



SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES & IDENTITIES

As You Are

*A College Application Guide
for LGBTQ+ Students*

Decide what to share, find a campus where you can be yourself,
and build a plan that works with your choices.

Dr. Heather Case, LMHC, and Dr. Carlton Underwood



As You Are

Companion Workbook

From the Stressed Out 2 Stand Out™ series

By Dr. Heather Case, LMHC, and Dr. Carlton Underwood

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The lead author is a master's-level mental health professional licensed in the state of Indiana and has spent decades working one-on-one with high school students as they transition to college, drawing on both her clinical training and her doctoral work in education; however, no psychological, counseling, consulting, advisory, financial, legal, or other professional services are being provided in this book or the accompanying workbook, nor is any form of client relationship being established between the authors and the reader. This publication is intended for informational purposes only, and no school admissions results, scholarship awards, or other outcomes are implied or guaranteed.

The stories included in this publication are composites of various students and families the author has worked with over the years. Names and circumstances have been changed to protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality.

This publication discusses federal privacy law, financial aid rules, and health insurance in general terms for educational purposes. It is not legal advice. Rules change and vary by state and by college; for your own situation, check with the office involved or a qualified attorney.



How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is the companion to **As You Are**. Each chapter of the book has a matching section here with three parts: a short reminder of the big idea, a couple of reflection questions, and an Exploring Deeper exercise. Work it in order or jump to the chapter you need most.

TWO WAYS TO FILL IT IN

Type directly: open this PDF in the free Adobe Acrobat Reader on a computer or tablet and click into any box to type. Your answers save when you save the file.

Print it: print the pages you want and write by hand. Every box is sized to write in.

THREE WAYS TO DO EVERY EXERCISE

Each Exploring Deeper exercise works three ways, and all three count the same.

WITH A PERSON

A friend, family member, teacher, school counselor, coach, or mentor can be a great thinking partner. Their job is not to give you answers. It is to ask you the questions, listen, and tell you honestly what they notice. For some of these, a person who actually knows you will see things more clearly than any tool could.

ON YOUR OWN

You can do every exercise by yourself, right here in this workbook. Write your answers in the spaces provided, then read back over what you wrote and look for the patterns. Thinking on paper is real thinking.

WITH AN AI TOOL

If you have an AI chatbot and want to use one, each exercise gives you a prompt you can paste in to get started. This is optional, one tool among several, and never required.

There is no better or worse choice here, and you do not have to wait. If lining up time with someone would mean putting this off, start on your own or with a tool today, and you can always come back to it with a person later. What matters is that you actually do the reflecting.

A NOTE ON USING AI WELL

If you use an AI tool, the prompts are here to help you think, not to think for you. It should never write your application for you, draft your essay, or invent experiences or words that are not yours. Colleges are reading you, and many have rules about AI-written material. Keep the thinking and the words your own.

Keep some things private. What you type may be stored, so do not paste in your full name, address, phone number, email, school name, birthday, or ID numbers, and do not share private details about other people or about your own mental health. You can do every prompt using general descriptions, like "a friend was going through something hard," instead of names and specifics. When in doubt, leave it out. AI can also be confidently wrong, so treat what it says as a starting point to check, not the final word.



Introduction · You Decide Who Knows What, and When

THE BIG IDEA

Being out is not one switch that is on or off. You can be out to a couple of friends and a counselor, not out at home, and not out on an application, all at the same time, and that is coherent and healthy. This workbook treats disclosure as a series of small, separate choices. One note before you start: if this workbook is not private where you live, you can type into a copy saved somewhere only you can reach, or simply think the answers through. Nothing here has to be written down to count.

REFLECT

1. Who knows what about you right now, and in which parts of your life? Where do you feel most like yourself?

2. What is the one extra question you carry into the college search that most of your classmates do not? Say it in your own words.



Introduction · You Decide Who Knows What, and When

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Map your venues. List the places in your life (home, school, friends, a team, online, work) and decide, for each one, how out you are there and whether that is where you want it to be for now.

