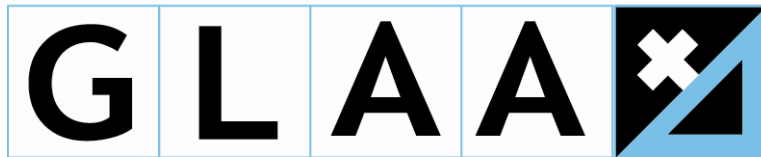


# Gay & Lesbian



# Athletes Association

*Dedicated to change in sport*

## ***PEER MENTORING PROGRAM***

[www.glaa-sport.org](http://www.glaa-sport.org)



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## **GLAA Peer Mentoring Program**

Gay and lesbian athletes face a variety of unique issues. The issues facing athletes go beyond homophobia and threats of violence. Coming out to their peers can be a daunting challenge for any athlete. They fear the potential for adverse reactions from teammates, coaches and others in their sport.

Sports environments can even cause a conflict in identity and destroy self-esteem. Some athletes may come to believe that they can be gay or an athlete, but not both. Some athletes go so far as to quit their sport so they don't have to deal with these issues. Others choose to hide their sexual orientation because they believe this is necessary to be successful in their sports endeavors.

## **How Peer Mentoring Works**

The GLAA Peer Mentoring Program is designed to match volunteer mentors with people (mentees) to help them work through the challenges of being gay or lesbian in sport. Mentors provide support, guidance and advice on a one-on-one basis, through email, telephone or in person.

The content of discussions between mentor and mentee are not assigned by the GLAA. What they discuss will be determined by the reasons for the mentee's participation in the program. The goal of the program is to help gay and lesbian athletes (and others) overcome the challenges of being gay and lesbian in sport.

## **Mission Statement of the Gay & Lesbian Athletes Association (GLAA)**

The GLAA general mandate is as follows:

1. To eliminate homophobia in sports.
2. To conduct research into the prevention of homophobia in sport and to disseminate the results of such research to the general public.
3. To educate the public about the presence and adverse impact of homophobia in sport on society at large by conducting seminars and meetings and developing and providing programs on that topic.
4. To facilitate participation in sport by members of the public adversely affected by homophobia in sport through education, support, counseling and mentoring.



## **Why Be a Mentor?**

A mentor is someone who provides a person (the mentee) with support, advice and guidance. A mentor listens and helps their mentee understand an issue and supports him or her in working through that issue, problem or challenge.

If you think you have experiences that might be useful to others, are a good listener, or have a good understanding of issues that might face lesbian and gay athletes, then become a mentor!

Even if you don't think you have enough experience, you can still become a mentor—you might just be surprised with yourself! By becoming a mentor, you get to use your strengths to help others. You will gain an appreciation of the troubles others are facing, as well as an appreciation of your own abilities to help others (and yourself) deal with tough issues related to homophobia. Being a mentor will expose you to new types of people and give you an opportunity to make lasting friendships.

To become a mentor, send an email to [mentor@glaa-sport.org](mailto:mentor@glaa-sport.org) or go to our website, [www.glaa-sport.org](http://www.glaa-sport.org).

## **Do you Want a Mentor?**

Do you sometimes feel the need to talk to someone about being gay or lesbian in sport, but don't know where to turn? Do you have goals that you don't know how to achieve and want some advice on how to go about achieving them? Have you ever needed someone who truly understands how to listen when you have a problem? Have you ever needed advice from someone who has personal experience dealing with life as a gay or lesbian athlete? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then maybe you need a mentor!

We can help you overcome the challenges of being gay or lesbian in sport.

To sign up for a mentor, send an email to [mentor@glaa-sport.org](mailto:mentor@glaa-sport.org) or go to our website, [www.glaa-sport.org](http://www.glaa-sport.org).



## **What Mentors Should Do**

### **Contacts Early in the Relationship**

After being matched up, the first thing that a mentor needs to do is to get to know the mentee. There is some reason why the mentee has signed up for this program and you want to find out about the challenges they face. But start slowly. The mentee may not respond well to an immediate barrage of personal questions and, at the beginning, may not even be able to articulate why they want a mentor.

