

Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in Girl Scouts

girl scouts of northern illinois

We are building Girl Scouts of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place. To do that, we must first provide a space that is inclusive, equitable, and accessible for all Girl Scouts, across diverse identities including transgender gender expansive youth.

Supporting LGBTQ+ Girl Scouts Requires Special Care and Attention

LGBTQ+ youth often face prejudice and discrimination that their cisgender and straight peers do not and are put at risk for negative mental health outcomes and suicide as a result. Overall, 41% of LGBTQ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year—and young people who are transgender, nonbinary, and/or people of color reported higher rates than their peers (The Trevor Project, 2023). When we affirm the identities of our LGBTQ+ youth, we have a direct impact on lowering their risk of suicide. Ensuring that Girl Scouts is a supportive and LGBTQ+ affirming space can save lives.

Supporting LGBTQ+ youth may be unfamiliar to you, so we have provided resources and trainings to help you on your way. You do not need to be an expert of LGBTQ+ youth to create a space where Girl Scouts feel safe, nurtured, and affirmed. You simply need to be intentional in making space for all Girl Scouts and have a willingness to learn when unfamiliar topics arise.

Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois would like to thank our sister councils that have led the charge in making Girl Scouts a more LGBTQ+ inclusive place to be, especially Girl Scouts of Northwestern Great Lakes and Girl Scouts of Western Washington. Thank you to Carolyn Wahlskog at Youth-Outlook for her assistance in preparing this document and developing training for GSNI staff and volunteers.

What does LGBTQ+ stand for?

- **Lesbian**
- **Gay**
- **Bisexual**
- **Transgender**
- **Queer**
- **+** represents any other gender or orientation identities not listed.

LGBTQ+ Terminology and FAQs on Page 2 will help describe other important words and concepts.

Supporting LGBTQ+ in Girl Scouts Resources

GSNI is in no way recommending the sites listed here. We are simply sharing them for informational purposes only.

The Safe Zone Project: (https://thesafezoneproject.com): Offers free, on demand training.

The Gender Unicorn, Trans Student Educational Resources: (transstudent.org/gender): Includes an infographic series that expanded their reach to millions of people around the world. These graphics covering a wide range of topics pertinent to trans youth around the country.

The Trevor Project: (https://www.thetrevorproject.org/) The leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention nonprofit organization for LGBTQ+ young people providing information and support to LGBTQ+ young people at all times.

Q Chat Space: (Q Chat Space | Home) This space is for youth between the ages of 13 and 19.

IMI-Guide: (https://imi.guide/) Provides guides built for and with LGBTQ+ teens to help them explore their identity and support their mental health.

Pflag: (https://pflag.org/) Creating a caring, just, and affirming world for LGBTQ+ people and those who love them.

Pinwheels: (pinwheels.us) A network of families embracing their children's and teens gender creativity in a kind a loving manner.

Additional resources can be found on the Youth-Outlook website (https://youth-outlook.org/): Dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ youth in seven counties in northern Illinois, offering drop-in centers for youth, caregivers, and parent support, plus community education and professional development.

More info: girlscoutsni.org/diversity

LGBTQ+ Terminology:

Words and Concepts Related to Gender:

Gender identity: refers to your sense of self and who you know you are.

- Female/woman/girl
- Male/man/boy
- Other gender(s)

Sex assigned at birth: is the sex a doctor assigned at birth.

- Female
- Male
- Intersex

Gender expression: refers to how you present your gender to the world and is heavily influenced by cultural gender norms. Things we use to express our gender might be haircuts, outfits, or stereotypically gendered toys, activity, and even career choices.

- Feminine
- Masculine
- Gender Neutral

Cisgender: people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth

Transition: the process of living in a way that affirms your gender identity. The steps in this process will differ for each person, but common steps include changing names and pronouns, or medical interventions to make your body consistent with your identity.

Transgender: an umbrella term for people whose gender identity or expression is different from their sex assigned at birth.

- ***Trans boys/men:*** assigned female at birth but psychologically know they are boys or men. *Likely pronouns: he/him*
- ***Trans girls/women:*** assigned male at birth but psychologically know they are girls or women. *Likely pronouns: she/her*

Non-binary: people who don't identify exclusively as a boy or girl. The gender expression for a non-binary person could have components of femininity and masculinity, reject all components of femininity and masculinity in favor of androgyny, and/or change day to day. Similar terms: genderqueer, genderfluid, gender non-conforming; *Likely pronouns: them/they*

Intersex: variations of anatomical sex characteristics that aren't classified as typically male or female at birth.