WITH A PERSON

With someone who already knows, talk through the list out loud. Ask them, “Does this match what you have seen? Is there a venue where I seem to be carrying more than I need to?”

ON YOUR OWN

Write each venue below, then next to it: how out you are there (fully, partly, not at all) and one word for how that feels (fine, tense, safe, tiring).

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm a high school student thinking about college, and I'm LGBTQ+. I want to map how out I am in different parts of my life, because being out is not one switch; it can be different with friends, at school, at home, online, and on a college application, and that is normal. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Ask me one question at a time about each part of my life: how out I am there, and whether that feels right for now. Then reflect my answers back as a simple map. Do not tell me I should come out anywhere, and do not tell me I should hide anywhere. The choices are mine.

KEEP GOING

Ask, “Which venue would I change first if I could, and what would need to be true for that to feel safe?”

DON'T ACCEPT

Any answer, from a person or a tool, that tells you where you must be out or must stay quiet.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

you can see your venues side by side and none of them surprises you.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- Being out is not one switch. You can be out in one place and not another, at the same time, and that is coherent.
- Disclosure is a series of small, separate choices. You make each one on purpose, on your own timeline.



Chapter 1 · The Weight Is Real

THE BIG IDEA

If the college process feels heavier for you than for your classmates, there is a name for that: minority stress. The extra weight comes from the environment, from bias, from staying alert, and from deciding what to share, not from any flaw in you. The hopeful part is that the same research shows affirming environments protect LGBTQ+ young people. That is why “can I be myself here, safely?” belongs near the top of your college fit list.

REFLECT

1. Where do you notice the extra weight most: staying alert, deciding what to share, or something else? What does it cost you in a normal week?

2. Think of a place or a person where the weight lifts. What is different there?



Chapter 1 · The Weight Is Real

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Separate the load. Sort what you are carrying into two piles: the ordinary college stress every applicant feels, and the extra work that comes from the environment around you.

WITH A PERSON

Tell a trusted adult or friend about one week of your college process. Ask them to help you name which parts were ordinary stress and which were the extra work.

ON YOUR OWN

Draw a line down the page below. Left side: ordinary stress (deadlines, essays, money). Right side: the extra work (watchfulness, deciding what to share, checking whether a place is safe).

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm an LGBTQ+ high school student applying to college. I've learned that minority stress means the extra stress that comes from the environment, like bias, staying alert to how a place will treat me, and the ongoing work of deciding what to share, and that it is not a flaw in me. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Help me sort what I'm carrying into two lists: ordinary college stress that every applicant feels, and the extra work that comes from my environment. Ask me one question at a time about a typical week. Then show me the two lists in my words. Do not diagnose me, and do not suggest I am handling things badly.

KEEP GOING

Ask, "Which item on the right side would an affirming campus take off my plate entirely?"

DON'T ACCEPT

Anything that moves the blame back onto you, or calls the extra work weakness.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

you can look at the right-hand list and say, out loud, "that is the environment, not me."

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- The weight is real, and it comes from outside you. Naming its source puts the blame where it belongs.
- Because the environment is the source, an affirming environment is protective. Finding one is part of taking care of yourself.



Chapter 2 · Deciding What to Share

THE BIG IDEA

Coming out is rarely one moment. In real life you tell different people different things at different times, and you decide the order. Think of it like handing out keys: some people get a key to everything, some to one room, some none yet. Using different names or pronouns in different settings is a valid, often smart way to stay safe. The adults on your side can only help if you brief them.

REFLECT

1. Who has which keys right now? Is there anyone who has more access than you meant to give, or less than you would like?

2. If you use more than one name or set of pronouns, what does keeping track of that cost you? Who could make it easier?



Chapter 2 · Deciding What to Share

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Write the briefing. Draft the two or three sentences you would say to a trusted adult so they know which name and pronouns to use where, and what to do if a family member calls.