During your first few contacts with your mentee, you are essentially strangers to each other. Most people take a bit of time to warm up to strangers, so offer some information about yourself to aid in the process. If your mentee knows a bit more about you, she or he may feel more comfortable in opening up (and it's just plain polite).

You will be provided with some basic information about your mentee. Take the time to discuss what you know about them and show interest in their sports activities. This will lead to a natural conversational flow. You will have to let the mentee become more comfortable and familiar with you before moving on to more personal topics. Some mentees may not be tentative about talking about personal issues, but you should still take some time to familiarize yourself with their basic information.

Please note that the Gay and Lesbian Athletes Association Peer Mentoring Program is designed to allow for a mentee to participate without fully revealing his or her identity. If a mentee conveys any reluctance to divulge personal information, you should not press him or her. Do not press for information to discern the mentee's identity.

### **Frequency of Contact**

We recommend being in contact with your mentee at the very least once a month, and more frequently in the early stages of the match. Every mentoring match will be different and how often contact is made will be determined by the nature of the relationship. Even a brief message once every month to check up on how your mentee is doing will be appreciated by the mentee.

Some mentees will want more frequent contact with their mentors, particularly when trying to overcome specific problems. Please provide as much communication as the mentee needs.



## **Possible Questions**

If your mentee is not forthcoming about the issues bothering her/him, or seems unsure what she/he wants to talk about, here are some tips for coming up with questions to ask.

Included in your package of resources and materials, there should be a set of “action guides”. Read them over. This will give you an overview of some of the situations your mentee might be facing. Then, you can try changing these action instructions into questions for your mentee.

For example, on the Action Guide for Athletes, the eighth bullet suggests, “Respect the right of all teammates to safety.” Ask a question about this. Ask a question like “Do you feel safe with your team?”, or “How safe do you feel with your team?” Ask open-ended questions (questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes/no response and that invite a response with more information).

Remember that many of the issues described in the action guides may not be a problem for your particular mentee. It is important to carefully listen to the responses given before deciding what type of questions to ask next (if further questions are needed to find out what issues your mentee is facing).

## **What you should be prepared to talk about**

You should be prepared to answer questions about your experiences as a gay or lesbian athlete/coach/administrator in sport. This can include how you dealt with isolation, stigma, lack of confidence, prejudice, discrimination, insults from others in sport, etc. if you have experienced any of these issues. You should also be prepared to answer questions that are more sport related (e.g. about training, diet, etc.), as well as questions more related to one’s identity as a gay or lesbian (e.g. coming out process).

## **What Mentees Should Do**

In order for a mentor/mentee relationship to work, there needs to be an exchange of information. If you know what issues you want to talk about, great. But even if you don't know specifically what issues you want to discuss with your mentor, try to think of some interesting things about yourself to tell your mentor. The mentee has to want to be a partner in the mentoring connection. If you offer up some details about your life or situation, your mentor will probably do the same and a conversation can get going.

Remember, the direction the conversation goes is ultimately up to you. This means that if you don't like where the conversation is going, you can change the topic. In particular, you will never be required to give your mentor identifying information or additional contact information if you choose not to (such as full name, address, or telephone number). You never have to divulge any information you don't want to divulge. If your mentor asks a question that you don't feel comfortable answering, just let her/him know that you do not want to respond.

On the other hand, remember that for there to be a relationship, you have to be willing to talk about *something*. So, if there are certain topics you don't feel willing to talk about, offer some other topics to your mentor. Your mentor can't know what you're ready to talk about until you let him/her know!

## **Frequency of Contact**

The frequency of contact will depend on how well you and your mentor get along. If both parties are amenable, contact can occur as frequently as you like. However, you should be aware of the availability of your mentor and that your mentor may have a full and busy life. If communicating by phone, you and your mentor should decide on a date and time for the next phone call, and who is doing the phoning at the end of each conversation. If communicating by email, you should be aware that a response may not always come right away.

