



Guide to engaging trans people in swimming

Trans swimming is growing rapidly

To help swimming providers offer the best experience possible for trans people, we've created a guide in collaboration with trans swimmers and trans support organisations. It is based on accurate insight from a number of sources and tried and tested best practise case studies.

This guide aims to broaden understanding of what it means to be trans gender and how to support trans people's swimming experience. However it will benefit all facility visitors as the key is good old fashioned customer service!

Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, but throughout this toolkit, the word '**trans**' has been used to encompass all of these varying terms.

Benefits of swimming for trans people

Swimming provides a number of health and wellbeing benefits, but particularly to the trans community. For those trans people opting for surgical interventions, swimming can help with weight loss and increasing physical fitness beforehand and also aid recovery afterwards.

Because of the inclusive and calming nature that being in the water can offer, swimming can also **help to relieve the high levels of stress** that trans people live with on a daily basis.

Swimming can also provide an opportunity for trans people to meet similar, likeminded people in a safe environment; which for some can be very hard to achieve in everyday life.

KEY FACTS (2016)

- Trans swimming participation is growing rapidly. It is estimated that **650,000 people**, or around **1%** of the population identify as trans in the United Kingdom.
- Trans people may also be lesbian, gay or bisexual, but do not assume they are as this is not always the case – gender identity and sexual orientation are very different things.
- Trans people come from all communities and backgrounds including disabled people, people of different faiths, and people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

What's the difference between lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGB&T+)

People may describe their sexual orientation and gender identity using one or more of a wide variety of terms, but throughout this toolkit 'LGB&T+' has been used to encompass all of these varying terms.

Sexual orientation

A person's emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to another person.

Gender identity

We are assigned a sex at birth (male or female) but our **gender identity is our internal sense of our gender (male, female, something else).**

Lesbian

Refers to a woman who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards women.

Gay

Refers to a man who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards men. It is also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality, and some women identify as gay rather than lesbian.

Bi

Refers to a person who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards more than one gender.

Some trans people may also be gay, lesbian or bisexual, but it is important not to mix the two together and make preconceived assumptions, as **gender identity** and **sexual orientation** are two very different things.

Trans

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, cross dresser, non-binary, genderqueer (GQ). Sometimes you may see an asterisk after the word trans (**e.g. trans***), this can be used to encompass all terminology around the word 'trans'.

Transitioning

The steps a trans person may take to live in the gender with which they identify. Each person's transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this. Transitioning also might involve things such as telling friends and family, dressing differently and changing official documents.

Transsexual

This was used in the past as a more medical term (similarly to 'homosexual') to refer to someone who transitioned to live in the 'opposite' gender to the one assigned at birth. This term is still used by some although many people prefer the term trans or 'transgender', as it is still referred to in the Equality Act.

Transgender man

Not all trans people will identify with a male/female gender pronoun, but this is a term used to describe someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.

Transgender woman

Not all trans people will identify with a male/female gender pronoun, but this is a term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.

Pre-op

For those trans people undergoing medical intervention, which not all trans people will, this is a term used to describe a trans person who is yet to have surgery as part of their transition to their new gender. This could refer to 'top surgery' i.e. breast removal or construction, or 'bottom surgery' i.e. genital removal and reconstruction. But also bear in mind that not all trans people will undergo surgery and may present themselves in their identified gender with the physical attributes of their assigned gender.

Post-op

For those trans people undergoing medical intervention, which not all trans people will, this is a term used to describe a trans person who has had surgery to help them transition towards their identified gender from their assigned gender.

Non-binary

An umbrella term for a person whose gender identity does not fit naturally into the generic categories of male and female.

Cis-gender

An umbrella term used to describe a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex, i.e. you remain the sex and gender that you were both with.

Transphobia

The fear or dislike of someone who identifies as trans.

Gender dysphoria

Used to describe when a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. This is also the clinical diagnosis for someone who doesn't feel comfortable with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Language

A lot of people worry about **saying the wrong thing** when speaking with trans people at the risk of offending someone or hurting someone's feelings.

Pronouns are words we use to refer to people's gender in conversation.

For example, **'he'** or **'she'**. Some people prefer gender neutral language like **they/their** or alternatively **ze/zir**.

