



# CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR LGBTQI+ PEOPLE

## 1. ASK FOR PRONOUNS

Start your seminar/session by asking students to add their preferred pronouns to their nametag if they wish. Never push this as an obligation in order to avoid creating pressure on the questioning members of the community – this should always be an option that you as a volunteer should provide and present yourself.

## 2. ASK FOR THE NAME THEY WANT TO BE CALLED BY

In addition to asking for first & last name, ask for a name that they want on their nametag. This also leaves room for people who prefer to be called by their nickname. People might have specific ways in which they don't like to be called or that even elicit some negative emotions. When asking for the preferred name, you show them that they really can be (and it's okay to be) themselves in this environment.

## 3. USE GENDER NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

Instead of using “he/him” or “she/her” when talking about a hypothetical individual, use the gender-neutral singular “they/them”, or use plural. For example:

- Don't say: *“If a student breaks several YFU rules, he will be sent home.”*  
*“When a volunteer tells you to be on time, you have to listen to her.”*
- But rather: *“If a student breaks several YFU rules, they will be sent home.”*  
*“When a volunteer tells you to be on time, you have to listen to them.”*

If you are not used to using “they/them” pronouns, try practising it in your daily life. For example:

- *When you're in the car mad at another driver instead of saying or thinking:*  
*“he drives like an asshole”,*  
*when you can't see the driver, try:*  
*“they drive like an asshole”.*

## 4. AVOID DIRECT QUESTIONS ABOUT IDENTITY

If you're curious or have a hunch, do not ask another person directly whether they are gay/trans/bi etc. If they are queer, being questioned directly only gives them two options: coming out to you (although they might not be ready), or lying. Instead, let them come out when they are ready and provide a safe space to do so.

For example, mentioning LGBTQ+ topics with a supportive attitude will show the other person that the topic is not taboo and that they would not be faced with a negative reaction, were they to come out. In the context of YFU, try adding the topic to some relevant sessions at orientations.

## 5. AVOID DIVISIONS BASED ON SEX

When assigning the students into rooms or dividing into smaller groups (e.g. to discuss a bit more personal topics), our brain might automatically think of a division based on sex of participants. Sometimes it can't be avoided due to certain regulations and/or rules but whenever possible – try avoiding such division. Alternatively, think of a plan B that might be introduced whenever such division (if necessary) causes discomfort to anyone involved.

## 6. SPEAK ABOUT EXPERIENCES INCLUSIVELY

Speak in a way that doesn't assume gender or sexual identity. Here are some examples:

- Instead of asking a female student whether she has a boyfriend, ask whether she has a partner (and vice versa).
- Use gender-neutral terms when possible, e.g. police officer instead of policeman/policewoman, flight attendant instead of steward/stewardess.
- Avoid gender stereotyping behaviours and activities, such as only looking at the boys in the group when mentioning football, or showing surprise when a male student has their nail painted.

## 7. BE OPEN AND VULNERABLE YOURSELF

There is nothing that inspires openness and trust like being open and trusting yourself. Show your students that you consider this group of people safe by being honest and talking about something personal. This makes you relatable and human in their eyes. For example:

- A simple admission of "I'm really tired today so let's get through this quickly.", admitting you don't know something, or sharing your own struggles with a certain topic.
- If you are LGBTQI+ yourself, sharing some issues you've had yourself works wonders. However, be mindful of your own boundaries and only share as much as you feel comfortable to.

## 8. LISTEN, ACKNOWLEDGE, DON'T JUDGE

When a student shares with you what they are going through, listen attentively, don't try to react immediately or give advice. Acknowledge and validate their feelings and the struggle they are facing, even if it doesn't seem like such a big deal to you – we all experience things differently. Try also being as objective and unprejudiced as possible. Do not judge the students, undermine their problems nor comment on them in any way. It should be their decision on what to do or how to resolve the given issue. What you as a facilitator can do is to guide them towards making a right decision by asking the right questions instead of giving advice.

*Note: This guide is written for a purpose of being used in a volunteer-student set up, but all of the tips can be applied to a group of friends or your family members!*