



# VOLLEYBALL CANADA

Homophobia and Transphobia Guide for  
Volleyball Canada's PTA's and Clubs

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide education and information for Volleyball Canada's PTA's and Club with respect to homophobia and transphobia. Volleyball Canada wishes to ensure a safe and positive environment (within programs, activities, and events) by making all individuals aware that there is an expectation, at all times, of appropriate behaviour consistent with the values of Volleyball Canada (VC), as set out in Section 3 of VC's Code of Conduct ("Code") and supported by Bill 13 (Accepting Schools Act) of the Province of Ontario, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of Canada (if applicable) and applicable provincial human rights legislation.

These documents support the Code and VC's commitment to providing an environment in which all individuals are treated with respect. VC supports equal opportunity and prohibits discriminatory practices. In keeping with the Code, individuals are expected to conduct themselves at all times in a manner consistent with the values of VC that include fairness, integrity, accountability, excellence, accessibility, innovation, and respect.

Conduct that violates the Code and/or these Policies and Procedures may be subject to sanctions pursuant to VC's Discipline and Complaints Policy.

### 1.2 Definitions<sup>1</sup>

As leaders in sport, we must all learn to be comfortable talking about the issue of homophobia and transphobia in society in general and in sport in particular. To help, here are some simple definitions of some common terms:

**Bisexual** – a term that describes an individual whose emotional and sexual attractions and connections are with persons of both sexes.

**Coming out, being out of the closet, or being out** – the process of becoming aware that one's sexual orientation is not heterosexual, accepting it and telling others about it.

**Gay** – a term that describes an individual whose primary emotional and sexual attractions and connections are with persons of the same sex (see "homosexual"). Gay is often distinguished from homosexual primarily by the emphasis it also places on the cultural and social aspects of homosexuality as opposed simply to sexual practice. Gay is often, but not always, used to describe males specifically.

**Gender dysphoria** – a term describing the intense and continuous discomfort a person feels when their physical sex and gender identity are not aligned.

**Gender identity** – a person's internal sense of themselves as male, female or something in between.

**Heterosexism** – the assumption that everyone is or should be heterosexual and that

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Seeing the Invisible, Speaking about the Unspoken: A Position Paper on Homophobia and Sport* by the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, 2006.

heterosexuality is the only “normal” or “natural” expression of sexuality.

**Homophobia** – fear or hatred of gays, lesbians or homosexuality. Homophobia can be expressed both subtly and overtly.

**Homosexual** – a term that describes an individual whose primary emotional and sexual attractions and connections are with persons of the same sex (compare with definition of “gay”). Homosexual is not typically used by gays and lesbians to describe themselves.

**In the closet** – keeping one’s sexual orientation secret. People can be in the closet to varying degrees: for example, while they might be “out” in their personal life, they might remain “in the closet” with their families, work colleagues or sports team.

**Lesbian** – a more specific term to describe a female whose primary sexual attraction is to other females.

**LGBT or LGBTQ** – an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (or questioning). Increasingly, this general acronym is used to describe a broader community of sexually diverse minorities.

**Questioning** – a term used to describe individuals who are unsure of their sexual orientation.

**Sexual orientation** – the direction of one’s sexual attraction towards the same sex (homosexual), the opposite sex (heterosexual), or both sexes (bisexual). Sexual orientation occurs along a continuum.

**Straight** – a term that describes an individual whose primary emotional and sexual attractions

and connections are with persons of the opposite sex (also heterosexual).

**Transgender** – an umbrella term used to describe a wide array of persons whose gender identity does not necessarily conform to stereotypical gender norms of male or female.

**Transitioned** – a term that refers to a person experiencing gender dysphoria who chooses to align their gender role and gender identity. Transitioned individuals undergo hormonal treatment, surgery and possibly other body modifications so that they may live their lives physically, psychologically and emotionally as either a woman or a man.

**Two-spirited** – This term derives from a First Nations tradition and describes people who display characteristic of both genders. It is used today in reference to LGBTQ persons of First Nations origin.

### 1.3 Background

Despite many gains in LGBTQ rights over the past two decades, discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is still often hidden, ignored, or denied in Canadian society. Most of us have seen and heard people — at home, at work and in many other contexts — making homophobic or transphobic comments or otherwise demonstrating intolerance of LGBTQ people.

This kind of discrimination can damage people’s job security, work, their mental and physical health, and academic or sporting performance. Furthermore, it violates their basic human right to be treated with respect, dignity and fairness. The repercussions of discrimination have been well-documented in the media. Along with the many studies supporting the negative impact of discriminative behaviour on a person’s well-

being, an awareness of these damaging effects has ushered in new legislation and policies at many government levels to address the issues central to eliminating the behaviour.

Discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity can contribute to lower rates of participation in sport by LGBTQ people, increased drop-out rates and absenteeism among students, and decreased productivity and increased resignations among employees.

Sport can provide participants with enjoyment, relaxation, income, health and social benefits. At its best, sport also promotes fairness and equity. Unfortunately, homophobia and transphobia in sport remain largely unchallenged, and certain participants often find that the values of sport are not extended to them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, or because of what their sexual orientation or gender identity is perceived to be.

In recent years, Canadian sport leaders have pursued a number of national policy initiatives and programs to promote safety, fun, fair play and ethical conduct within the Canadian sport system. In most cases, the experience of sport is overwhelmingly positive for participants — but in rare cases, the sport experience is not safe and welcoming. Issues such as harassment, bullying, violence and homophobia undermine the powerful potential of sport to contribute to personal, social and community development.

It is important to note that discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity — including harassment in the form of homophobic and transphobic language — is against the law under the Canadian Human Rights Act and applicable provincial human

rights legislation. A sport organisation that fails to address homophobia and transphobia within its sphere of operations not only leaves itself open to legal action, but it also compromises its own ability to attract and retain talent, and to promote inclusivity and participation in its sport.

## 2 VC's Beliefs

Volleyball Canada believes that participating in sport in any capacity is not only about striving for athletic success, but it is also about justice, equality, teamwork, respect and dignity. This includes fighting any form of discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. To that end, VC has a zero tolerance policy towards homophobia and transphobia. Section 7.a.i of VC's Code of Conduct states explicitly that all individuals have a responsibility to maintain and enhance the dignity and self-esteem of VC members and other individuals by:

“Demonstrating respect to individuals regardless of body type, physical characteristics, athletic ability, gender, ancestry, colour, ethnic or racial origin, nationality, national origin, sexual orientation, age, marital status, religion, religious belief, political belief, disability or economic status.”

In VC, homophobia and transphobia are never acceptable or excusable. Moreover, when homophobia and transphobia are encountered, doing nothing is not an option.

When challenging abuse or discrimination we must recognise that people may face multiple layers of discrimination or disadvantage. Taking steps to reduce homophobia and transphobia in sport is not only consistent with VC's efforts to foster a safe and welcoming environment in the sport of volleyball, but also mirrors our core values of fairness, integrity, accountability, excellence, accessibility, innovation, inclusion, and respect. By creating an inclusive volleyball culture where everyone understands the importance of tackling homophobia and transphobia, and feels confident in doing so

together, we can prevent it from happening in the first place.

### 3 Understanding<sup>2</sup>

#### 3.1 Recognising Homophobia and Transphobia in Sport

As a microcosm of larger society, the world of sport reflects the homophobia and transphobia that exists in larger society. Homophobia and transphobia affects the sport experience in negative ways. Because heterosexuality is the presumed norm in sport and in society at large, the existence of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people in sport is rarely acknowledged. Most athletes and coaches who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender remain invisible, and living their lives more openly becomes an option only after they have left the sport world.

Homophobia and transphobia in sport occur when:

- People perpetuate myths and stereotypes, for example: that lesbians and gays are sexual predators; that females who are good at sports must be lesbians; that lesbians, gays and transgender athletes and/or coaches undermine team cohesion.
- Athletes who are LGBTQ are rejected by their teammates, coaches, sport organizations and sponsors.
- Athletes and teams resort to “trash-talking,” name-calling and hazing rituals that are degrading to LGBTQ people.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the Rugby Football League's *Guidance for Rugby League Clubs: Challenging Anti-Gay (homophobic) Abuse and Behaviour*, and *A Guide for Addressing Homophobic Language in Sport* by the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity.

- LGBTQ individuals are stigmatised or experience violence at the hands of their peers.
- LGBTQ people experience direct discrimination in sport employment and other opportunities. They also experience indirect discrimination in the ways that media sometimes exaggerates portrayals of athletes who are stereotypically feminine or stereotypically masculine.
- The sport experience exists within a “chilly climate” that occurs when homophobic, sexist and racist attitudes are permitted to prevail.

#### 3.1.1 Homophobic and Transphobic Language

Homophobic and transphobic language includes explicit verbal abuse such as calling someone a “Queer,” “Fag,” or “Dyke” as well as more subtle and casual phrases implying that LGBTQ people are inferior and wrong, such as “you play like a girl/boy”, “you are such a sissy” and “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay.” All homophobic and transphobic language, whether implicit or explicit, creates an unwelcoming environment for LGBTQ athletes, and their friends and families.

Homophobic and transphobic language is prevalent in Canadian society, particularly in sporting environments, and often goes unaddressed. In The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Canadian Schools conducted by Egale Canada in 2011<sup>3</sup>:

- 70% of participating students, LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ, reported hearing expressions such as “that’s so gay” on a daily basis, and

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://egale.ca/youth-and-safer-schools/national-survey/every-class-in-every-school/>.

