



REMEMBER

- Most young people don't believe they are 'choosing' a sexual identity any more than they have chosen their eye colour. It's just who they are. When we understand this perspective, we can imagine how confusing and hurtful it can be for a camper to feel like they can't really "fit" with us until their sexual identity is the same as ours.
- Questioning sexual/gender identity can be part of identity exploration which is a normal part of development. Camp may be a place where a camper feels safe to try on a new identity. Asking them questions about what they hope to discover through a new identity can be a great invitation to exploring the why not just the what.
- We need to embrace God's process and realize that we just have one week. Our job is to guide teens to see a true picture of God's heart for them - just as they are - and demonstrate his compassion for them in ways that matter to the young person.



RECOGNIZE

- God has a soft spot for the vulnerable - those who are in need of extra care and attention. Jesus stood between vulnerable people and those who wanted to harm them. We need to join him there.
- LGBTQ+ identifying campers are carrying extra weight on their shoulders from being non-typical in their sexuality or gender journey. This stress is statistically far more likely to leave them with mental health struggles like anxiety, depression, self-harm and feeling suicidal.
- Often we respond poorly to declarations about sexuality because we are uncomfortable or unsure what to say. We need to get past how we feel and focus on how the young person in front of us feels.
- Conversations that are open, honest and curious without trying to convince the camper of anything best represent Jesus' response to those around him.



RESPOND

- **Welcome them in.** Being in a Christian environment probably feels scary and possibly even unsafe. Affirm that you are happy they came and suggest that God may have invited them because he's looking forward to spending time with them there at camp.
- **Make space to listen.** Invite an LGBTQ+ identifying camper to talk about their sexuality/gender journey with you, without feeling like you need to correct or convince. Ask them what will be difficult for them at camp. This may be the first place they've been invited to talk about what's happening inside. The feelings they feel are real and need to be heard. Care about the person more than you care about their sexual or gender identity.
- **Make a plan.** If an LGBTQ+ identifying camper seems to be overshadowing other campers with their sexuality/gender conversation, take them aside and ask how they hope their fellow campers will see them and why. Ask what positive things they hope will happen in their week at camp. Brainstorm things that might stand in the way of their hopes being realized and things that might help.
- **Stand with them.** Don't allow those around the youth to speak negatively or jokingly about sexual and gender minorities. Reflect Jesus by protecting them from the harm of others' words and actions. Consider using their chosen pronoun/name as an act of respect, even if the pronoun changes throughout the week.
- **Explore identity, not just sexuality.** Ask them what other parts of "who they are" they are exploring and encourage them to watch for things at camp that may help in their discovery. Continue telling them what you see forming within them in terms of gifts, abilities, and interests. Watch for the evidence that they are made in the image of God - whether they believe in him or not yet - and tell them.



CARING FOR
LGBTQ+ CAMPER



RESOURCES

- **Finding a Better Way: Faith-filled Conversations with Gender and Sexual Minority Youth.** Watch this training video at lifeteams.ca/resources for practical guidance for building relationships with LGBTQ+ youth.