences of PE and school sport" explores the experiences of young trans people in second-level P.E. One of the students in the study, a 17 year old trans girl in a co-ed school, was told she couldn't participate in a Zumba class because boys weren't allowed, only the girls.

Another student, a 15 year old trans boy in a co-ed school, wanted to drop out of his school's girls hockey team to play with the boys, but he wasn't allowed to play on the boys team. His parents were thankful that he had a supportive teacher who kept him playing with the girls, but they noted that this was extremely difficult for him, and also noted that he would never get to be acknowledged properly for any sports awards in the school.

[He] is never going to get an award at sports because they can't say 'for the boys' because he doesn't play on the boys' team".

(Father of 15 year old trans boy)

This highlights how the gender-segregated system of award-giving can deeply affect trans and non-binary students staying involved in sports. It also highlights the constraints of inclusion if policies are not put in place to properly include trans students.

Secondary schools are gender segregated for P.E. and other school sports, and for many trans youth, having to choose which team to play on can be a major barrier to school sports, "Which team do you go in? Who do you participate with?" (McBride & Neary, 2020).

This can leave trans youth feeling that they can't participate at all because they will be obstructed from playing with the team they feel most comfortable with.

P.E uniforms can often be uncomfortable, gender specific and can heighten negative feelings about their bodies for trans youth. One participant from The Post Primary School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth In Ireland, (McBride and Neary, 2020) who is trans masculine said that they didn't like their school P.E. uniform because it emphasised aspects of their body they were uncomfortable with.

The P.E. uniform was very tight fitting..very female orientated.

(Trans masculine participant)

If an appropriate uniform is not available, this can put trans youth off from participating in sports or P.E.

The most common barrier to sports amongst trans youth is lack of appropriate changing facilities. Gender segregated facilities can feel unsafe if not managed appropriately by school staff, and single cubicle options are often a disabled access toilet which can often feel inappropriate.

The language that is used when engaging in sports can also be harmful for young trans and non-binary students. Comments that are based on harmful gender stereotypes are commonly used in sports environments, even when there is no trans person or LGBTQ+ person in the group. This "banter" is a social norm that has been created and is commonly used not just on the pitch or P.E. hall, but also in the changing rooms and sidelines (Storr et al, 2022).

As we can see from this research, there are many barriers that trans youth experience in relation to participating in P.E. and school sporting activities.

We believe that everyone should have an equal opportunity to experience the benefits of sport and healthy activities. All people, regardless of identity or expression, should be able to participate in P.E. and sport at school.



Supporting Trans Students

What do I do if a student comes out to me?

Thank the student for telling you, appreciate their courage, and ask them if there is anything you can do to support them at this time. Reassure the student that you support them as the person they are and that you are glad to have them as part of the group.

Do not “out” the student to anyone else. Respect their privacy and confidentiality. Check if your school requires that you inform school leadership/another member of staff. If that is the case, then you must tell the student who you will be informing and ensure it only stays between you and the other staff member.

Names, pronouns, and language use

Respectful use of names, pronouns and correct gendered language is crucial to creating an inclusive environment, upholding the dignity of trans people, and ensuring non-discrimination.

Here are a few ways to establish appropriate pronoun use:

- 1) Role modelling coaches, captains, and players to share pronouns when introducing yourself at the start of the season/school year. This shows that you are aware of the importance of pronouns and allows others to share their pronouns if they want to. An example of how to introduce yourself can be “Hi everyone, my name is John Doe, my pronouns are he/him, and today...”. This helps to create an environment for other players to feel comfortable to share their pronouns without you having to ask.
- 2) Encouraging players to let others know if they are using the wrong pronouns, and encouraging open conversation about pronouns and names.
- 3) If you are ever unsure about someone’s pronouns, you can simply ask them privately. An example of this can be “Can I ask what pronouns you use?” It’s a very polite way of making sure that you refer



to the person by the correct pronouns they wish to use. You can also ask a player in a private one-on-one conversation what pronoun they would like to use during training and matches. The player may or may not be comfortable with using their chosen name and pronouns depending on what setting they are in, as they may be out with the team but may not be out to friends and family outside of the sport. It's important to check in with them and see how they want to be referred to in different environments.

