



## LGBTQ – Guidelines for UNHCE Youth Programs

### Culture & Values:

*UNHCE is committed to programming that is welcoming and supportive of youth, staff and volunteers of all sexual orientations and gender identities. We believe having gender and sexual identity diversity adds to the quality of our programs and we will not tolerate bullying or harassment. This is a core value that needs to be expressed openly and often.*

### Forms & Disclosure:

- Before asking for a youth, volunteer, or staff person’s gender identity or sexual orientation, make sure this information is in fact essential information.
- Forms:
  - If gender identity is necessary information, then forms should not be limited to Male/Female. Forms must have a ‘write-in’ option (e.g., “Gender\_\_\_\_\_.”)
  - Forms should also have space where staff, volunteers, youth and their guardians can write in notes about special needs or considerations
- Do not assume you know someone’s gender or sexual orientation.
- Never reveal a staff, volunteer, or youth’s sexual orientation or gender identity without their permission. It is ok to ask for this permission if sharing the information would be in the best interest of the person (e.g., it may be helpful to share a youth’s trans-gender identity with the counselors in their cabin).

### Practices:

- Staff/volunteer training must include our commitment to diversity, our lack of tolerance for bullying, and the importance of respecting privacy.
- Bathrooms: Staff, volunteers, and youth should have access to all restrooms that correspond to their consistently asserted gender identity. If possible, at least one restroom should be designated as non-gender specific. However, no staff, volunteer or youth shall be required to use such a restroom because they are transgender or gender nonconforming.
- Cabins/bunk-rooms, Bedrooms and locker rooms: There is no one size fits all answer to bunk and locker-room assignments for LGBTQ people. While in most cases a transgender youth should have access to facilities that correspond to their gender identity, it is vitally important to openly communicate with the youth, volunteers and staff about their needs and desires in order to create the best solution. Some transgender youth, for example may feel more comfortable housing with the gender that correlates with their full time presentation and identity and others with their biological sex. Some may want to room with a few select friends and some, if given the option, may prefer their own room. Again, it is important to work with the LGBTQ youth and family (as we would work with any youth and family) to create a reasonable accommodation that best suits the needs of everyone involved.

## LGBTQ Terminology

**LGBTQ** : Stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (occasionally a second Q, meaning Questioning, will also be present); the letters together represent a community of people who experience oppression on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Gender Binary:** The two commonly understood genders, male and female, with all of the societal reinforcements that accompany those genders (i.e. — men act in a masculine way and avoid stereotypically feminine behaviors; women act in a feminine way and avoid stereotypically masculine behaviors); the gender binary is seen as too limited and restrictive for the many individuals who don't fit easily into one category.

**Gender Expression:** The way individuals display their understanding of their own gender identity to others, through all of the ways our society identifies gender — clothing, hair styles, makeup, presence, etc.

**Gender Identity:** Separate from biological sex, gender identity reflects how individuals understand their own gender, or even a non-gender.

**Gender Transition:** *Medical Gender Transition* - physical changes, such as through gender-affirming surgery / sexual reassignment surgery and/or hormonal therapy that result in one's physical appearance affirming one's gender identity; not all transgender individuals choose to take hormones or undergo gender affirming surgery. *Social Gender Transition* - many individuals may choose not to undergo a medical gender transition, but will experience a social transition and will consider themselves to be post-transition if they are living as a gender different from the one assigned at birth.

**Queer:** A term used by individuals who do not identify as heterosexual, but are not comfortable labeling themselves gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and consider their sexuality on a continuum. Queer or genderqueer may also be used by an individual who doesn't feel they fit into the gender binary of male or female, but that their gender identity falls somewhere along a continuum between male and female. NOTE: this term has very negative connotations and when it is used in a more positive way it is being done so as a "reclaimed" term and thus it might not be suitable for general use.

**Sex:** A person's assignment at birth as biologically male, female, or intersex

**Sexual Orientation:** Refers to the gender that one is attracted to (in a romantic, emotional, and spiritual way); the commonly understood sexual orientations are *gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, and queer*.

**Transgender:** An umbrella term used broadly to describe individuals who identify as a gender different from that of their biological sex, or see their gender identity as fluid and not conforming to the gender binary.

**Transition:** The process in which a person changes their gender expression to better reflect their gender identity. In order to feel comfortable and to express their gender identity to other people, transgender people may take a variety of steps: using a nickname or legally changing their name; choosing clothes and hairstyles that reflect their gender identity; and generally living, and presenting themselves to others, consistently with their gender identity. Some, but not all, transgender people take hormones or undergo surgical procedures to change their bodies to reflect their gender identity.