## **Available Resources**

On our website ([www.glaa-sport.org](http://www.glaa-sport.org)), we have a small library of resources. The library of resources contains documents or links that we think may be useful for anyone who wants information on issues facing lesbian and gay athletes.

Familiarize yourself with these resources so that you can direct your mentee to the appropriate resource should the need arise.



Any mentor or mentee who would like assistance in furthering the mentoring relationship and helping their match may also send an email to [help@glaa-sport.org](mailto:help@glaa-sport.org). The email will be directed to a program advisor or manager who can help.

### **Content of Communications**

Please note that any romantic or sexual relationships between mentors and mentee matched are expressly prohibited. Such occurrences will result in an immediate termination of participation in this program. Mentors and mentees are required to report any romantic or sexual relationships between them, or any concerns regarding romantic or sexual relationships between them to project staff immediately. This includes sexual innuendo, any actions with sexual overtones, or any overtly sexual comments.

Violence or threats of violence, on either the part of the mentor or the part of the mentee, are expressly prohibited and must be reported to project staff immediately. Violence or threat of violence will result in termination of involvement in this program.

### **Effective Email Communication**

We expect that email will be the main mode of communication for many matches, mostly because of geographical barriers and confidentiality concerns. Communication by email, however, is not exactly like having a conversation and there are a few things you should watch out for when communication via email.

Since there are no vocal or facial cues in email, certain forms of expression may not be as clear as when speaking face to face with somebody. Sarcasm is often unclear, and it is more difficult to convey what kind of tone you are “speaking” in through text.

There are various conventions that help convey feeling and emphasis. You should, however, try to make sure that your mentee will understand the use of these conventions before employing them! For example, **WRITING IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS INDICATES SHOUTING**, and smiley faces can indicate thoughts.

In our “Library of Resources” on our website ([www.glaa-sport.org](http://www.glaa-sport.org)), we have put together a list of websites that will help you communicate effectively through email. The websites contain information on “netiquette”, common text communication conventions and devices, and online conflict resolution. If you are an experienced email user, you can read through them quickly, but you should still give them at least a cursory reading as there may be points that you had not thought of or encountered previously.



## **Policies for the Gay and Lesbian Athletes Association Peer Mentoring Program**

### **Final Right of Refusal**

Program staff reserves the right to finally accept, reject, or match any potential mentor, or mentee applicant.

### **Non-Discrimination Policy for Matching Mentors with Mentees**

Mentors may not be categorically excluded from matches based on sex, gender, age, racial or cultural group, religious affiliation, or disability. However, common experiences and interests play a role in determining the optimal match, so where appropriate, sex, gender, age, racial or cultural group, religious affiliation or disability may be used as factors in determining a match.

### **Agreement to Policies of the Program**

All mentoring applicants must expressly agree to abide by the policies of the program. The agreement indicates that an applicant has read and understands the policies related to the program and willingly promises to abide by them in the course of being a mentor.

The policies of the project may be subject to change, in which case mentors and mentoring applicants will be informed of the changes and will have the option of withdrawing their agreement to abide by the policies of the project, thereby terminating their involvement with the project.

A breach of any of the policies of the project may result in an application to mentor being rejected, or an existing match or involvement with the program being terminated.

### **Romantic and/or Sexual Relationships**

The Peer Mentoring Program is NOT a dating service and the use of one's position as a Peer Mentor or any information gained through the program for personal, social, or sexual purposes is unethical and will be considered a violation of the program's mission. This is grounds for removal from the program. While meetings between mentors and mentees may occur, Peer Mentors are not allowed to plan one-on-one social interactions or respond to an invitation from the mentee to a social event for at least four months after the last contact as a Peer Mentor. A Peer Mentor may choose to accompany a mentee to social events, meetings, etc. in order to facilitate the mentee's transition into the Gay and Lesbian community.

Mentors and mentees are required to report any romantic or sexual relationships between them, or any concerns regarding romantic or sexual relationships between them to project



staff immediately. This includes sexual innuendo, any actions with sexual overtones, or any overtly sexual comments or actions.