Two-Spirit: an umbrella term created by First Nations/Native American/Indigenous peoples to describe a sexual orientation and/or gender/sex that exists outside of colonial constructions of the gender binary (neither man nor woman, but a distinct, alternative gender status exclusive to their ethnicity). This term should not be appropriated by or used to describe people who are not First Nations/Native American/Indigenous

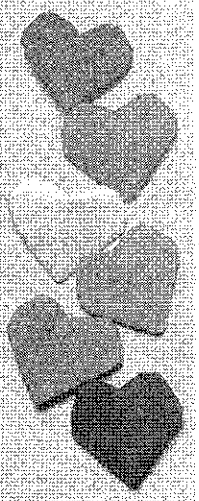
Questioning: anyone who may know they feel different, but are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression

Gender Expansive: anyone who does not identify with traditional gender roles but otherwise does not confine themselves to one gender narrative or experience. Similar terms could be gender non-confirming, genderqueer, non-binary, etc.

Outdated and Hurtful Language

Preferred language is in **bold**.

- *Hermaphrodite:* is stigmatizing and inaccurate, instead use **Intersex.**
- *Homosexual:* associated with a medical diagnosis, instead use **Gay**.
- *Born female/male and female/male-bodied:* **assigned** female/male at birth, which accurately depicts what happened at birth.
- *A gay/a transgender:* is using labels as nouns instead of adjectives, instead say **a gay person/a transgender person.**



Words and Concepts Related to Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation/attraction or romantic orientation/attraction: to whom you are sexually or romantically attracted

Asexual or Ace: having little or no sexual attraction

Bisexual: being attracted to more than one gender

Gay: being attracted to the same gender. Historically used for men who are attracted to men

Lesbian: a woman who is attracted to women

Pansexual: being attracted to any gender, or to people regardless of their gender

Omnisexual: attraction to all genders, though gender often still plays a role in one's attraction

Queer: an umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual. This term has been reclaimed by the LBGTQ+ community after being used as a slur.

Supporting LGBTQ+ in Girl Scouts Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How can I make Girl Scouts an inclusive place for ALL Girl Scouts?
Resource: https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/guide/a-guide-to-being-an-ally-to-transgender-and-nonbinary-youth/ Creating a safe and affirming space benefits all Girl Scouts, not just those who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. We recognize that all Girl Scouts will interact with the LGBTQ+ community at some point in their lives, whether it be a family member, friend, or fellow community member. For this reason, modeling Girl Scouts as an inclusive space matters all the time, even if there is not a known LGBTQ+ member in your group.

When creating an inclusive space for LGBTQ+ young people and adults, consider the ways you advertise your group and programming, your outreach and recruitment efforts, and what a youth and their family will experience from the first entry point (visuals, paperwork).

Use role models from the LGBTQ+ community when looking for guest speakers or historical figures for troop meetings. Seeing positive representations of LGBTQ+ people can help counterbalance negative representations and stereotypes that young people may pick up. And it demonstrates that our LGBTQ+ Girl Scouts can have a future in leadership, too!

Celebrate LGBTQ+ holidays like:
- International Transgender Day of Visibility (3/31)
- National Coming Out Day (10/11)
- Pride Month (6/1 through 6/30)

If you hear comments about being gay or trans used as an insult or negative description, hear a homophobic or transphobic joke, or hear other stereotypes or hurtful language being used, take time to talk about it. Your responses could include:
- Ouch! That comment/joke was hurtful/homophobic/transphobic, please don't do it again.
- Actually, that is a stereotype, not all XYZ people do/say/experience that. May I share another perspective?
- When you say ABC, you are insulting the XYZ community. Can you think of a different word to use?

GSNI welcomes Girl Scouts across many diverse identities including transgender gender expansive youth. Why no cisgender boys?
Cisgender girls, transgender boys and girls and gender expansive youth face unique challenges and oppressions in their lives due to their gender identities. We strive to create a safe space that is inclusive, equitable, and accessible for marginalized gender identities. A place where, as Girl Scouts, they can build courage, confidence, and character so they can make the world a better place.

A note on transgender boys/trans masculine scouts: on occasion, a member may transition to non-binary or male but still feel connected to their Girl Scout troop. They are welcome to continue to participate. When you have members who no longer identify with the word "girl", be extra mindful to use inclusive language when referring to your group members. Avoid language such as "ladies, let's go" etc.

How can I best support a LGBTQ+ Girl Scout:
- Keep the Girl Scout and their well-being in mind.
- Allow them to talk about their feelings and experiences.
- Ask them if they are getting support elsewhere or need anything from you.
- Respect their privacy.
- If you don't know the answer to something, that's ok! Tell them you aren't sure and will find more information.

Do I have to use a Girl Scout's pronouns?
Yes. Asking for and using correct pronouns is a way to treat everyone with respect. Introducing yourself and including your own pronouns is a wonderful way to make space for others to do the same. If you make a mistake, apologize, correct yourself, and move on. If you hear someone else make a mistake with your pronouns or another Girl Scout's pronouns, correct them, and move on. For more information, please see https://www.mypronouns.org.

