

Guiding Conversations



WE DISCOVER, WE GROW

Girlguiding

Sexuality, gender identity and bullying

Introduction

The last few years have seen an increase in public awareness of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. Positive media coverage surrounded the 2013 same-sex marriage bill as it progressed through Parliament, and young people in the spotlight such as Tom Daley and Ellen Page have come out publicly and received support from their fans.

Despite these developments, members of the UK population who are part of the LGBT community still experience discrimination. For example, statistics from Stonewall state that one in six experience discrimination at work.

We are for all girls and young women, and we give them their own space - a safe, non-judgemental environment where they can be themselves completely. Conversations about sexuality and gender identity may arise naturally during unit meetings. This *Guiding Conversation* provides the information Leaders need to support young members as they grow, develop and interact with a wide range of people in today's changing world.

The 2010 Equality Act brought all existing anti-discrimination laws into a single act. It protects people from being discriminated against because of, among other things, their age, race, sex, gender reassignment or sexual orientation.

Girlguiding aims to be a fair, open and inclusive organisation. Members and supporters are welcome regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. For more information about our equality and diversity policy, please see www.girlguiding.org.uk/guidingmanual > Policies.

How to use this Guiding Conversation

This conversation focuses on three main topics: sexuality, gender identity and related bullying. It includes questions and talking points to facilitate discussion at District or Division meetings about awareness of these specific topics and how Leaders might address them in unit meetings. It

will help Leaders to confidently discuss these topics with their girls and direct them to correct information from expert sources.

Some participants may be sensitive to the issues raised, so be considerate during your discussion. Make the group aware that anyone in need of further support should speak with their local Commissioner. Local Commissioners, please see page 3 for additional information.

Key questions

- How do you think these topics might affect girls in your local area?
- Would you know where to go for additional support relating to the topics discussed in this Guiding Conversation?

Sexuality

Bisexual: a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to both men and women.

Gay: an umbrella term for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It is best to avoid using this word to cover all lesbian, gay and bisexual people as it can make lesbians and bisexuals feel invisible.

Gay man: a man who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards men.

Homosexual: considered by some in the LGBT community to be a derogatory and offensive term. It was used when same-sex attraction/relationships were construed as a mental illness. Use gay, lesbian, gay man/woman, bisexual, bisexual man/woman or the acronym LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual).

Lesbian: a woman who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards women.

Asexual: someone who does not experience sexual attraction, but may experience romantic attraction.

Aromantic: someone who does not experience romantic attraction, but may experience sexual attraction.

Guiding Conversations



WE DISCOVER, WE GROW

Girlguiding

Sexuality, gender identity and bullying

Girls, young women and even adults in guiding might choose to discuss their sexuality, their experiences and their feelings about it with their peers in guiding, or with a Leader or volunteer. This could be for a number of reasons - they might be beginning to explore or question their sexuality and want to know where they can find more information, or they might want to make you aware of their sexuality, or they might just like talk to someone they can trust.

Whether a member chooses to speak to you about her sexuality, or has spoken to other girls in the unit who then share that information with you, it is important to be positive and reassuring. Make it clear that her sexual orientation is not an issue in guiding, and that she has your support and the support of the unit.

Don't...

- make assumptions
- use phrases like 'it's just a phase'.

Do...

- offer reassurance
- tell her that anything discussed will be confidential
- listen and be supportive - ask her how she feels and let her know she can come and talk to you again
- discuss how parents and/or carers might respond
- let her know that if anyone in the unit is not being supportive she should tell you
- ask how she'd like to proceed and if she needs any further information - you could suggest she looks at www.stonewall.org.uk.

Key questions

- How might you feel if a girl or young woman, a volunteer or another Leader came out to you?
- Would you feel confident having a conversation about her sexuality?

Gender identity

Transgender: a person who feels that the sex they were assigned at birth does not match or sit easily with their own sense of gender. Trans people include: those who were assigned male at birth whose gender is female (trans women); those who were assigned female at birth whose gender is male (trans men); those who do not identify as 'male' or 'female' (non-binary people).

You may meet young members or volunteers within Girlguiding who are questioning their gender identity, or who are transgender. Again, guiding may offer a secure environment in which they feel confident to discuss their feelings and thoughts with their peers, a Leader or a volunteer.

If a member chooses to discuss their gender identity with you, you should approach the conversation in a similar way to one about sexuality. See our *Let's Talk Gender and Gender Identity* guidance for more information.

If they are looking for more information, you could direct them to one of a number of different organisations, such as Gendered Intelligence (www.genderedintelligence.co.uk), Mermaids (www.mermaidsuk.org.uk) or the Scottish Transgender Alliance (www.scottishtrans.org).

Key questions

- Watch the YouTube video about the Whittington family in the 'Further information' section, which provides a sensitive introduction to the issues facing families with children who are questioning their gender identity. What are your thoughts? Is there anything in the video you would like to explore further?
- How would you feel if a girl or young woman, a volunteer or another Leader opened up to you about their gender identity?
- Would you feel confident having a conversation about gender identity?

