

Mixed Gender Youth Work

Will we all have to re-train?

The National Occupational Standards for Youth Work do not identify any different skills or knowledge required to work with girls, and the skills of relational youth work, hold good for both sexes. There is a new optional module on Youth Leader Training for those leaders working with boys and girls. This will look at good practice when working with both sexes.

Female leaders

It has often been asked whether or not we have to have a female leader present when working with girls. The answer is that there is no statutory requirement for leaders of mixed sex youth groups to have female leaders if girls are present. However, common sense should prevail when there are activities where there are issues of privacy for the girls. For example a mixed sex outing to a swimming pool would call for a female leader to supervise. Camps and holidays with both sexes too, would need both male and female adult leaders.

Programme

The matter of programme activities need not be seen as problematic. We need not assume that there are any activities that are suitable for boys and not for girls, or vice versa. The practice of involving young people in programme planning would be helpful in identifying a programme that engages all the young people in a company.

Overcoming Gender Stereotyping

In order for the BB to provide a truly developmental environment for boys and girls, it is important that we are aware of the ways in which we stereotype both sexes, and thereby miss opportunities to assist young people to reach their potential.

These new regulations represent a valuable opportunity to review the assumptions we hold about masculinity and boys. We use the phrase "Christian manliness" but the definition of manliness is seldom explored. Both sexes are subject to stereotyping from birth onwards. Boys are often assumed to be more physical, rowdier, more assertive, competitive, practical rather than communicative, emotionally tougher etc. Girls are assumed to be more passive, less adventurous, more caring, emotional, better communicators etc. The lists go on, often contradictory, sometimes apparently true, but are nevertheless stereotypes. Whether an attribute accorded to either sex is positive or negative, it is always limiting.

Many boys and girls experience extreme pressures to "fit" into their ascribed gender role. The sanctions applied to young people who step outside their gender roles can range from teasing to ridicule, bullying and exclusion. The BB cannot necessarily change society (although we can have a role in how society evolves), but we can certainly offer a safe place where young people can be themselves, without fear of recriminations

Questions

If you have any questions about mixed gender working or how to start a Girls' Association contact your Regional Headquarters or BBUK Headquarters on 01442 231 681.



Mixed Gender Youth Work A guide to good practice

Mixed gender working in The Boys' Brigade

Brigade Council in September 2008 voted that companies can admit girls where it is the wish of the church and the company to do so. This leaflet is designed to help you through the process should you wish to form a Girls' Association.

Frequently asked questions

Q: What do the new regulations mean?

A: The regulations now permit those Companies that wish to work with girls, and where it is the wish of the church, to do so. If you do decide to take girls then you will need to register a Girls' Association at your company.

Q: Who decides whether we will take girls?

A: This will be a joint decision between the Company and the Church.

Q: How will this affect our relationship with the GB/Guides?

A: If discussions are conducted openly, honestly and with respect then it should not affect relationships. It is important to remember that our responsibilities are primarily with the children and young people in our communities. We need to be careful to be good role models to them and remember that they also have choices. It would be courteous to inform and consult any other youth groups where you have existing relationships. Experience shows that young people have differing needs and may show preferences for a particular group or way of working.

Q: If we decide to set up a Girls' Association will we need to have female leaders?

A: There is no policy or legal requirement to have female leaders. An ordinary BB night in a church hall or other appropriate premises would not necessitate or preclude leaders of either sex being present. The most important factor is having the right number of leaders with the appropriate skills present to supervise the activities you have planned.

There would be situations where common sense and good practice would mean you must have leaders of both sexes present, for example camps, holidays or sleepovers. Also if you have children or young people who because of a disability or impairment need a level of personal care or help with changing etc, then it is necessary to have a leader of the same sex helping them.

Q: Are there any additional safeguarding implications?

A: The Safeguarding guidelines on the "Good Practice" card and in the Safety Handbook hold good for working with either or both sexes.

Q: Do we need any extra training to work with girls?

A: There are different skills and awareness that can be helpful when working in a mixed-sex company. There will be training and resources available for leaders to extend their skills. This will help to make our work with teenagers more effective and rewarding – for leaders and young people.

Q: Do we need to adapt our programme if we decide to work with girls and boys?

With Anchors and Juniors there is no evidence to show that you would need to adapt the activities that you carry out currently. In fact, it would be considered good practice that you do not differentiate between girls and boys in most aspects of your programme. You can occasionally have "girls teams" and "boys teams" but it is equally important to divide children up randomly. With Company Sections and Seniors the new programme materials are again, valid for young women and young men, although you may find that they sometimes express a preference for different activities. At this age we should be encouraging young people to participate in the planning of their own programme, and that may sometimes mean that different preferences are shown. It's a good idea to try and accommodate young people's ideas, but at the same time to challenge stereotypical ideas of what both sexes can do.

Q: What about camps and holidays?

A: The BB has many years of experience running camps and holidays where both boys and girls are present. As with all situations where Companies are away from home, careful planning and proper supervision is crucial. It would be essential to have female leaders present in this situation, as in any overnight event. Other than this there is no difference in approach to taking single-sex camps. Young people should be fully involved in the planning of the event as well as in a post-event evaluation, even if this is just asking them what they thought.

Q: What changes will we need to make at Company level? Battalion level?

A: If you have taken the decision to set up a Girls' Association, then it is essential that both boys and girls are treated equally in the Company. (Equally doesn't always mean exactly the same, but with equal opportunities to achieve and participate and to be valued equally).

One of the roles of the Battalion is to support all of the Companies in its area, so if a Battalion has a mix of companies including boys-only and those Companies with a Girls' Association, then those Battalions should ensure that events and competitions offer opportunities to both girls and boys. Where a national sporting body lays down guidelines about organised sports or games that means that you cannot have mixed teams, then an opportunity for single sex teams to compete separately should be provided, if possible.

Q: If we have a Girls' Association, is it necessary to have girls in all sections?

A: It may be that not all sections have girls at all times, but once girls have joined there must be opportunities for them to progress upwards through the sections.