WITH A PERSON

Say the briefing out loud to the adult it is for, or practice it with a friend first. Ask, "Is anything unclear? What would you do if my parent called the office tomorrow?"

ON YOUR OWN

Write the briefing below in plain words: the name and pronouns to use with you, what to use around family, and how you will tell them if that changes.

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm an LGBTQ+ high school student. I may use one name and set of pronouns at school and another at home, and I want to brief a trusted adult, like a counselor or a teacher, so they follow my lead. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Help me write a short briefing, two or three sentences, that says: which name and pronouns to use with me, what to use if my family is around, and that I will tell them if anything changes. Ask me what I want in each part. Keep it in my words, and do not add anything about why, because I do not owe anyone an explanation.

KEEP GOING

Ask, "Is there a second adult who needs the same briefing?"

DON'T ACCEPT

A briefing that asks the adult to lie. You are asking them to follow your lead, which is different.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

you could say the briefing in under thirty seconds without rehearsing.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- Coming out is not one moment. You tell different people different things at different times, in the order you choose.
- Trusted adults can only help if you brief them. You are asking them to follow your lead, not to lie.



Chapter 3 · Your Identity in the Essay

THE BIG IDEA

You are never required to write your college essay about being LGBTQ+. Your identity can be part of the story, woven in, or it can sit in the background while you write about something else entirely. Both are strong choices, and neither is more honest than the other. You do not owe anyone a coming-out story or a hardship story. Colleges are reading for a real person with a real mind.

REFLECT

1. What are two or three stories from your life that show how you think, whether or not your identity is in them?

2. If a teacher or counselor nudged you to write about your identity, how would you want to answer? Write the sentence you would say.



Chapter 3 · Your Identity in the Essay

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Try both doors. Sketch two essay directions in a few lines each: one where your identity is part of the story, and one where it is not. Then notice which one you actually want to write.

WITH A PERSON

Describe both directions to someone who knows you well. Ask, “Which one sounds more like me? Which one did I light up telling?”

ON YOUR OWN

Write a four-line sketch of each direction below. Under each, note one honest reason for and one against. Then circle the one you want, and write why in one line.

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm applying to college and I'm LGBTQ+. I know I'm never required to write my essay about my identity, and that writing about it or not are equally strong choices. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Help me sketch two possible essay directions in a few lines each: one where my identity is part of the story, and one where it is not. Ask me about things I care about, problems I have chased, and moments I think about a lot. Do not write the essay. Do not push me toward either door. At the end, ask me which sketch I would rather keep writing, and why.

KEEP GOING

Ask, “Does this essay show how I think, not just what happened to me?”

DON'T ACCEPT

Any pressure to turn a private or painful part of your life into material for an admissions office.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

you have picked a direction for a reason you can say out loud, and it is yours.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- Writing about your identity is a strong choice if it is the story you want to tell. Writing about something else is an equally strong choice.
- You do not owe anyone a coming-out or hardship story. Show colleges a real person with a real mind, on your terms.



Chapter 4 · Fields, Names, and Optional Questions

THE BIG IDEA

Applications ask about name and gender in two different ways. The required legal fields exist so your application matches your transcript and aid file, and completing them under your legal name is a valid safety choice if a parent may see your application. The optional orientation and gender questions are voluntary, private, and separate; answer them or skip them, with no penalty either way. Nothing you put down now locks in who you are. You can affirm your identity on campus records later, once it is safe.

REFLECT

1. Is there any chance a parent or guardian will see your application? How does that change what you want in the required fields?

2. If an application offers optional identity questions, what would you want to happen with that answer, and would you rather skip them for now?



Chapter 4 · Fields, Names, and Optional Questions

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Decide field by field, before you open the real form. Make your plan for the required legal fields and for the optional questions, so you are choosing on purpose instead of in the moment.

