

Quotes to support research release

Dan Palmer, former Wallaby and professional rugby player. Now coaching at the Brumbies.

What did you think of the research findings on the use of homophobic language?

Homophobic language is often used as banter or to get a laugh in team environments. It is important to understand the impact such language can have, especially on younger people trying to find their way. Homophobic language further isolates closeted teammates and signals to aspiring gay athletes that they will not be accepted. Most people don't like homophobic language, it is both uncomfortable to use and to hear, so with some effort and focus I think we can stop this behaviour quickly.

From my experience, the most effective way to transform behaviour in a team environment is for the leaders within the team to model the desired behaviour. Captains and coaches need to stop accepting homophobic slurs and work to create an environment that people want to be a part of.

I've read the data on youth suicide and it is very alarming. I had no idea the rates of suicide and self-harm were so high for LGBTQ kids. Young kids are taking their lives simply for who they are - we cannot accept this. Given the platform and influence sport has in our culture, addressing these issues in sport is a good starting point.

I do believe rugby, as a sport, is genuine in its desire to be inclusive and welcoming, but we have some work to do before we reach that goal. There seem to be lots of good intentions in rugby, both from players and administrators alike, but good intentions are only as good as the practical solutions we can apply to them. It is important that we start a conversation around what we can actually do to develop a more accepting and inclusive environment.

As a young person, fitting in is important. To me, being a rugby player and a gay person seemed incompatible. I didn't know of any gay rugby players when I was growing up and thought that being the stereotypical 'straight' man was the only way to be accepted in the teams I was a part of. The truth is, rugby players come in all shapes and sizes, have diverse interests, ideas, and sexuality.

What would you say to young people who are playing sport now and struggling with their sexuality and not sure what they should do?

Firstly, you aren't alone, although it may feel that way a lot of the time.

Coming out is a very personal journey and everyone's situation is different, but if you have someone you can trust, I'd recommend talking about it. It took me a long time before I was comfortable enough to tell anybody, but by telling a single person, I removed the weight I was carrying my whole life and finally had someone in my corner. This made a world of difference to me.