Guiding Conversations



WE DISCOVER, WE GROW

Girlguiding

Sexuality, gender identity and bullying

Bullying

Homophobia: The beliefs and actions of people who hold these views and act upon them are based around a hatred of, or intolerance for, and/or a refusal to accept or acknowledge the equal rights of any lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Currently, 53 per cent of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people say that they experience bullying at school (Stonewall). Homophobic bullying can come in many different forms, from verbal and physical abuse to cyberbullying. Both bullying and the use of homophobic language by peers can have a negative impact on LGBT young people. It can lower their self-esteem, affect their well-being and happiness, and make them less likely to reach their full potential. It is very important, therefore, that homophobic language and bullying are addressed immediately and consistently. See our inclusive language guidance for further information and support.

Some homophobic language, such as the use of the term 'gay' in a negative context, can often go unnoticed and unchallenged. You might like to have a discussion in your unit about what language is appropriate and inappropriate, and challenge girls on the use of phrases like 'that's so gay'. Or, if it is not covered already, you could incorporate using appropriate and inclusive language and behaviour into your unit guidelines, which might encourage a wider discussion.

Key questions

- Do you hear your girls or adult volunteers using homophobic language? If so, how often, and what do you do about it?
- How confident do you feel about challenging homophobic language with your girls or other adults?
- Have you seen homophobic bullying happening within guiding? How have you dealt with this, or how might you?

If a girl discloses to you that she is exploring or struggling with her sexuality and/or gender identity, this is not a safeguarding issue. You need not break confidentiality unless you believe she or another young person is at risk of harm.

However, if you are concerned about the safety of a girl at any point, you should contact your local Commissioner or email safeguarding@girlguiding.org.uk for further advice. If you believe a girl is in immediate danger, you must report your concerns, in line with Girlguiding's safeguarding policy.

Consult *A Safe Space* for more information (see the 'Further information' section for more details).

For local Commissioners

If you require extra support running this conversation, please speak to your County Commissioner or email leadership@girlguiding.org.uk.

During the course of this conversation a question may be asked, or an issue raised, that you are unsure how to tackle. In anticipation of this, you may like to provide a 'question box' for participants to use at the end of the meeting. This will allow you time to respond accurately and appropriately to any questions by using the suggested resources or emailing leadership@girlguiding.org.uk. It could also be used to help identify any training needs for your District/Division.

Further information Girlguiding

Use the search facility on the Girlguiding website (www.girlguiding.org.uk) to find the following resources.

Let's Talk Gender and Gender Identity.

Inclusive language guidance.

A Safe Space - must-read guidelines for Leaders on the policies and procedures that are in place to protect both girls and volunteers.

Guiding Conversations



WE DISCOVER, WE GROW

Girlguiding

Sexuality, gender identity and bullying

Let's Talk Guidelines - for Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and The Senior Section, and advice for Leaders.

Girlguiding's equality and diversity policy.

Information about the Equality Act 2010.

Girlguiding is a core member of the Sex Education Forum and supports the Sex and Relationships Education Campaign. For further information, visit www.sexeducationforum.org.uk.

Government policy

Equality Act 2010 (www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance) - guidance from the government's Equalities Office and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Resources

Everyone is Included (www.stonewall.org.uk > At school > Education for all > Youth workers) - information for adults working in the youth sector to help them to support young people outside the school environment.

Including Different Families (www.stonewall.org.uk > At school > Education for all > Resources > Education guides) - aimed at schools, but can be a useful starting point for Leaders to think about inclusion.

Supporting Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Young People (www.stonewall.org.uk > At school > Education for all > Resources > Education guides) - a guide for schools and anyone working with young people.

Tackling Homophobic Language (www.stonewall.org.uk > At school > Education for all > Resources > Education guides) - guidelines for teachers and youth workers to understand and challenge homophobic language.

The Whittington Family: Ryland's Story (www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAHCqnux2fk) - YouTube video that gives a sensitive introduction to the issues facing families with children who are questioning their gender identity.

Useful organisations

Galop (www.galop.org.uk) - London-based LGBT anti-violence and abuse charity.

Gendered Intelligence (genderedintelligence.co.uk) - organisation that specialises in supporting young trans people.

Mermaids (www.mermaidsuk.org.uk) - organisation that supports young people and families experiencing gender identity issues.

Stonewall (www.stonewall.org.uk) or call 0800 050 2020 - charity working for equality and justice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans people. Provides information and local support networks.

Safe Network (www.safenetwork.org.uk) > Training & awareness > LGBT) - offers a range of useful guidance on supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender children and young people.

The Scottish Transgender Alliance (www.scottishtrans.org) - works to improve gender identity and gender reassignment equality, rights and inclusion in Scotland. Provides useful information for young transgender people and their families.