WITH A PERSON

Walk through the plan with a counselor or trusted adult. Ask them to tell you plainly what each field is used for at the schools you are considering, and where that information goes.

ON YOUR OWN

Write two short plans below: "Required fields: what I will enter and why," and "Optional questions: answer or skip, and why." Add a line for what you will check fresh when you open the actual application.

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm an LGBTQ+ student about to fill out college applications. Applications ask about name and gender in two ways: required legal fields that need to match my transcript and financial aid file, and optional questions about sexual orientation and gender identity that are supposed to be voluntary, separate, and private. Completing the required fields under my legal name can be a safety choice, and skipping the optional questions costs nothing. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Help me make a plan for each, one at a time, by asking me about my situation at home and what I want. Then show me the plan in my words. Do not tell me what I should disclose.

KEEP GOING

Ask, "What will I check on the actual form this cycle, since the questions can change?"

DON'T ACCEPT

Being told that the required fields are dishonest if they carry your legal name. They are a safety choice.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

you can open an application and already know what goes in each field.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- Required legal fields and optional identity questions are different things. Treat them differently.
- You are not locked in. Colleges expect that many students affirm their identity on campus records later, once they are safe.



Chapter 5 · What “Affirming” Means

THE BIG IDEA

“Affirming” is not a vibe. It is a set of concrete things a school either has or does not: your lived name on rosters, email, and ID; a gender marker you can change without medical hoops; gender-inclusive housing open to first-years; all-gender restrooms you can find; a health center that provides care; a staffed LGBTQ+ center; a nondiscrimination policy that names gender identity. The fastest single tell is a web page that lays out a school's trans-inclusive policies in one place. Build a list that stands on academics and fit, so it never has to announce why.

REFLECT

1. Of the checklist items (name on records, gender marker, housing, restrooms, health care, a staffed center, a clear policy), which three matter most to you right now?

2. If your college life will center on one community, like a team, a studio, or a lab, what would you want to know about that corner's climate?



Chapter 5 · What “Affirming” Means

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Build your own checklist. Take the full list from this chapter, pick the items that matter to you, and turn them into a one-page checklist you can run on every school.

WITH A PERSON

Show your checklist to a counselor or a friend already in college. Ask, “What would you add? Which of these did you only learn mattered after you got there?”

ON YOUR OWN

Write your checklist below, one item per line, in order of importance to you. Leave a column to mark each school yes, no, or unknown.

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm an LGBTQ+ student building a college list. An affirming campus is made of concrete things I can check: my lived name on rosters, email, and ID; a gender marker I can update without a doctor's letter; gender-inclusive housing open to first-years; all-gender restrooms with a map; a health center that provides gender-affirming care; a staffed LGBTQ+ center; and a nondiscrimination policy that names gender identity. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Ask me which items matter most and why, and whether my college life will center on one community like a team or a lab. Then give me the checklist in my order with a yes, no, or unknown column. Do not rate or recommend specific colleges.

KEEP GOING

Ask, “What is the one item I would not compromise on?”

DON'T ACCEPT

A list built around your identity in a way that announces itself. Your reasons are yours to keep.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

you can run the checklist on a school in ten minutes and get a clear answer.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- “Affirming” is a set of concrete things you can check, not a feeling on a tour.
- The fastest tell is a dedicated page listing a school's trans-inclusive policies. If they wrote it down publicly, they did the work.



Chapter 6 · Researching Without Setting Off Alarms

THE BIG IDEA

Trust current students over the official page, because some schools are removing LGBTQ+ information from their websites and a service can still exist when the page is gone. Check the state as well as the campus, using a live tracker rather than a printed list. Find health care by asking the health center directly, which is a protected conversation. Do all of it from a safe place and an account your family does not monitor. And learn to tell a supportive site from a hostile one: watch who runs it and what its verbs are doing.