4) Try to use more gender neutral language when you are talking to a group. Using phrases like “Hi folks/everyone/team” can be used instead of saying “lads/boys/guys/girls” to make sure everyone feels included.

Gendered Environments (Teams, Uniforms, and Facilities)

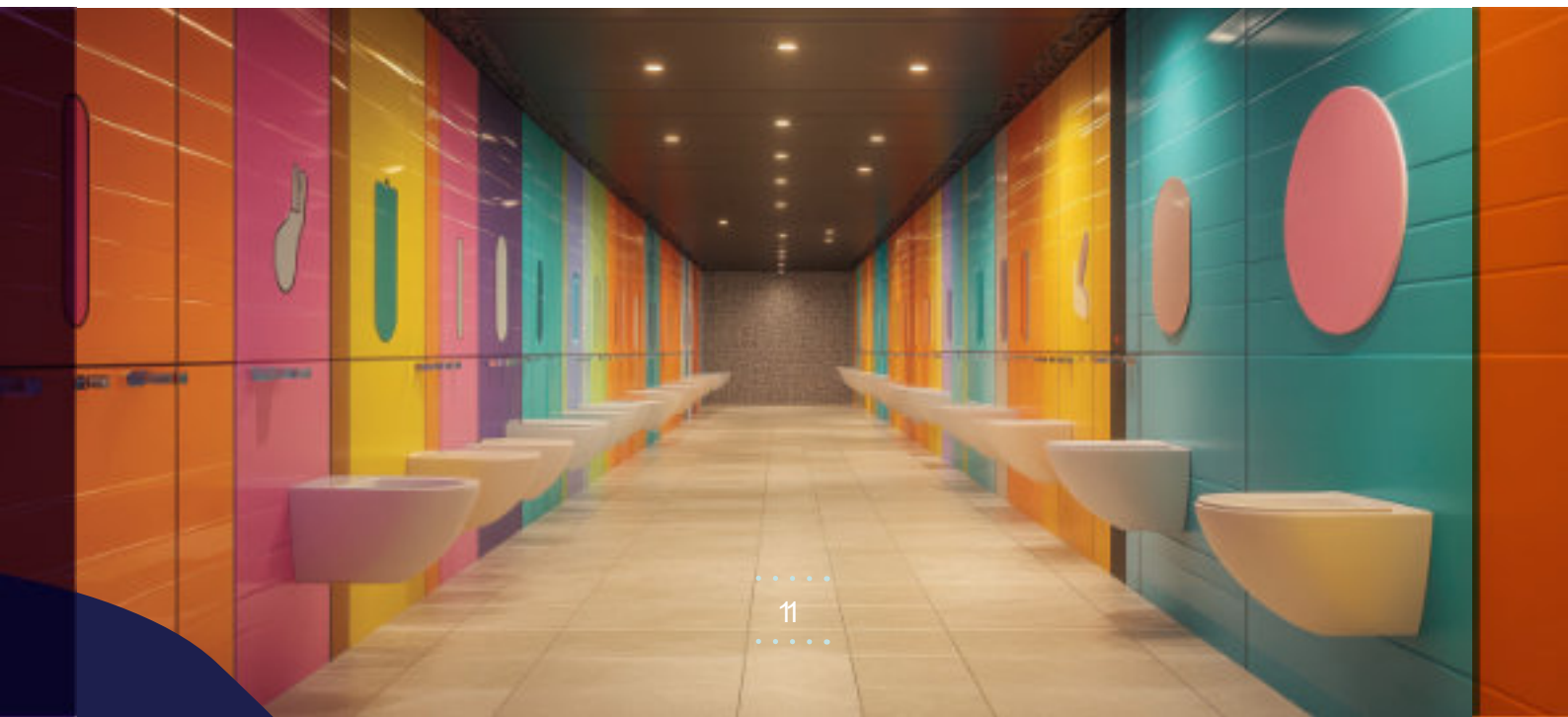
There are a number of things to consider when you have a trans student participating in P.E., such as changing facilities, uniforms during P.E., and, if there is any gender segregation, what team they want to play on.

Having a choice in changing facilities is important. A trans student may want to change in a single cubicle or with their peers. It is important to give all options available to the trans student and let them decide for themselves what facility will make them feel most comfortable.

