



Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in Girl Scouts

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 many diverse identities.

Supporting LGBTQ+ Girl Scouts requires special care and attention

LGBTQ+ youth often face prejudice and discrimination and are put at risk for negative mental health outcomes and suicide as a result. 36% of LGBTQ+ students in Maine seriously considered suicide in 2023, three times higher than non-LGBTQ+ youth. 51% of transgender youth in Maine seriously considered suicide in 2023, five times higher than non-LGBTQ+ youth (Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 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, so we have provided some resources and trainings to help you on your way. You do not need to be an expert on 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.

To learn more about the histories, cultures, and identities of the LGBTQ+ community, visit The Safe Zone Projects* website for free, on demand training.

You'll see the acronym LGBTQ+ throughout this document. It stands for:

Lesbian

Gay

Bisexual

Transgender

Queer

Questioning



represents any other gender or orientation identities not listed.

See page 6 for the full definitions.

The Safe Zone Project Website:
thesafezoneproject.com/resources/courses/

** The Safe Zone Project is a free online resource for powerful, effective LGBTQ+ awareness and ally training workshops.*



Frequently Asked Questions

How can I make Girl Scouts an inclusive place for ALL Girl Scouts?

Creating a safe and affirming space benefits all Girl Scouts, not just those who are LGBTQ+. All Girl Scouts will interact with the LGBTQ+ community as family members, friends, and fellow community members even if they are not LGBTQ+ themselves. For this reason, making Girl Scouts an inclusive space matters all the time, not just when an LGBTQ+ individual is involved.

If you hear comments about being gay or trans used as an insult or a 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?*

In some instances, it may not be appropriate to explain or engage in a discussion around the hurtful language, as that can be uncomfortable for other youth who are overhearing it. It may be best to stop the conversation, and then follow up with the child who made the comment later.

If disrespectful or hurtful behavior continues, connect with your GSME Volunteer Support Specialist.

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)

Pride Month (6/1-6/30)

National Coming Out Day (10/11)

What should I do if a Girl Scout comes outs 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's important to remember that 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 to. 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.



Frequently Asked Questions Continued

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. According to The Trevor Project, correct pronoun usage can reduce suicidality by 50%. Introducing yourself and including your own pronouns is a great 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 Scouts' pronouns, correct them and move on. Getting used to new pronouns takes practice! If you're having a hard time remembering, write yourself a story using the correct name and pronoun, and read it out loud. Repeat until it becomes easier. It just takes practice.

How do labels work?

Labels are adjectives that help us describe ourselves. Labels have generally accepted broad definitions, but the finer details of interpretation vary from person to person. As an individual, only you can decide what labels are right for you and what aspects of your identity you want to label or not label.

For example, "tall" is a label that we can use to describe our height. We generally agree on what tall means, but each person may have a slightly different interpretation. We may choose to label ourselves as a "tall person" or we may choose not to identify with any label regarding our height.

When it comes to gender and attraction/orientation labels, each person decides what is right for them, and it is important that we respect the label or lack of label that they choose.

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.

Who can join Girl Scouts and participate in troops, camp, and other activities?

Yes

- *Cisgender girl (gender identity girl & sex assigned at birth girl)*
- *Gender non-conforming or non-binary*
- *Transgender individuals*
- *Gender identity girl & sex assigned at birth male*
- *Gender identity boy & sex assigned at birth female*

No

- *Cisgender boy (gender identity boy & sex assigned at birth male)*

How can I best support an 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 would like to connect with a local LGBTQ+ youth group*
- *Protect them from any anti LGBTQ+ comments, jokes and sentiments.*
- *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.



Frequently Asked Questions Continued

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 good privacy strategies including access to private changing spaces and times for all individuals, whenever requested. Members have the right to use the facility of their choosing (men's, women's, or gender-neutral facilities where available).

For overnight events, where should everyone sleep?

Girls 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 Scout's 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, provide an opportunity for Girl Scouts and families to share what they need to be successful for the overnight and provide an opportunity for 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 about a term or acronym, 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 specified.

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





Words and Concepts to Know Related to Gender:

Gender identity

refers to your sense of self, and who you know you are.

Sex assigned at birth

is the sex a doctor assigned at birth.

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 toy, activity, and even career choices.

● **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.

Includes:

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.





Sexual orientation/attraction or Romantic orientation/attraction

who you are sexually or romantically attracted to.

Words and Concepts to Know Related to Orientation/Attraction

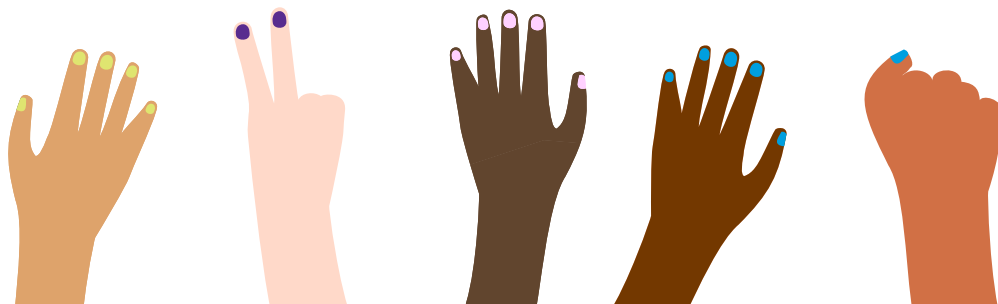
- **Asexual or Ace:** having little or no sexual attraction.
- **Bisexual:** being attracted to more than one gender.
- **Gay:** being attracted to the same gender. Historically used for men who are attracted to men.
- **Lesbian:** a woman who is attracted to women.
- **Pansexual:** being attracted to 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 LGBTQ+ community after being used as a slur.



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: instead use **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**.
- It: is for referring to things, not people, instead use **They**.





Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in Girl Scouts
Resources

OUT Maine All Resources A - Z

<https://www.outmaine.org/document-library/>

GLAD Resources for Youth In Maine

<https://www.glad.org/maine-youth-resources/>

Equality Maine

<https://equalitymaine.org/>

LGBTQ-Inclusive Language Dos and Don'ts, Safe Zone Project

<https://thesafezoneproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/LGBTQ-Inclusive-Dos-Donts.pdf>

The Gender Unicorn, Trans Student Educational Resources

<https://transstudent.org/gender/>

The Trevor Project

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

Portland OUTRIGHT

<https://portlandoutright.org/>

**If you need help finding additional resources contact GSME
at 888.922.4763 or customercare@gsmaine.org**