REFLECT

1. Where and when can you do this research privately? What device, what place, what account?

2. What are the two or three questions you most need answered that a website alone cannot tell you?



Chapter 6 · Researching Without Setting Off Alarms

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Write your three direct questions. Draft the plain-language questions you would send to a campus LGBTQ+ center, health center, or current student, so you can learn what the website will not say.

WITH A PERSON

Ask a counselor or an older student to read your three questions. Ask, “Would these get me a real answer? Who at a college is the best person to send each one to?”

ON YOUR OWN

Write the three questions below, each with the office or person you would send it to, and the safe account you would send it from.

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm an LGBTQ+ student researching colleges, and I want to ask schools direct questions instead of relying on websites, since some schools have removed LGBTQ+ information from their sites. A conversation with a campus health provider is protected by privacy law. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Help me write three short, plain questions I could send to a student health center, an LGBTQ+ center, or a current student, such as whether they provide or refer for gender-affirming care, whether housing is assigned by gender identity, and what daily life is like for students like me. Ask me what I most need to know first. Keep the questions in my words and do not add anything that reveals more about me than I choose.

KEEP GOING

Ask, “How will I know a site or an answer is talking to me rather than about people like me?”

DON'T ACCEPT

Any resource that uses words like “exposed,” “caught,” or “agenda” about LGBTQ+ people. Close the tab.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

you have three questions, the people to send them to, and a safe way to send them.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- A scrubbed website does not mean a service is gone. Trust current students, and ask directly.
- Check the state and the campus. Use a live tracker, not a printed list, and research from a private account.



Chapter 7 · Belonging Is Not a Bonus

THE BIG IDEA

A sense of belonging is one of the strongest predictors of whether a student thrives, and it is doubly important when the world outside has made you work harder to feel safe. Belonging is findable: a staffed center, affinity groups, an affirming professor, one friend who gets it. You do not have to organize your whole life around your identity to belong, and you do not have to hide it. For some students, like Mato, belonging has more than one layer, and the goal is a place where every part of you gets to be present.

REFLECT

1. Where have you felt like a real part of something, not a guest? What made it feel that way?

2. Which parts of you need a home on campus: your identity, your culture or community, your interests, your faith, your sport? Can one place hold more than one?



Chapter 7 · Belonging Is Not a Bonus

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Name your raw materials. For each school you are considering, list the specific places and people where your belonging could be built, and notice where a school asks you to leave part of yourself at the door.

WITH A PERSON

Ask someone who went to college where they found their people. “Was it the place you expected? What would you look for if you did it again?”

ON YOUR OWN

For your top schools, list the raw materials of belonging you have found: groups, centers, programs, a team. Mark any school where one part of you would have no home.

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm an LGBTQ+ student choosing colleges, and I've learned that a sense of belonging, feeling like a real part of a place rather than a guest, is one of the strongest predictors of whether a student thrives. Belonging is usually built from a few real connections: a staffed center, a club, an affirming professor, a good roommate. Some students also need more than one community present at once, for example their cultural community and an affirming space. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Ask me which parts of me need a home on campus, then help me list, for each school I'm considering, the specific places and people where belonging could be built. Flag any school where one part of me would have nowhere to go. Do not rank the schools for me.

KEEP GOING

Ask, “Which school lets the most of me show up at once?”

DON'T ACCEPT

Advice that treats belonging as a soft extra you can sort out later.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

you can picture your people at a school, or you know clearly that you cannot.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- Belonging is one of the strongest predictors of whether students thrive. It is not a soft extra.
- You get to belong as your whole self. Sometimes that means finding a place that can hold more than one whole at the same time.



Chapter 8 · Family, Safety, and Money

THE BIG IDEA

Families respond in a wide range of ways, and if yours is hard, that is not your fault. There are practical paths through the places where family, money, and safety overlap. The FAFSA usually needs a parent's information until you turn 24; overrides exist for documented abandonment or abuse but are hard to get. Residency rules and insurance coverage for gender-affirming care vary by state and school. Once you start college, FERPA makes your records yours, a release can be partial, and health records get added protection. Affirming schools have not-outing safeguards, and you are allowed to ask about them.