Think about the P.E. uniform and whether it is gender inclusive. Are there a variety of options for everyone? Think of having options for P.E. uniforms from which students can choose. Just like cisgender students, trans girls may want to wear the girls P.E. uniform and trans boys may want to wear the boys P.E. uniform.

If the P.E. class is doing a swimming session, give students the option to wear what makes them comfortable, which may include a t-shirt. This would help support them in being able to take part in the activity without putting themselves in an uncomfortable position.

Consider holding mixed gender classes so that everyone can feel included. If there is any gender segregation, the trans student should decide what class they would like to participate in that would make them feel the most comfortable.



Wider School / Team Environment

Code of Conduct

Creating a Code of Conduct outlining how your group expects everyone to behave and act towards others is a great way to show what is and is not acceptable within your P.E. classes and extracurricular activities in terms of transphobic discrimination, language, and name-calling.

Your Code of Conduct should apply to all of your stakeholders:

- Coaches
- Players
- Spectators
- Volunteers
- Staff and administrators
- Referees and other officials

Having a Code of Conduct can be beneficial when playing against any teams from other schools as they will have to follow what is outlined in the document. Consider putting the Code of Conduct on a noticeboard in a public space or pin it on any of your messaging platforms so that everyone can see it.

School Anti-Bullying and Inclusion Policies

Make sure all your policies relating to anti-bullying and gender identity and expression are trans inclusive. It's important to set out your "no tolerance" approach in relation to transphobic language, discrimination, and name-calling.

TENI can offer guidance and assistance if you plan to update your policies. For extracurricular activities, if you're participating in a league, you will need to look into the policies around participation of trans and non-binary players from the National Governing Body of the sport that you are playing.

Creating an Inclusivity Charter is another great way to publicly show your commitment to trans inclusivity within your school. An Inclusivity Charter can tie into multiple areas of inclusion, you can declare and acknowledge that you aim to make an inclusive environment for all players regardless of their gender identity, race, sexuality, disability, etc.

Establish a clear reporting procedure, so individuals can feel safe and comfortable in reporting an incident. You can set up an anonymous report box for students to report incidents without fearing if other students see them speak with a teacher.



Working with Opposing Teams

You may have someone who feels safe and supported by your team, but is anxious about playing against another team. Before the game is played, consider having a chat with the opposition coach and let them know that a valued member of the team is trans and that you look forward to having a good game with them. Speak to your own team and make sure that everyone remembers how to behave and how to support each other. Make sure you give the trans players support and act accordingly with your own team and sports policies.

Visibility

Visibility is important for LGBTQ+ students because it creates a sense of safety. It is important that students and the local community see that you are an inclusive school for the trans community. Here are a list of things you could consider:

- You can show your allyship by wearing a Pride pin. You could also wear a pronoun pin to show how you want to be referred to and to highlight the importance of pronouns.
- It's important to have diversity reflected in sport. Having role models is important for young people as they are able to look at athletes and see people who are like them.
- Make sure that all stakeholders (parents, coaches, staff, etc), including players, are aware of your anti-bullying and gender identity and expression policies.
- Incorporate Pride and Trans colours and imagery into murals, posters, and flyers during "Stand Up Week" or other important dates for the trans community like Trans Day of Remembrance (20th of November) and Trans Visibility Day (31st of March).
- Promote high-profile LGBTQ+ causes, organisations and charities.
- Publicly celebrate any trans athletes in the elite sporting community.
- Holding Pride Games to promote and celebrate the inclusion of trans people in sports.
- Discussing trans topics in school can make students more aware of what's going on in the community. Education, for both students and staff is key in promoting more acceptance of trans people.
- Making sure your social media is inclusive and you are being non-discriminatory online.

If you have any forms that need to be filled in before joining a team, you can consult with TENI to find out best practice for equalities monitoring and asking about gender identities.



Conclusion

Do's&Don'tsof trans allyship

DO:

- Be respectful of other people's identities, backgrounds and experiences.
- Use the right name and pronouns.
- Respect trans people's privacy.
- Introduce your pronouns.
- Use your position - role model using the right name, pronoun, inclusive language.
- Ensure that trans people have access to appropriate facilities and uniforms.
- Interrupt and address any bullying, jokes or hurtful behaviour.
- Develop and maintain a Code of Conduct for all.