Asking someone which pronouns they prefer helps you avoid making assumptions and potentially getting it wrong. It also gives the person the opportunity to tell you what they prefer.

If you make a mistake, **apologise, correct yourself** and **move on**.

This is also something to bear in mind when asking trans people to fill out their details on membership forms, as the questions around gender identity often do not enable trans people to express the way they would like to be referred to.

However, do bear in mind that you must be clear why you are asking for this information and what you will do with it afterwards under the **Data Protection Act (1998)**.

Trans people use a variety of terms to describe their gender identity, and the terms people use may change over time, so really don't be afraid of asking "which pronoun would you prefer me to use?"

If you want to ask about this information, we suggest questions similar to the ones below:

Which pronoun do you prefer to use?

Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms, Ze, Zir, They, Their,
Prefer to self-describe (leave a space for this)

Prefer not to say.

What is your sexual orientation?

Bi/bisexual, Gay/lesbian, heterosexual/straight,
Prefer to self-describe (leave a space for this)

Prefer not to say.

What best describes your gender?

Male, Female, Prefer to self-describe
(leave a space for this)

Prefer not to say.

Do you identify as trans?

(here you should consider including a short definition of trans)

Yes, No, Prefer not to say.

Equality Act (2010)

Gender reassignment is the process of transitioning from one gender to another, and is one of the **9 Protected Characteristics** outlined in the **Equality Act (2010)**.

The Equality Act (2010) says that you must not be discriminated against because you are transsexual; that is your gender identity differs from the gender assigned to you at birth.

To be protected from gender reassignment discrimination, you **DO NOT** need to have undergone any specific treatment or surgery to change from your birth sex to your preferred gender. This is because changing your physiological or other gender attributes is a **personal process** rather than a medical one.

You can be at **any** stage in the transition process – from proposing to reassign your gender, to undergoing a process to reassign your gender, or having completed it.

You can read more about gender reassignment and potential discrimination on the Equality and Human Rights Commission website here:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/gender-reassignment-discrimination



Barriers to swimming participation

Trans people experience horrifying levels of discrimination in every area of their lives, every day.

Whilst these issues are not all specific to sport, they do impact on the ability of trans people to begin and to sustain physical activity.

In 2015, Swim England conducted an **LGB&T+ Swimming Audit**, aimed at exploring LGB&T+ people's barriers and motivations towards swimming.

The **most significant barriers** identified by trans people were:

1. Feeling anxious that people will make fun of them
2. Not wanting to be seen in swimwear
3. Not liking shared changing facilities

The audit also identified the areas within a centre where trans people were **most likely to receive negative experiences**, which were consistently higher than LGB counterparts on every count:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. From other customers in the changing rooms | 26% |
| 2. From other customers in the pool area | 22% |
| 3. From centre staff on reception | 16% |
| 4. From centre staff in pool area | 14% |

These barriers represent a number of opportunities to be able to implement interventions and provide an appropriate and quality swimming experience for trans people, which is explored in more detail in the next section of the toolkit.



Increasing swimming participation

Pride Sport's 2016 study '**Sport, Physical Activity and LGBT+**' for Sport England outlined **six key benefits** to service users of trans specific provision:

- Safe spaces
- Improved mental health
- Appropriate facilities
- Improved physical health
- Social interaction
- Community ownership

These **six key benefits** run throughout the recommendations below and across each of Swim England's **three frontiers to increasing swimming participation**.

When reading these recommendations and planning any future activity, please keep the following important points in mind:

- Trans ownership of trans-based projects is vitally important to the success of an activity. **Involve trans people wherever possible throughout** the development, monitoring and sustainability of a project to ensure you are developing the right experience for everyone.
- It is important that **everyone has the best experience possible**. This not only includes trans customers but also other centre users, staff, and the general public. This can and should involve open and honest conversations and potentially some difficult questions, but as long as everything is directed in the right positive and constructive way then there is no need to worry, you are just trying to ensure the best experience for all!

Frontier 1

Increasing awareness and relevance of swimming

It can be extremely rewarding when you engage with trans customers effectively, and here are some hints and tips below about how you might be able to do a little more.

