

AYSO Gender Inclusivity: Guidance and Practices

Purpose

These guidelines are provided to ensure that all AYSO players, regardless of their gender identity, feel welcomed, supported, and valued. This document seeks to educate coaches, staff, players, and families about appropriate practices for inclusion of players of all genders, including those of trans and gender non-conforming identities.

AYSO DEI Policy

AYSO is committed to its founders' legacy of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We provide fun and enriching soccer programs for everyone, welcoming individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, or disability. We respect and embrace differences, fostering a community where all feel they belong.

Team Placement

Players younger than the age of majority wishing to join a team that aligns most closely with their gender identity (as opposed to their gender assigned at birth) may do so by having their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) providing written confirmation that their stated gender is sincerely held and part of their core identity.

Guidance for Regional Commissioners and Registrars

1. Respect and Confidentiality

- Always maintain the player's privacy and confidentiality.
- Share information only with those who need to know and only with the player's/parent(s)/legal guardian(s) consent.
- If a participant is registered for a gender that differs from what is on their birth certificate, a brief call to confirm their registration is suggested. For example: "We see you registered your player in the girls' division, but the birth certificate indicates differently. We wanted to confirm this is your desire and, if not, that this is a sincerely held belief and part of their core identity. Please provide written confirmation that your child's gender identity is a sincerely held belief."

2. Ongoing Communication

- Encourage the player and their parents to contact you to address any concerns or changes in needs.
- Ensure the parent/guardian is aware that their choice will remain for the duration of the season. Note: The Region defines the season, whether Fall, Spring or Fall/Spring.
- An optional questionnaire is attached for your use to aid in promoting inclusion.

3. Education and Awareness

- Consider educating yourself, your board and your coaches about issues of gender identity and diversity.
- Commonly accepted definitions:
- Gender identity refers to a person's innate sense of their own gender, including male, female, both, non-binary, gender fluid, etc., regardless of their assigned sex at birth.

- Cisgender is an adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with their assigned sex at birth.
- Transgender is an adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth.
- Non-binary is an adjective used to describe a variety of gender identities that do not fall into one of the two – male or female – traditional identities.

4. Play Up/Down

- The Regional Commissioner can determine if a player should play up or down to promote a safe environment for all participants.
- Be sure that the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) are aware of the age issues related to inter-play and secondary-play opportunities which often define age eligibility.

5. Addressing Transphobia (defined as fear or contempt of a transgender person)

- Understand that there are people who have issues with transgender, gender nonconforming or non-binary persons. People unfamiliar with trans and gender non-conforming identities may feel uncomfortable interacting with trans and gender non-conforming persons which may lead to hostile reactions.
- Knowledge is a powerful tool to help deal with people who are not comfortable interacting with trans and gender non-conforming persons. Those informed about transgender and gender non-conforming identities are less likely to hold negative beliefs.
- If you encounter an incident of transphobia, address it constructively. Encourage dialogue rather than confrontation. Use “I” statements to express how the comments make you feel. For example, say, “I feel uncomfortable about that sentiment” instead of directly labeling the behavior.
- Ensure that responses prioritize the respect and needs of the participant rather than focusing on personal preferences.

6. Handling Parental Concerns

- If a parent or coach threatens to withdraw their child or disband the team due to the inclusion of a transgender or gender non-conforming player, verify that this reflects a consensus among parents rather than an individual opinion.
- Individual conversations with other parents may be necessary to gauge their feelings and address concerns.
- First weigh potential effects on the player, then the team members, then the division, then the parents and then on the entire Region. Your decisions will set the tone.

Conclusion

By adhering to these guidelines that support our DEI policy, AYSO reaffirms its commitment to creating a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment for all players, fostering a culture of respect, belonging, and community within AYSO.