DON'T:

- Feel that you need to exactly understand someone else's experience in order to treat them with respect.
- Assume that you'll know if someone is trans - being trans looks different for everyone!
- Ask inappropriate or unnecessary questions about trans people's bodies, hormones, surgeries, previous names, etc.
- Disclose that an individual is trans to anyone else without their consent.



Other Supports

TENI Training

TENI can support your school by providing training on trans awareness and inclusion specific to sports environments in an open and non-judgemental learning environment. In our sports inclusion training we cover topics such as:

- Terminology that you will encounter when working with the trans community.
- Statistics about young LGBTQ+ people's experiences of sports in Ireland.
- What to do if someone comes out as trans and things to consider to make your sports environment more inclusive for trans people.
- Conscious and unconscious bias.
- The language used in a sports environment, or sports "banter", and how the language can affect trans people wanting to stay involved or leave sports.
- Tips on how to start creating a safe and inclusive environment for trans people.

If you want to find out more about our other trainings or want to book in trainings, visit our website at: www.teni.ie.

Additional Resources

- **Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI):** www.teni.ie
- **BelongTo:** www.belongto.ie
- **Athlete Ally, Transgender Inclusion in Sports Resources**
(<https://www.athleteally.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Resource-Document-FINAL.pdf>)
- **Australian Human Rights Commission, Guidelines for the Inclusion of Transgender and Gender Diverse People in Sports**
(https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_transgender_and_gender_diverse_guidelines_2019.pdf)
- **Football v Homophobia Scotland:** www.fvhscotland.org
- **Laureus: Sport for Good, A First Steps Guide Toward Transgender and Non-Binary Inclusion in Sport for Development**
(https://laureus-com-editor-files.s3.amazonaws.com/Toolkit_Beyond%20the%20Gender%20Binary%20Guide%202021_.pdf)
- **LEAP Sports Scotland Resources:** (www.leapsports.org/stay-informed/resources)
- **LGBT Youth Scotland: Supporting Transgender Young People**
(www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/media/1344/supporting-transgender-young-people.pdf)
- **Nederlands Olympisch Comité* Nederlandse Sport Federatie' (NOC*NSF), Guidelines for Inclusion of Gender and Sex Diverse Individuals**
(<https://cdn.nocnsf.nl/media/ewpk3pl1/guideline-gender-and-sex-in-sport-online-engels.pdf>)
- **Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Including Transgender People in Grassroot Sports**
(<https://nihrc.org/assets/uploads/Including-Transgender-People-in-Grassroots-Sport-Gender-ed-Intelligence-NISHRF-2023.pdf>)
- **Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Legalities Regard Trans Inclusion in Sport**
(<https://nihrc.org/assets/uploads/NIHRC-Transgender-inclusion-in-Sport-March-2023-Final.pdf>)
- **Outsport EU** (www.out-sport.eu/research/)
- **Pride Sports, Non-Binary People, Sports & Physical Activity**
(<https://pridesports.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Non-binary.pdf>)
- **Scottish Trans Alliance, Getting Equalities Monitoring Right**
(www.scottishtrans.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/getting_equalities_monitoring_right.pdf)
- **TransEDU** (www.trans.ac.uk/ResourcesInformation/Facilities/tabid/7236/Default.aspx)

Support Groups

TENI believes in creating spaces for whole family units to engage in support. We offer parents and young people support and guidance either in person, online or via phone calls.

We also have a variety of support groups.

Contact transparencigroup@gmail.com for the following support groups:

TransParenCI - Parent and adult family member support group. Meets once a month in person in Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Galway and Kerry, and online via Zoom.

Transformers - Teen support group for ages 13 - 18yrs. Meets once a month in person in Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Galway and Kerry, and online via Zoom.

TransParenCI Minis - Parent and adult family member support group for 12yrs and under. Meets once a month online via Zoom.

Transcend - Young adult support group for 18 - 24yrs. Meets once a month online via Zoom.

For any general queries, contact office@teni.ie



Transgender
Family Support Line
Families Supporting Families
01 907 3707

Signposting service that runs on Sunday from
6pm - 9pm and Tuesday from 10am - 12pm

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