Messaging should highlight the **health and wellbeing benefits** that swimming offers:

- Physical activity can improve **mental health** and **wellbeing**, particularly around improvements in mood, self-esteem and confidence, as well as lessening anxieties around body image which are all especially pertinent for the trans community.
- Physical activity is also vitally important to improve physical health and wellbeing too, particularly for those trans people needing to lose weight and gain fitness in order to be able to have surgery and then recover from it afterwards, for which swimming caters so effectively.

Remember to be proactive:

Promoting any good work that you are doing in this area will help to reassure and increase confidence in any potential new customers.

Make sure to promote any training that staff have had in this area, specific elements of the centre that are particularly inclusive to this community, or promoting tailored sessions in your pool programme will definitely stand you in good stead, and these points are explored further in frontiers 2 and 3.

Try to use the following marketing and communications avenues to reach out to the trans community:

Use your **Local Authority, Community Sport Partnership, Clinical Commissioning Group, GP surgeries** or **NHS clinics** to help you identify local trans support groups, charities, groups or clubs.

Target wider LGB&T+ support groups if trans specific groups do not exist; most cities have a local LGB&T+ network or association that you should be able to find online.

Often word of mouth is the best form of communication particularly for trans people who are a very close knit community – try and work with trans people to develop your offer and ask them to help spread the word.

Frontier 2

Improve the overall swimming experience

Having appropriate facilities and a safe place to swim is hugely important to the trans community.

In fact, the areas outlined below were identified as very significant motivators for swimming participation by trans people in the

Swim England LGB&T+ Swimming Audit were:

1. Knowing staff have received trans awareness training.
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2. Having a pool with private changing and shower cubicles.
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Workforce

Your centre staff are pivotal to all customers having a great time using your facilities, but especially so for trans people.

A lack of understanding from staff members can have a major impact on the quality of swimming experience for trans people from those at the front desk to lifeguards on poolside and to cleaners in the changing rooms. It is vitally important that all staff are fully informed about trans inclusion to provide great customer service to trans people, but also so they are equipped to inform other customers about it too when receiving queries.

This is all about good customer service, and your staff are probably already supporting trans customers without even realising. However, take a look at the following steps and recommendations below to help you:

- Staff can be reluctant or worried about supporting a trans customer due to a lack of understanding and being afraid of offending someone, but some simple awareness raising can help to solve this.

- Most local LGB&T+ and/or trans groups are usually willing to come in and speak with staff to explain more about trans life and what their needs might be to use the centre and participate in physical activity; formal 'training' is not usually needed.
- Try and reach out to local groups and engage them in supporting your workforce to understand more about trans people.
- Think about promoting your efforts to trans people – put a sign up in your centre or a notice on your website to say that your staff have received trans awareness training and that you are very proud to be supporting trans people.

Ultimately, we want to get to a place where staff are able to accept people in the gender that they present themselves in, and are able to offer them the best customer service and the best experience possible at your centre. This isn't just about running trans specific sessions, but hopefully giving trans people the confidence and ability to attend any session in the timetable.

Environment

The most common queries raised around trans participation relate to the use of changing rooms and toilets. Take a look at the following steps and recommendations below to help you.

1. The most appropriate changing and shower facilities are **gender neutral village style changing rooms**, so that everyone can enter together without fear, with individual changing and shower cubicles also provided to enable a closed, private space to change and shower before and/or after exercise.
2. You may need to do some **education work with other centre users** who may be concerned when sharing a space with a trans person, especially if a trans customer looks to have different physical characteristics to the gender they are identifying with i.e. a male to female trans customer who has not had top or bottom surgery may still look like a male to others, and conversely with female to male trans customers.

In these situations you may experience negativity or a lack of understanding from other centre users, but be confident in explaining the situation to them, educate them about the positive steps you are taking to welcome trans customers at your centre, as well as outlining yours and their legal obligations and accountability under the Equality Act (2010).

3. If your facility is not able to cater for this and you have a more traditional gender assigned toilet/shower allocation, then you should **enable trans people to use the facilities which they feel to be most appropriate**. As outlined in the Equality Act section earlier in this toolkit, you have a responsibility to support somebody who is undergoing or who has undergone a gender transition as much as possible.
4. It may be appropriate to enable trans swimmers to use disabled changing facilities. If so, this should be an offer that is made on an individual basis and **a trans person should never be required to use disabled changing facilities**.

Customer safety

By encouraging more trans people to use your pool, you may start to experience more negative incidents in and around your centre.