### **Violence or Threats of Violence**

Violence or threats of violence, on either the part of the mentor or the part of the mentee, are expressly prohibited and must be reported to project staff immediately. Violence or threat of violence will result in termination of involvement in the program.

### **Financial Responsibility/Liability**

The Gay and Lesbian Athletes Association Peer Mentoring program is not responsible for any costs incurred as a result of a mentoring match, including, but not limited to long distance telephone charges. The program is not responsible for any outstanding debts between members of a match.

### **Release of Information**

To protect the confidentiality of mentors and mentees, all information about mentors and mentees will be available only to the staff of the Gay and Lesbian Athletes Association and project volunteers and will be used only for project purposes.

### **Sharing of Relevant Information**

Mentors, mentees, and project staff are encouraged to keep each other reasonably informed of information which will, or likely will, impact the relationship between the mentor and mentee. This information should be provided as part of the matching process, and mentor and mentee should continue to keep each other, and project staff, informed of such information as the match progresses.

### **Mentor Confidentiality Agreement**

Mentors are required to expressly agree to our Mentor Confidentiality Agreement regarding personal information.



## **Mentor Application Process**

Anyone who is committed to the goals of the program may apply to become a mentor. Youths under the age of eighteen require parental consent for participation in this program as a mentor. Inquiries by phone to our toll free line will be directed to our online application procedure.

Prospective mentors can sign up to become a mentor by sending an email to [mentor@glaa-sport.org](mailto:mentor@glaa-sport.org). Once a mentor sends an email to sign up, he or she will be directed to our website, which outlines the procedures and expectations of the program and contains a full on-line application form. The full mentor application package can also be downloaded from our web site, [www.glaa-sport.org](http://www.glaa-sport.org).

The mentor application package includes:

- a) mentor application form
- b) mentor confidentiality agreement
- c) mentor agreement to policies of the program
- d) policies and procedures

All applicants and mentors must commit to undergoing training as is deemed necessary by the program, including reading any training materials made available.

## **Mentee Application Process**

Anyone who is interested in having a mentor may apply to be a mentee. Inquiries by phone to our toll free line will be directed to our online application procedure.

## **Matching Process**

The matching between mentors and mentees will be carried out by designated program staff. Any factors deemed relevant will be taken into account when determining a match, including, but not limited to, age, level of sport, sport, cultural/religious affiliation, and sexual identity.

## **Termination**

If at some point in the relationship either party wishes to terminate the match, he or she must inform program staff of the reasons for termination. Program staff can be contacted through email at [help@glaa-sport.org](mailto:help@glaa-sport.org).



## **Mentor/Mentee Contact**

The mentee may make contact with their mentor by email or instant messenger, phone, or in person. NOTE: At any time, during any meeting or the course of any correspondence that either the mentor or mentee does not feel comfortable with their match, the program coordinator should be notified.

### *E-mail or Instant Messenger Communications*

Perhaps the least threatening form of communication is e-mail. A mentee's email address is confidential. Mentees may wish to use other forms of communication.

### *Telephone Communications*

Telephone contact is an option offering a more personal interaction than e-mail, but may require financial resources, depending on the relative locations of the mentor and mentee. Telephone communications are only permitted if desired by the mentee. Initial contacts are to be made through email. Phone meetings should be conducted during reasonable hours. It is up to mentors and mentees to establish reasonable parameters for phone meetings. Mentors must keep the phone numbers of mentees in the strictest of confidence at all times.

### *Personal Meetings*

Personal meetings are only permitted if desired by the mentee. Given logistical concerns (distance, timing, etc), personal meetings are not required or even feasible for some situations. Personal meetings should be arranged only after substantial contact has been made via e-mail, instant messenger and phone. All personal meetings should take place during reasonable hours and in a public setting.

### *Frequency of Contact*

Mentors and mentees should be in contact at least twice per month, although there are no strict requirements on the frequency of contact. It is recommended that more frequent contact is made at the beginning of the match.