REFLECT

1. Where do family, money, and safety overlap for you right now? Which overlap worries you most?

2. What true reasons for your college choices could you share with family, whatever else you keep private?



Chapter 8 · Family, Safety, and Money

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Build your check-it-fresh list: the money and safety questions that depend on current rules, and who you will ask for each one.

WITH A PERSON

Bring the list to a counselor or a financial aid officer. Ask them to point you to the current rule for each item, not answer from memory, and to say what documentation each needs.

ON YOUR OWN

List below: FAFSA dependency, residency, insurance for care, FERPA release choices, not-outing safeguards. Next to each: who you will ask, and how.

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm an LGBTQ+ student planning for college, and family, money, and safety overlap for me. The FAFSA usually needs a parent's information until age 24, with hard-to-get exceptions; residency rules and college health plans vary by state and school; and once I'm enrolled, FERPA makes my records mine and a release can be partial. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Help me build a check-it-fresh list: the questions whose answers depend on current rules, who to ask for each, and what to ask. Ask about my situation one question at a time. Do not quote the rules yourself, since they change; help me plan how to find the current answer.

KEEP GOING

Ask, "Which school office is the right one for each question, and what is the safest way to contact them?"

DON'T ACCEPT

A rule quoted from memory, by a person or a tool. Every item gets checked against a current source.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

every worry on the list has a person attached to it and a date you will ask.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- If your family's response is hard, that is a fact about them, not a verdict on you, and there are still practical paths forward.
- Once you start college, your records are yours. A release can be partial, and you are allowed to ask a school about its not-outing safeguards.



Chapter 9 · Records and Letters

THE BIG IDEA

Waiving your right to see recommendation letters is standard and makes them stronger. It can also open a private channel: you can ask a counselor who knows your situation whether they would include a short paragraph about a home circumstance, and some will let you review the wording. That starts with a conversation, and you can say no at any point. Your name is usually not protected by FERPA, so once you are enrolled, ask your registrar to exclude your previous name from directory information. The point of knowing all this is control.

REFLECT

1. Is there anything about your home situation that you would want a college to understand, and anything you are clear you do not want shared?

2. Which adult knows your situation well enough to write about it, if you ever chose to ask?



Chapter 9 · Records and Letters

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Script the ask, in case you ever want it. Write what you would say to a counselor to open the conversation about the private channel, including what you would and would not want included.

WITH A PERSON

If you already have a trusted counselor, use the script to open the real conversation. If you do not, practice it with a friend playing the counselor, and notice where you hesitate.

ON YOUR OWN

Write the script below in three parts: how you would open the conversation, what you would want included, and what you would not want included. Then add the registrar request you will make once enrolled.

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm an LGBTQ+ student applying to college. Recommendation letters are private between the writer and the college once I waive my right to see them, and I may ask a counselor who knows my situation whether they would include a short paragraph about a home circumstance. Some counselors will let me review that wording, some will not, and I can say no at any point. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Help me write a short script for opening that conversation: how I would bring it up, what I would want included, and what I would not want included. Ask me what matters first. Keep it in my words, and remind me that I can decide not to use it at all.

KEEP GOING

Ask, "What would make me feel safe enough to ask, and what answer would tell me to stop?"

DON'T ACCEPT

Any version where someone else decides what a college learns about your circumstances.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

you know exactly what you would say if you chose to, and you feel free not to.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- Waiving your right to see letters is standard. The private channel exists only if you ask, and only with your say-so.
- Your name is usually not protected by FERPA. Ask your registrar to exclude your previous name from directory information.



Chapter 10 · A Few Specific Situations

THE BIG IDEA

Some paths come with their own questions, and the honest answer to each is the same: the specifics matter, they vary by school, and they change. Women's college admissions policies for trans and nonbinary students vary and are evolving. Faith-based colleges range from affirming to not, and some hold legal exemptions. Trans athletics eligibility is one of the fastest-changing areas anywhere. For all three, a general statement will fail you and a specific, current check will serve you.

