

How to Make your Organization a Positive Space¹

“Positive Space” is a program that was developed at the University of Toronto in 1996 and which has since spread to most universities in Canada, and increasingly, community-based organizations, such as public health units and community health centres.

“Positive Space” refers to an agency that is open and welcoming, as well as equitable and accessible, to persons of all sexual and gender diversity.

Many of the actions identified in Pat Griffin’s Action Guides will make your organization much more welcoming to LGBTQ persons. By going one step further, and creating your own “Positive Space” for LGBTQ persons in your sport organization, you will publicly acknowledge and affirm that in your organization, sexual diversity is welcomed. Here are some additional things that you can do to create your own Positive Space.

1. Recognizing the value and importance of staff diversity lays the foundation for creating a Positive Space. Inclusive personnel policies and practices will create the framework to support a Positive Space.
2. Developing behaviors, attitudes, policies and practices that enable your organization to “walk the talk” is key to creating a Positive Space. This starts with education. Create opportunities for raising awareness about homophobia and what can be done to address it amongst your Board, staff, volunteers, and in particular, athletes, coaches, officials, and medical staff. CAAWS can help you with this through their tailored approach to homophobia, ranging from the 45 minute executive level presentation to the 3.5 hour workshop that can be adapted to best suit the needs of the specific target group(s).
3. Examine and identify existing behaviors, attitudes, policies and practices that may be unwelcoming or even unsafe for those who are LGBTQ in your organization. At a minimum, know in advance how safe is any destination that members of your organization are required to travel, especially LGBTQ athletes and coaches. This information is available on the CAAWS website at www.caaws.ca/homophobia/. Consider carefully the risks of training and competing in a country outside Canada that is not safe for your LGTBQ members, and implement steps to eliminate or minimize these risks while in a country where it is unsafe to be LGBTQ.
4. Make sure that your medical staff is aware of, and knowledgeable about, dealing with LGBTQ persons. Although a sport-specific LGBTQ medical information package does not yet exist, there is lots of good information for physicians available on the Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition’s website at <http://www.rainbowhealth.ca/english/index.html>. Also, there has been some initial thinking done on this by Commonwealth Games Canada as part of their own Positive Space initiative for the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. Your Team Physician can also take a further leadership role by ordering *Caring for Lesbian and Gay People, A Clinical Guide* by Allan Peterkin, MD, Cathy Risdon, MD that is available to physicians through the Canadian Medical Association’s online bookstore at www.cma.ca and thinking about the implications from a team physician and medical support staff perspective.

¹ Adapted from *A Positive Space is a Healthy Space: Making your Community Health Centre or Public Health Unit Inclusive to Those of all Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities* available at <http://www.opha.on.ca/resources/SexualHealthPaper-Jun06.pdf>, and the University of Toronto’s Positive Space Campaign available at <http://www.positivespace.utoronto.ca>.

5. Publicly acknowledge that your organization is a Positive Space through the display of “Positive Space” symbols. Members of the organization may also wish to demonstrate their active support of the Positive Space initiative through a sticker, small poster or button (also available through CAAWS). Regardless of sexual orientation, a person who displays a Positive Space symbol indicates their active support of an organization that welcomes sexual diversity. However, displaying the Positive Space symbol requires a commitment by the individual to respond favourably to those who may feel marginalized because of their sexual orientation, or who may themselves feel hesitant to speak out positively. It also means that the Ally is prepared to challenge discriminatory language and stereotypical talk, even if said in jest. As a result, it is important that these Positive Space allies are aware of and comfortable with these commitments, and at a minimum, have read the CAAWS Homophobia in Sport paper available at http://www.caaws.ca/pdfs/CAAWS_Homophobia_Discussion_Paper_E.pdf.
6. Ask Games organizations with whom you work what they are doing to create welcoming spaces for your LGBTQ athletes, coaches and support staff. These organizations play a critical role in creating an environment that allows all of your athletes, coaches and support staff to feel welcome and supported regardless of their sexual orientation during what is likely the most important competitions of their lives.