

Gender Inclusive Environment in Youth Settings

Guidance

About This Guidance

The NYA believes that all youth work should take a rights-based approach and centre the needs of individual and collective young people. This implies that all youth work should ensure that the rights outlined by the UNCRC are equally applicable to all young people accessing your provision.

When working with young people who are exploring their gender, it is important that their needs and rights are protected equally alongside those of their non-gender-questioning peers. It's important to emphasize the principles of inclusivity, respect for gender identity, and the well-being of all.

It is important to begin with acknowledging the complexity of this issue and the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment for all young people. We should never assume someone's gender identity. We should treat all young people with equal respect and dignity.

We should use young people's chosen names that they share with us in the environment, without making assumptions about what this means for their gender identity and journey. This is not about affirming or denying a young person's identity, but about meeting them where they are at in that moment. All young people have a right to feel safe and secure in your youth work setting as well as with you as their youth worker. This might mean that there is a need to define and redefine the way you engage with a young person in different spaces.

As youth workers we have a responsibility to safeguard and protect the well-being of all the young people who we engage with. If we encounter any concerns regarding the health or well-being of a young person, it is essential to appropriately share or disclose this information with parents, guardians, or relevant parties, such as social care, when it is both necessary and safe to do so. This may include sharing information about gender and identity if it is to protect a young person from harm. Protection from harm is paramount.

Youth workers should ensure inclusion of all genders in activities, including residential. There may be exceptions to this based on group need, for example support groups that are for non-binary young people, or single sex/gender spaces (as determined by the group themselves).

If providing for multiple genders means there are extra expenses, like single-person rooms in residential, plan for these costs from the start. It's important not to disadvantage anyone for needing a single occupancy room; costs should be fair for equal access and opportunities.

Creating a gender-inclusive environment

1. Treat all young people with respect. Never assume someone's gender identity.
2. Maintain confidentiality regarding a young person's gender identity within the group, unless they have given explicit permission to share information.
3. Seek consent before discussing or disclosing a young person's gender identity to others, including parents or guardians.
4. Create a zero-tolerance policy for bullying or harassment based on gender identity or expression. Establish a clear and confidential reporting mechanism for young people who experience discrimination, harassment, or bullying.
5. Empower young people to challenge discriminatory behaviour in a positive way.
6. Use inclusive language in all materials, discussions, and activities. This includes all policies.
7. Plan activities and events that are inclusive and respectful of all gender identities. Encourage participation from all young people.
8. Ensure that staff and volunteers receive training on gender diversity and inclusion, so they can better support and understand the needs of all young people. Recognise the intersectional nature of oppression and the need for cultural competency. If you don't know, ask, don't assume.
9. Stay informed about current best practices, research, and legal developments related to gender diversity, and incorporate new knowledge into policies and practice.
10. Provide information and resources on gender identity and support where needed. Collaborate with specialist organisations for specialist guidance.