

Transgender Youth Guidelines



From Kiwanis International

One of the values of Kiwanis Service Leadership Programs is inclusiveness. As an organization, Kiwanis is committed to ensuring that its clubs, programs, events, and activities for our SLP members and any school-aged youth are accessible and welcoming. This means steps should be taken for reasonable accommodations for any participant.

Currently, the national conversation in the United States regarding transgender youth has provided opportunities for Kiwanis and its programs to ensure that these youth have the chance to experience the full richness of our Service Leadership Programs. “Transgender” describes an individual whose gender identity (one’s internal psychological identification as a boy/man or girl/woman) does not match the person’s sex at birth¹.

No matter personal or political beliefs, all adult Kiwanis members and advisors to our Service Leadership Programs understand that any student who presents themselves to us with a desire to serve their community, develop their leadership skills, and strengthen their character traits, deserves our full and absolute support.

Therefore, Kiwanis Service Leadership Programs will operate with these guiding principles:

1. Volunteers and members of Service Leadership Programs are expected to respect one another’s privacy and boundaries. For out-of-school trips and overnight events, everyone should understand expectations of being in a communal environment.
2. Volunteers must act as protective agents committed to the safety and well-being of the youth they serve, including those who are transgender.
3. Personal needs and preferences for transgender youth should be considered and enacted. This includes lodging accommodations for overnight events and restroom facilities.
4. Volunteers can be more successful if transgender youth or their guardians make them aware of their status and preferences for accommodations. Adult leaders should not be in a position to guess or make assumptions about individual needs.

Because situations vary, no one way or policy can be developed to address all situations. Kiwanis leaders planning events for Service Leadership Program members should consider these best practices when supporting transgender youth:

- For overnight events, a transgender student’s comfort level with sleeping arrangements will largely dictate the manner in which related issues are addressed. Youth are encouraged to make their preferences known to prevent assumptions being made and appropriate accommodations can be made.

- If the standard situation for an overnight event is shared rooms by gender, transgender students must be allowed to access housing consistent with their gender identity. The best practice is for the student to identify peers they are comfortable with, and vice versa, as roommates.
- A transgender student may want an alternative sleeping arrangement, such as single-occupancy room, suggested by the student or parent. These requests should be honored when possible. However, transgender students cannot be required to stay in single-occupancy accommodations, nor should those arrangements be made without their consent.
- The volunteers have an obligation to maintain the member's privacy and cannot disclose or require disclosure of the student's transgender status to the other students or their parents.
- Transgender students must be allowed access to restroom facilities consistent with their gender identity. Where possible, a suggested practice is to have three designated options: male, female, and all-gender.
- When aware of a transgender or transitioning youth attending an event, first determine whether the student's family is accepting in order to avoid inadvertently putting the student at risk of greater harm by discussing with the student's family. Based on this information, engage the student and/or their guardian to determine how to best support the student.

Some topics to cover:

- Accommodations for the student (e.g. lodging, restroom, etc.)
- What is their preferred gender pronoun?
- What information should be shared with other event volunteers.
- How to address questions from peers (if student's transgender status is not private).
- Is there anything you should be aware of to ensure the student has a good experience?
- Event organizers should choose facilities that can be adapted as necessary to accommodate requests.

Sources:

¹Gender Spectrum, "A Word About Words," available online at

http://www.genderspectrum.org/images/stories/Resources/Family/A_Word_About_Words.pdf

²National Education Association, "Schools in Transition," available online at

https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Schools_in_Transition_2015.pdf

³U.S. Department of Education, "Dear Colleague Letter on Transgender Students," available online at

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201605-title-ix-transgender.pdf>

Regarding doubt of the sincerity of a student asserting a transgender identity

"In early 2015, Media Matters for America contacted officials at the largest school districts in 12 states that have laws protecting transgender students, and not a single one reported "any incidences of harassment or inappropriate behavior" as a result of "allowing transgender students to access

facilities they're comfortable with." This is not surprising given that schools have permitted all students to access restrooms and locker rooms based on gender identity for many years; it is, in fact, the norm throughout society to allow people to access those facilities without being asked to prove their gender. Enforcing any other type of policy would be unmanageable and invasive.

Providing transgender students with access to the restrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity is yet another way that schools adjust to meet students' individual needs. Generally, there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of a student who asserts a transgender identity, and schools should accept the student's identity without imposing additional requirements. Manipulative or insincere requests are likely to be easily discernible. If a school administrator has credible doubts about a student's sincerity, however, they should document the concerns and request some documentation that the student has asserted a transgender identity in other settings. Again, this scenario is very unlikely to occur, and school officials should avoid assuming the role of gatekeeper."²

Suggested Responses to Specific Scenarios

A student indicates discomfort or frustration with having a transgender roommate.

- Treat this circumstance as you would with any other roommate disagreement or issue and seek to satisfy both sides. This could include switching roommates.

A parent is upset that his/her child had a roommate that was transgender.

- Inform the parent of the guidelines you are being asked to follow.
- If the parent demands his/her student be placed in a different room, it's best to try and satisfy this request. It is not your job to change hearts and minds, but rather, to ensure the event/activity is a success for all participants.

The laws of a particular state or province are in conflict with these guidelines.

- If there is a local law that compels you to not incorporate certain of these guidelines, the local laws should take precedent.

Policies of a private retreat center are in conflict with these policies.

- Meet with the director of the center to inform him/her of the guidelines you are being asked to follow. If the center is unwilling to accept these guidelines for any reason, it is expected that you would identify a different location for your event.

An adult leader acts contrary to or willfully ignores these guidelines.

- First, ensure the adult leader is aware of the guidelines and is provided an opportunity to correct his/her actions. If unwilling or unable to do this, the adult leader should not participate in the event.

Students are curious about a transgender student and seek information from an adult leader.

- Do not share information that has been shared with you in confidence. Inform the students that the best way to learn about a person is in individual conversation with them and encourage them to build a relationship with the student.
- Do not put yourself in a situation to disclose a person's transgender status publicly or privately.