1. You should adopt a **zero tolerance policy** on any transphobic behaviour from staff or centre users.
2. Try to encourage your workforce to be aware of any potential transphobia likely to happen before or after a session, both in or around the centre, and empower them to challenge transphobic language, attitudes and behaviours from other staff members, customers and the general public too.
3. You could look to build links with the local police force to make them aware of the work you are doing and ask for their advice about how best to support the safety of trans customers.
4. You could work with your local transport department to try and ensure a safe journey for trans customers from the local bus or train station into the centre.

Frontier 3

Tailoring your pool programme / swimming offer

The trans community is very similar to some faith communities in terms of the privacy initially needed when accessing the pool. Try to deliver trans specific sessions in the pool timetable if you can, even for a trial period e.g. once a month, to support the gentle introduction of trans customers into the water.

Trans specific sessions not only provide a **safe space** and **protection from discrimination**, but can offer trans people a chance to **meet and socialise** with likeminded peers.

Many trans people feel socially isolated and value the ability to socialise with other trans people whilst engaging in an activity, which is particularly beneficial because it is so different from the more mainstream support group environment that so many trans people experience as the only way to meet similar people.

If you **are** able to offer trans specific swimming sessions:

1. These sessions might be best delivered in a teaching /smaller pool that can be closed off to the rest of the public
2. If your pool cannot support that, then look to run separate swimming sessions at quieter times of the day..
3. Trans customers are likely to need private changing, shower and toilet facilities wherever possible. **Try to be as flexible and proactive as you can** with this; think about closing the pool to other centre users 15 minutes prior to the session starting, and for 15 minutes after the session has ended to enable trans customers to have privacy in the shower and changing areas.
4. **Be mindful about how much visibility there is into the pool space** from public viewing areas and try to reduce this as much as possible by using screens or blinds, or paper on windows if you can.
5. If you have agreed to deliver sessions in a certain way then work hard to keep them in place for every session, as one small slip up may cause a negative experience for a trans person and they may never attend again.
6. After a period of running trans specific sessions, when the swimmers have gained confidence and you have built a good relationship with the group, it may be appropriate to try to encourage the swimmers to attend other sessions in the pool timetable as they may be missing out on a number of other opportunities that you could offer!

Don't forget to keep reinforcing key messages with your workforce:

- **Ensure that front of house staff are aware when a trans specific session is on** so they can be prepared to support trans customers with all their needs when they arrive at the centre.
- **Ensure that lifeguards are aware when a trans specific session is on** so they too can be prepared and not surprised when trans customers may enter the pool potentially looking very different to the type of customers they may be more used to working with.

If you **are not** able to offer trans specific swimming sessions, then you need to be able to ensure that trans people have the confidence and ability to access the rest of the pool timetable.

1. You should strive to ensure that all of your pool timetable sessions are accessible to everyone, with the exception of some single-sex sessions, that may be required.
2. When offering single-sex sessions in your timetable, remember that you must enable trans swimmers to attend the sessions they would like to according to their gender identity, which may take some initial support and some education with other centre users.
3. Where non-binary customers wish to use the pool i.e. those people whose gender identity does not fit naturally into male and female identities, you should encourage them to attend sessions that are open to everyone.

Think about relaxing rules around swimwear if you haven't already – many people in society have personal issues with their bodies, but this is especially so in the trans community.

Many trans people suffer from varying distress at the mismatch between their gender identity and their body, and the exposure involved in swimming can be particularly intimidating, but confronting this in a supportive way using the tips below could be very empowering to trans people as well as to the wider population.

1. Wherever possible it should be encouraged to **enable all customers to wear appropriate, comfortable clothing in the water** i.e. leggings and a tight t-shirt/rash vest, or a t-shirt or rash vest under/over a swimsuit.
2. Some swimmers who were born female but now identify differently may wear what is called a 'binder' – this is a tight piece of material that is wrapped around the top half of the body in order to compress breasts to conceal them behind clothing. This is perfectly safe to swim in, and should be encouraged.
3. Some swimmers may have a preference to wear less clothing than usually expected. For example, some swimmers may not want to wear anything on their top half, so as to identify with their new gender, but if they have not had top surgery this means that this person's breasts will be clearly visible. This needs to be talked about and an amicable solution found. This may be appropriate to allow during a trans specific session, but if a trans swimmer is attending any other session in the timetable, then they should be appropriately covered up – you wouldn't allow a woman to swim topless in a public session, and you need to treat everyone the same.
4. Similarly, a swimmer who was born male but now identifies as a female should be expected to wear whatever you would let other female customers use to swim in.
5. Encourage swimmers to bring a towel or a robe on to the poolside with them to make the journey from the changing room to the water easier. Install hooks or storage on poolside for swimmers to put them whilst they are swimming – this will benefit all of your customers!
6. Remember that **this is about everyone feeling comfortable**, including the trans customer, other centre users and centre staff.

