

LGBTQIA+



Providing Education, Support, & Empowerment Are Essential for Vulnerable LGBTQIA+ Populations

Self-acceptance is crucial for mental wellbeing. The ability to embrace one's achievements, characteristics, and attributes, along with one's flaws and limitations allows individuals to feel more in control of emotions and helps regulate tendencies toward self-criticism.

Self-acceptance and self-compassion also build confidence and helps individuals feel happier overall, making them less susceptible and emotionally vulnerable to internal and external criticism. Both attributes are important components in empowering all individuals regardless of age, religion, sexual orientation, race, or geographic location in building resilience. Yet for members of the LGBTQIA+ community self-acceptance and self-compassion can mean the difference between suffering from mental and emotional health concerns or not.

An inability to be compassionate or accepting of oneself can lead to self-destructive habits and behaviors. That is why individuals suffering from anxiety, depression, substance abuse disorder, or trauma often aren't in a healthy place of self-acceptance. When individuals suffer from emotional or mental health disorders, or find themselves depending upon substances to cope, often the underlying discord is a feeling of either not being accepted by others or themselves.

It is understandable then that LGBTQIA+ individuals who may feel ostracized by society or who are not accepted by their own families can be especially vulnerable to mental health concerns. LGBTQIA+ adolescents suffer high risk of depression and increased suicidality. A survey released in 2020 found that over 25% of LGBTQIA+ adults in the U.S. (aged 18 to 25 years) reported having suicidal thoughts in the past year.¹ While society overall is becoming more accepting of different gender identities and sexual orientations, there is still ongoing stigma and discrimination, increasing the risk for physical and/or mental health ailments.

The Dangers of Rejection

When LGBTQIA+ individuals don't see themselves represented in their culture, they don't feel they are an accepted part of society. Whether portrayed in the media or in their own communities, individuals who only see heteronormative examples of intimate relationships feel like they are insignificant in the larger context of their neighborhood, town, or city, and can often feel outcast as an "other."

A 2013 survey showed that 40% of LGBTQIA+ adults have experienced rejection from a family member or a close friend.² Another survey in 2019 revealed that 86% of LGBTQIA+ youth have reported harassment or assaults at school.³



¹ Suicide thoughts, plans, attempts among LGB young adults share U.S. 2020 | Statista

² <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/a-survey-of-lgbt-americans/>

³ <https://www.glsen.org/research/2019-national-school-climate-survey>

These challenges chip away at self-acceptance and exacerbate mental wellness challenges; and when rejection is experienced from one's own family member or a close friend, the erosion of self-esteem can be earth-shattering and can set the stage for mental health struggles that can last a lifetime, including:

- **Trauma** - Feeling identity-based shame is often traumatic. Homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and bullying is many times the basis for a discriminatory environment that can include stereotyping, denial of opportunities or access, and verbal, mental, and physical abuse. Such discrimination leads to individuals feeling vulnerable and targeted and contributes to a significantly heightened risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among individuals in the LGBTQIA+ community compared to those who identify as heterosexual and cisgender.⁴
- **Substance Abuse** - Substance misuse is concerning for members of the LGBTQIA+ community when individuals turn to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism or method of self-medication. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) LGBTQIA+ adults are nearly twice as likely as heterosexual adults to experience a substance use disorder and transgender individuals are almost four times as likely to experience a substance use disorder.⁵
- **Suicide** - Risk of suicide is higher in the LGBTQIA+ population than in the heterosexual, cisgender population. High school students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are more than four times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to their heterosexual peers.⁶ The rates of attempted suicide in transgender adults are 40%, compared to less than 5% of the general U.S. population.⁷

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What the acronym stands for

LGBTQIA+ is an inclusive term that includes people of all genders and sexualities. The letters and plus sign represent specific groups and encompasses the entire spectrum of gender fluidity and sexual identities: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, and allies.

Traumas associated with mistreatment or discrimination due to sexual orientation or gender identity can start at a very young age. Consequently, individuals adapt by isolating, staying in the background, and/or living in fear, which can lead individuals to questioning their value and purpose and even create feelings of self-loathing.

Feeling insignificant or invisible explains how LGBTQIA+ individuals are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to have a mental health disorder in their lifetime. Statistics show they are 2.5 times more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and substance abuse compared with heterosexual individuals. Transgender individuals are nearly four times as likely as cisgender individuals⁸ to experience a mental health condition.⁹

According to a cross-sectional analysis of psychiatric diagnoses among over 10,000 transgender patients, mood disorders such as major depressive disorder, anxiety disorders, including general anxiety disorder and panic disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder top the list. Other diagnoses on the list include psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, adjustment disorder, a variety of personality disorders, eating disorders, and chemical dependence concerns.¹⁰

⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3395766/>

⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022395620311316>

⁶ https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/abes/tables/sexual_identity.htm#MH

⁷ <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/diversity/education/lgbtq-patients>

⁹ Mental Health Diagnoses Among Transgender Patients in the Clinical Setting: An All-Payer Electronic Health Record Study (liebertpub.com)

Resources

A variety of resources exists for the LGBTQIA+ community. Here are a few to reference:

Mental Health Struggles, Advocacy, & Support

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/category/sexual-orientation/>

The American Psychological Association (APA)

Depression Looks Like Me

Suicide Prevention

https://afsp.org/lgbtq-mental-health-and-suicide-prevention?gclid=Cj0KCQiAgaGgBh-C8ARIsAAAYLfG9mPCx89Ht-WI7V-WdOpFYLmhjPEnXonq2ZluVthDMtBonQW-ii18aA-gi-EALw_wcB