REFLECT

1. Do any of these three situations apply to you, or might they? Which one, and what is the specific question you need answered?

2. Who tracks this area closely enough that you would trust their answer this month?



Chapter 10 · A Few Specific Situations

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Pin the live question. For the situation that applies to you, write the exact policy question, the school it is about, and where the current answer lives.

WITH A PERSON

Ask a counselor, a coach, or an admissions officer at the school itself. Say, "I need the current policy, not the general picture. Where is it written, and when was it last updated?"

ON YOUR OWN

Write the situation, the exact question, the school, and the source below. Add the date you checked, so you know when to check again.

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm an LGBTQ+ student considering colleges, and one specific situation may apply to me: women's colleges, whose admissions policies for transgender and nonbinary applicants vary and are evolving; faith-based colleges, which range from affirming to not and may hold legal exemptions; or college athletics, where eligibility rules for transgender students change quickly by sport, association, and state. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Help me turn my situation into one precise question I can ask a specific school, and help me plan where the current, written answer would live and who at the school would know. Do not tell me what the policy is, since it changes. Help me find out.

KEEP GOING

Ask, "When did I check this, and when do I need to check it again?"

DON'T ACCEPT

A general statement standing in for a specific, current check.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

your question names one school, one policy, and one place the answer lives.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- These are areas where a general statement will fail you and a specific, current check will serve you.
- Write down the date you checked. What is true this month may not be true next fall.



Chapter 11 · Your Plan

THE BIG IDEA

A plan does not have to be complicated. It has to be yours, and it has to hold the pieces in order. Your list comes first, built on true academic and fit reasons and quietly filtered through your two tests: does the state protect you, and does the campus clear your checklist. Then your application choices, made on purpose. Then the quiet infrastructure: records, letters, money, and care. And underneath all of it, your safety and your timeline, which belong to you. You are not a problem to manage. You are a student building a life.

REFLECT

1. Looking back over this workbook, which chapter changed what you will actually do? What is the change?

2. Who are the two or three people and resources you will lean on, and how will you reach each one when you need to?



Chapter 11 · Your Plan

Exploring Deeper

Do this with a person, on your own, or with an AI tool. All three work. Go with whatever is easiest to start today.

THE EXERCISE

Write the one-page plan: your list, your application choices, your records and money and care, and your safety and timeline.

WITH A PERSON

Walk the plan through with a trusted adult, one part at a time. Ask them to look for gaps, not to change your decisions.

ON YOUR OWN

Write the four parts below, a few lines each. Under safety and timeline, write the one thing you will do first.

WITH AN AI TOOL: COPY THIS PROMPT

I'm an LGBTQ+ student finishing a college-planning workbook, and I want to pull everything into a one-page plan with four parts, in this order: my college list (built on academic and fit reasons, filtered through two tests: does the state protect me, and does the campus clear my affirming checklist); my application choices (essay, required fields, optional questions); my records, money, and care (letters, FERPA, FAFSA, residency, insurance); and my safety and timeline. I will keep details general, with no names, no school name, and nothing that identifies me or anyone else. Ask me about each part in turn, then write the plan back to me in my words, short enough for one page. Do not make the decisions for me. Point out any gap you notice, and end with one thing I said I would do first.

KEEP GOING

Ask, "What is the first small step, and when?"

DON'T ACCEPT

A plan that someone else owns, or one so big you will not start it this month.

YOU'LL KNOW IT WORKED WHEN

you can read the plan in two minutes and nothing on it is a surprise.

CAPTURE WHAT YOU FOUND OR WROTE

ONE CHANGE I WILL MAKE

REMEMBER

- Your plan has four parts: your list, your application choices, your records and money and care, and your safety and timeline.
- You are not a problem to manage. You are a student building a life, with more care than most. Arrive as yourself.



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