- 48% of the student body heard labels such as “faggot”, “queer”, “lezbo” and “dyke”.

In sport, this kind of homophobic language is often overlooked and excused as being “just part of the game” or a result of “kids being kids.”

In the same way that racist language is challenged, sport organisations and particularly staff and coaches, should feel confident responding to homophobic language whenever it happens. Addressing homophobic language and behaviour sends a strong message that disrespect and hurtful biases will not be tolerated from anyone.

LGBTQ people can often be the target of abuse or violence, whether or not that abuse is accompanied by explicit homophobic or transphobic language. Explicit abuse is a common occurrence in the lives of many LGBTQ people. However, even more common is abuse — sometimes called “casual” homophobia or transphobia — that uses the words “gay” or “lesbian” or other language associated with LGBTQ people to imply something negative or inferior. Phrases such as “you’re such a lesbo!” or “that pass was so gay”, “you play like a fag”, and “get up off the floor you faggot”, for example, may be used to insult someone or something, but without referring to actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. This language is often dismissed as harmless banter and not thought by some to be particularly hurtful if the intent is not a comment on someone’s actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. Regardless of an absence of deliberate intent, these terms equate being gay or transgender to something that is bad, wrong or inferior and inadequate. The constant association of being gay or transgender with being inferior or

negative creates a hostile environment for LGBTQ people, as well as their friends and families.

### 3.1.2 “Casual Homophobia”

“Casual” homophobic or transphobic language tends to be used without thinking and is often ignored by people because either they feel it is difficult to know how to respond or they believe the language is used without any homophobic or transphobic intent. It is not exclusively gay or transgender people who experience homophobic or transphobic name-calling or harassment. Homophobic or transphobic bullying can affect any individual at any point in their involvement with volleyball: from children to adult players, to tournament staff, coaches, referees, volunteers and management. Those at greatest risk of homophobic and transphobic bullying are:

- people who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (regardless of whether they in fact are);
- people who are openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender;
- males who participate in certain sports and activities;
- males who are not perceived to be as tough, strong, or competitive as expected for an athlete in their sport;
- females for behaving or acting “like boys/men”;
- females who play sports and are “too athletic/strong/competitive” or play certain kinds of sports;
- participants who have LGBTQ parents, siblings, children, or other family members; and
- other vulnerable individuals who are routinely the subject of bullying and verbal or physical abuse.

### 3.1.3 Who is Affected by Homophobia and Transphobia?

Homophobia and transphobia hurt everyone in sport. Taking steps to reduce homophobia and transphobia in sport is not only consistent with Canadian Sport Policy<sup>4</sup> efforts to foster ethical behaviour, inclusion, and a safe and welcoming environment in sport, but also mirrors closely-held Canadian values of diversity, acceptance and fairness.

Addressing homophobia has important benefits for everyone involved in volleyball:

- It promotes inclusiveness, acceptance and diversity — essential ingredients to strong and cohesive teams.
- It removes barriers to participation in volleyball and makes sport a more welcoming place for all.
- It challenges stereotypes and reduces fear and ignorance, enriching the learning environment that volleyball programs can offer.
- It helps to improve the lives of LGBTQ youth, who are at greater risk of isolation and bullying than their heterosexual counterparts.
- It helps to create safe and welcoming spaces for all people who play volleyball; responding appropriately to homophobic and transphobic bullying and abuse helps create a positive environment for all.
- It creates a safer environment that enhances the social and psychological well-being of all participants, and paves the way for a future generation of sport leaders, athletes and coaches who celebrate diversity.

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<sup>4</sup> See Canadian Sport Policy 2012, [http://sirc.ca/CSPRenewal/documents/CSP2012\\_EN\\_LR.pdf](http://sirc.ca/CSPRenewal/documents/CSP2012_EN_LR.pdf).

- It creates an environment where LGBTQ people will feel safe to be themselves and therefore more likely to reach their full potential.
- In actively reaching out to LGBTQ communities, it is an opportunity to increase the talent pool in all areas of volleyball in Canada.
- By making a commitment to equality and diversity, and challenging homophobia and transphobia, it demonstrates leadership in the advancement of social justice in sport in Canada, and creates additional opportunities for growth, funding and sustainability.
- It's the right thing to do.

