



Supporting Transgender and Gender Expansive Youth in RELC Settings

Residential Environmental Learning Centers (RELCs) have historically operated on strict gender binary systems, with bathrooms and cabins for boys or girls, with little to no support for students who identify differently. Additionally, the residential aspect of these programs can cause anxiety and fear for transgender and gender expansive youth, who may fear for their personal safety or experience social ostracization. To foster a climate of inclusion, there are steps you can take at your site to help these youth to thrive. Part of supporting all students and creating an inclusive community is to role model inclusive language and strategies. It is our responsibility to provide an equitable and inclusive atmosphere to every student.

Here are some specific steps you can take at your site to support transgender and gender expansive participants:

- Instead of saying “you guys” or “ladies and gentlemen,” use gender-neutral language such as, “you all,” “friends,” “students,” “folks,” “6th graders,” “scientists,” and so on.
- Establish a no-tolerance policy for bullying, cruelty, and disrespectful behavior. It is important that your staff pay attention and follow through with any disrespectful language or inappropriate activities that occur. Use tools like constant supervision, cabin agreements, setting expectations, and team building to alleviate this, while recognizing that incidents may still occur. If you hear something or see something, it is your responsibility to intervene.
- Offer your pronouns when introducing yourself. Consider giving staff buttons that state their pronouns to wear outside of their uniforms. This simple gesture can make gender expansive and transgender students feel welcomed, included, and safe.
- Change your intake forms to include an option in addition to male and female. Consider adding “another” or “I choose to specify” with a fillable blank space.
- Provide at least one all-gender bathroom. Ideally, all of your bathrooms would be converted to all-gender spaces. If this isn’t feasible, designate one all-gender bathroom in a centrally located area that anyone can use, and make sure it is clearly labeled and listed on any maps or orientation materials.

Here are some recommended resources for further learning:

- [Gender Spectrum](#) – nationally recognized resource with terminology, trainings, and resources for educators and parents
 - [Supporting Nonconforming and Transgender Youth](#) – from Multnomah Education’s Outdoor School
 - [Why Pronouns Matter](#) – Website dedicated to discussing what pronouns are and why they matter
-