What do I tell people if they have questions about another Girl Scout?
Let them know that due to the individual Girl Scout's right to privacy, you cannot discuss specifics about any member and remind them that Girl Scouts is a welcoming and inclusive environment.

How do I respond to or support parents or volunteers who argue or question the policies/procedures?
Please refer them to their Membership Engagement Specialist, Director of Membership, or Chief of Belonging and Membership.

Do I have to provide separate bathrooms, dressing rooms, or showers for LGBTQ+ Girl Scouts?
All Girl Scouts are entitled to privacy while using restroom facilities. This includes toilets, changing areas, and showers. Please continue to practice privacy strategies including access to private changing spaces and times for all individuals, whenever requested. Members have the right to use the facilities of their choosing (men's, women's, or gender-neutral facilities where available).

Supporting LGBTQ+ in Girl Scouts Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

For overnight events, where should everyone sleep?
Girl Scouts who are LGBTQ+ can share a room and all facilities with other Girl Scouts. Unless a Girl Scout states otherwise, no separate sleeping arrangements are necessary. There is no need to "out" or discuss a Girl Scouts' gender identity with other youth or adults. If questions or issues arise, address the issue with respect, protecting the needs of the LGBTQ+ youth, and in an age-appropriate manner.

During the registration process or parent/caregiver meeting, provide an opportunity for Girl Scouts and families to share what they need to be successful for the overnight and offer accommodations such as private shower facilities or sleeping arrangements as requested.

What if I don't have the right words?
From the time of Shakespeare to the teen slang of today, language is always changing. Do your best to learn more, but don't fault yourself if you feel two steps behind. If you have a question, feel free to ask the person who used it or look it up. Follow the lead of the Girl Scout and the language they use to describe themselves.

Keep in mind though, that the language we use matters, and that we are setting an example for the Girl Scouts we serve. Language can be used to purposefully demean others, like when the wrong pronouns are repeated after multiple corrections. Or it can be used to purposefully include others. Default to gender neutral terms and pronouns that avoid promoting a binary when gender doesn't need to be specific.

- People of all genders do these jobs: firefighter, police officer, mail carrier
- Addressing a group: everyone, folks, honored guests, friends, kiddos, campers, Girl Scouts
- Example of Gender Neutral Pronouns: they, them, theirs

What if two Girl Scouts are dating or demonstrating physical attraction?
A greeting hug is fine if both parties agree to it, but other public displays of affection are discouraged and not allowed during Girl Scout meetings/functions. Hands are to be kept to oneself. Age-appropriate behavior is expected. It is strongly encouraged that groups make group agreements which can state that the relationships built through Girl Scouts activities are intended to be platonic. Note that volunteers and employees are held to the same standards.

What if LGBTQ+ topics are raised by youth or come up naturally during Girl Scout activities?
If topics relating to LGBTQ+ identities are raised organically, it is acceptable to discuss them on the level of identity, education, and experiences. Avoid allowing the conversation to turn to the act of sex. Please use your best judgment and, if unsure, in consultation with GSNI staff in deciding whether the use of a Sensitive Issues Permission Slip would be required. In that case, tell any individuals involved that you would like to place a hold on the conversation and that you will return to it once the permission slips have been issued. With older Girl Scouts or with groups with LGBTQ+ youth, you may want to make use of the Sensitive Issues Permission Slip at the beginning of year to allow for the conversation to happen when it arises.

What if volunteers or employees identify as trangender or gender expansive?
The same guidelines are applicable regardless of whether the individuals are youth, volunteers, or employees.

I don't feel equipped to navigate gender issues, what can I do?
Talk to the individual, talk to parents/caregivers (if they are engaged and know), or talk to the appropriate staff member. Educate yourself and consider attending our LGBTQ+ and other DEI training opportunities. We are excited to help and support you, and there are lots of resources for you (reference Supporting LGBTQ+ in Girl Scouts Resources on page 1). We all have a responsibility to treat every individual with respect and dignity, and to honor the way they show up in the world.

What should I do if a Girl Scout comes out to me?
Express appreciation. The fact that they have trusted you with this information is a big deal. Ask if they need any support or assistance, or if they are getting support and assistance from anywhere else. If a Girl Scout is sharing their gender identity, ask what name and pronouns you should use for them AND if you may use that name and pronoun all the time or only in certain circumstances. It is important to remember they may not be out in all settings. Respect the Girl Scouts' privacy by not sharing this personal information with anyone else unless the Girl Scout has asked you to or given you permission. The Girl Scout may not have shared this information with their family and friends or may not be living openly. Disclosing this personal information causes unnecessary stress on the young person and can put them at risk. Do not question or deny the identity the Girl Scout has shared with you.