

Framework for Gender Inclusive Camps

Gender inclusive camps...

- Recognize that gender impacts all campers
- Avoid reinforcing binary notions of gender (e.g splitting campers in groups of boys/girls)
- Celebrate gender diversity
- Question gender stereotypes
- Support campers to explore all parts of themselves, including their gender
- Teach empathy and respect

When thinking about creating gender inclusive camps, it is helpful to consider four main focus areas: **Personal Understanding, Organizational Structure, Gender Inclusive Language and Messages, and Gender Inclusive Activities.** Depending on the context, any one of these areas may prove the best starting point for this work.

Personal Understanding: Explore staff's own understandings of gender, including reflection about how each person's experiences and beliefs about gender impact the work they do with youth. Through specific gender-based training and using tools such as *My Gender Journey* (found on our website), commit to learning as a staff about the dimensions of gender, and in the process applying a lens of gender awareness to all you do at camp.

Organizational Structure: Create a foundation for gender inclusion to take hold. What steps can the camp as an organization/institution take to recognize and honor gender diversity? How can you actively work to reflect a more complex understanding about gender. Here are a few suggestions:

- Create policies/regulations emphasizing gender as an area of diversity protected and supported by the camp
- Demonstrate your commitment to gender inclusive practices through your website, social media and other external communications about your camp
- Provide staff training that builds the capacity of counselors and other staff to honor the gender diversity of all youth
- Use record keeping systems that allow families to self-identify a child's gender, name and pronouns
- Identify staff members who can function as leads around gender diversity and inclusion efforts
- Provide gender neutral restroom/facilities that allow options for privacy without stigmatizing any campers
- Make written materials and information about gender diversity readily available to staff, campers and their families
- Use signage/imagery celebrating gender diversity
- Create flyers/forms that demonstrate a non-binary understanding of gender

Gender Inclusive Language and Messages: Consider the various ways in which adult interactions and conversations reinforce the camp's commitment to gender inclusion. The use of gender inclusive language helps to demonstrate a camp's commitment to honoring the gender diversity of all youth. Here are a few tips related to gender inclusive language.

Look for opportunities to use language that challenges binary notions of gender (female/male, boy/girl)

- *There are lots of ways to be a boy or a girl, both, neither, or many other genders; isn't that great?*
- *Toys are toys, hair is hair, colors are colors, and clothes are clothes. Things don't have genders; people have genders.*
- *Is there only one way to be a boy or girl? Can boys and girls like the same things?*
- *Rather than "boys and girls," "ladies and gentlemen," etc., refer to campers as "campers" "children," or another non-gendered term for the group.*

Help youth understand the difference between patterns and rules

- *Who says only girls wear dresses? Do all-girls wear them? Do all boys wear dresses? Do some?*
- *What patterns have you noticed about gender expectations for from peers? The media?*
- *Sure, boys might do certain activities more than girls or vice versa. But that doesn't mean all boys do those things or are supposed to wear that girls don't or shouldn't do that!*

Question gender stereotypes

- *Who decided what things are for boys and what things are for girls?*
- *Sometimes this stuff is confusing. We get messages that some things are for boys and some things are for girls. But these messages are just some people's ideas. They may not be right for you.*

Recognize that gender is more about our identity than anything else

- *No one gets to tell another person how to feel on the inside.*
- *How someone feels about their gender comes from their hearts and their minds (and not their pants!).*
- *Some bodies are thought of as "boy" and some thought of as "girl" but that's not true for everyone.*

Support campers to explore all parts of themselves, including their gender

- *Some people see us differently from the outside than we feel ourselves to be on the inside; think of all the wonderful things about yourself that no one else knows about by just looking at you!*
- *Being a boy or a girl, both, neither, or a variety of other genders, is not about what you like or what you wear or your body. It is something that each of us figures out for ourselves based on how we feel inside.*

Teach empathy and respect

- *How do you think you would feel if people were always asking you about your own gender?*
- *No one likes to be pointed out by others. Does it feel good if you think others are talking about you?*

- *Have you ever been teased? How does it feel when you are teased or treated as an outsider?*

Celebrate and provide examples of gender diversity

- *Help campers understand that ideas about gender are changing all the time.*
- *When you tell stories or give instructions using people as examples, include people with different gender expressions and identities.*
- *Hire counselors who are gender diverse and/or have your counselors model defying traditional gender roles (e.g., have a male counselor lead cooking or arts and crafts activities, or a female counselor in charge of flag football).*
- *Our world is full of examples of gender diversity! There have been gender diverse people and animals, from all over the world and throughout time.*

It is also important to consistently respond to gender stereotypes and even overt unkindness in ways that promote learning and do not stigmatize the individual on the receiving end of the initial comments. In cases where an individual repeatedly mistreats or deliberately misgenders other campers, it is important to make clear that such behavior will not be accepted.

Gender Inclusive Activities: There are specific ways you can engage youth to instill greater awareness and understanding about gender. Whether standing alone or integrated into ongoing activities, these approaches are the most direct way to impact campers. In some ways, completing gender inclusive activities can be the most easily accomplished. Think about ways to do the following to promote gender inclusion at your camp:

- Design activities to expand understandings of gender diversity
- Avoid dividing campers into groups based on gender for activities, games, meals, etc.
- Explore existing opportunities to celebrate gender diversity and lead gender inclusive activities
- Use the arts to explore gender
- Use organic conversations amongst campers to surface gender related themes
- Discuss ways the media and popular culture communicate gender related messages
- Include gender related topics and gender diverse characters in theater productions, performances, or any other major camp projects and events
- Use video or other media that present inclusive ideas about gender
- Create space for campers to articulate their own understanding and beliefs about gender
- If your camp includes academics, integrate gender into curriculum areas through story problems, writing prompts, readings, art assignments, research projects and more