### 3.2 How to Respond to Homophobic and Transphobic Language and Behaviour

In the same way that racist or sexist language and behaviour is challenged, players, staff, coaches and referees should feel confident in challenging homophobic and transphobic language and behaviour whenever it happens. Homophobic and transphobic language and behaviour are often ignored because individuals do not know how to properly respond or because they believe the behaviour is not meant to be malicious or intentionally homophobic or transphobic. It is also ignored because individuals often fear that if they challenge it, their sexual orientation will be called into question. It is important, however, to have the courage to challenge all incidents of homophobic or transphobic language to demonstrate that it is unacceptable and to ultimately create a welcoming and safe space for all. Here are some suggestions:

- Be consistent in your response.

- Challenge the comment or behaviour rather than the individual. For example, instead of telling someone "You are being homophobic," a better option is to say, "Your language is inappropriate and hurtful to people who are [gay/lesbian/transgender], and it makes me feel uncomfortable, too."
- Use your judgment to decide whether or not the language or behaviour should be challenged at the point of the comment or at a later time — but do not let it go unchallenged.
- Respond calmly and ensure that the situation does not escalate, especially if others join in the discussion.
- Where possible explain why a comment is unacceptable rather than just saying, "Don't say that."
- Other, specific responses to homophobic language and behaviour:
  - "The word [gay/lesbian/queer/etc.] should never be used casually as a negative comment or label. It is hurtful to people who are gay and to people who have parents/guardians, children, other family members, or friends that are gay."
  - "Homophobia will not be tolerated on this team, or within this organisation. We have a zero tolerance policy."
  - "Homophobic language and behaviour goes against VC's Code of Conduct respecting everyone on this team and within this organisation. Respect is essential for creating a strong and successful team. "
  - "We do not tolerate racism or sexism on this team or within this organisation so why would we tolerate homophobia?"
  - "It does not matter what you intended by saying that phrase – using homophobic language is not a joke."
  - "Comments are never harmless or just a joke when they offend or upset people."
  - "There are young people at our tournament/club/event and as adults we need to set a good example – that kind of language is unacceptable."

### 3.3 Taking Further Action

It is important to decide whether an incident surrounding the use of homophobic language or behaviour requires a more formal follow-up. Here are some steps and suggestions:

- Discuss incidents within the leadership of Volleyball Canada to decide whether more serious sanctions are required.
- It is also important to document the incidents of homophobic abuse, including unacceptable and offensive language, while ensuring that this information is treated in confidence.
- Records should include dates, times, places, people involved, actions taken, and outcomes. Information, education, and training may be the most appropriate response depending on the nature of the incident or if it is a first time incident.
- For repeat or serious incidents, sanctions may be the most appropriate response.

## 4 List of Resources in LGBTQ Equity and Diversity in Sport

### OutSport Toronto

<http://www.outsporttoronto.org/>

### Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity

[www.CAAWS.ca/StepUpSpeakOut/e/index.cfm](http://www.CAAWS.ca/StepUpSpeakOut/e/index.cfm)

### Toronto District School Board - Anti-Homophobia and Sexual Orientation Equity

[www.tdsb.on.ca/\\_site/viewitem.asp?siteid=15&menuid=5018&pageid=4377](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/_site/viewitem.asp?siteid=15&menuid=5018&pageid=4377)

### Changing the Game: The GLSEN Sports Project

<http://sports.glsen.org>

### You Can Play Project

<http://YouCanPlayProject.org>

### Athlete Ally

<http://AthleteAlly.com>

### GForce Sports

[www.GForceSports.org](http://www.GForceSports.org)

### Rugby Football League's *Guidance for Rugby League Clubs: Challenging Anti-Gay (homophobic) Abuse and Behaviour*

[http://www.diversitychallenge.co.uk/files/resources/r\\_p\\_RFL\\_challenging\\_behaviour.pdf](http://www.diversitychallenge.co.uk/files/resources/r_p_RFL_challenging_behaviour.pdf)

### Australian Sports Commission – *Harassment-Free Sport: Guidelines to Address Homophobia and Sexuality Discrimination in Sport*

[http://fulltext.ausport.gov.au/fulltext/2000/asc/pub/homo\\_sexuality.pdf](http://fulltext.ausport.gov.au/fulltext/2000/asc/pub/homo_sexuality.pdf)

### Bill 13 Accepting Schools Act

[http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills\\_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=2549](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=2549)

### Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

<http://www.publications.gc.ca/site/archive-archived.html?url=http://www.publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/CH37-4-3-2002E.pdf>

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This document was created through contributions of the Ontario Volleyball Association, OutSport Toronto and Volleyball BC. It is the hope of these organisations that it will serve as a model for other sport associations. As such, Volleyball Canada grants any such sport association, team, league, club or other organisation the right to use this policy document in whole or in part to formulate their own policy with the provision that credit to the Ontario Volleyball Association, OutSport Toronto is given within the derived policy document for such use. Although seeking permission is unnecessary, we ask any organisation using this document to please, as a courtesy, advise our two organisations of such use.



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