Information for clubs

What do you do if someone in your club tells you that they want to transition genders?

This is becoming more of a commonality across the country and **you are certainly not on your own**. Take a look at the following steps and recommendations below to help you:

If the person is an adult or a member of the club's workforce, try to arrange a meeting with the member and relevant club committee members in order to develop the best plan of action moving forwards. This can and should involve open and honest conversations and potentially some difficult questions, but as long as everything is directed in the right positive and constructive way then there is no need to worry, you are just trying to ensure the best experience for all.

If the person is a child, then try to arrange a meeting with the member, their parents/guardians, the head coach and club welfare officer to develop the best plan of action moving forwards. Often the child's school will already be taking positive steps to support them, so it can be very useful to learn about what the school is doing in order to reflect this as much as possible.

Often queries will be around changing, toilets and swimwear, so you should work with the centre operator to support you on this. More information on these points can be found earlier in this toolkit.

The member may also have other needs and preferences that they will need support with, including the process of how to inform other club members about their transition process, and these should all be talked about.

Remember, **it is important that everyone has the best experience possible**, and that not only includes trans members, but other club members, club workforce, centre staff and the general public too.

Who else should I tell?

You should inform the leisure provider who operates the pool that you train in to support this person through their gender transition, but make sure to discuss this first with the person who is transitioning and hopefully do this with them.

You may find that this is the first time the operator has come across this, so be proactive and work with them to embed the recommendations in this toolkit.

You may even find that the operator has come across this before and the centre is already fully inclusive to trans people.

What about the legal issues, where do I stand?

You have a responsibility to support somebody who is undergoing or who undergone a gender transition as much as possible - refer back to the legality section earlier in this toolkit for more information on this.

What about competition?

Swim England adopted a simple policy on trans competitors in November 2011 for two reasons: firstly, **in order to ensure equal and fair competition across all aquatic disciplines**; and secondly, **to ensure the safety at all times of all competitors**.

The policy outlines the different process that needs to be followed for both children and adults.

This policy has now been updated based on the helpful guidance from the **Sports Council Equality Group** and can be downloaded here: www.swimming.org/swimengland/equality-and-diversity/

In summary

Educate your workforce and customers about the importance of trans and wider LGB inclusion. It is **vitaly important that all staff are fully informed** about trans inclusion in order to provide great customer service to trans people, but also so they are equipped to inform other customers about it too when receiving queries.

Involve trans people wherever possible throughout the **development, monitoring** and **sustainability** of a project in order to ensure that you are developing the right experience for everyone. Reach out to your local trans community and actively engage them in any progress or developments.

Think about **introducing trans specific swimming sessions** as a trial at least and work on making the whole of your pool timetable as inclusive as possible for everyone.

Think about making a few simple **environmental changes where possible** in order to fulfil your obligations and provide a **great experience** not only for trans customers, but for all customers using the centre.

Remember, **this is just about providing excellent customer service** and it is important that everyone has the best experience possible, not only trans customers, but your workforce, other centre users, and the general public too.

Once you have taken some positive steps, make sure to **promote the great work that you are doing**.

For more information

see the following websites and resources

Swim England Equality Support

www.swimming.org/swimengland/equality-and-diversity/

Sport's Council Equality Group (SCEG)

www.equalityinsport.org/

Gendered Intelligence

www.genderedintelligence.co.uk

Pride Sports

www.pridesports.org.uk/

Stonewall

www.stonewall.org.uk/

Stonewall Guide for LGBT Inclusion in Sport

www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/rl-sports-toolkit.pdf

Equality and Human Rights Commission

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/gender-reassignment-discrimination

Or you can reach **Swim England's lead on inclusion** by emailing - equality@swimming.org