

SUICIDE CONCERNS WITH THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

It may come as no surprise that people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) are vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and behavior. In recent years, the media and social campaigns have highlighted the tragic suicides of several young people who ended their lives because of relentless bullying or family rejection. Preventing suicide and enhancing resilience is clearly one of the most critical aspects of health care provision for LGBTQ patients.

What is Known?

Actual suicide rates among LGBTQ individuals are not known because sexual orientation and gender identity are not reported in death records. What we do know about suicidality among this group, is through surveys in which people self-report suicide attempts and ideation. According to a number of regional and national studies, LGBTQ adults and youth face an extraordinarily elevated risk of suicidal thoughts and behavior.



Why are Individuals of the LGBTQ Community at High Risk?

Research has found multiple factors associated with suicidal behavior among LGBTQ individuals, including isolation from family and peers, a history of mental health issues (e.g., depression and anxiety), substance use disorders, and victimization (e.g., being the target of bullying; being abused). All of these risk factors stem from the stress created by living as a stigmatized minority (often referred to as minority stress).

Risk Factors

- Age: LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk for suicide than LGBTQ adults
- Discrimination manifesting as bullying, physical violence, rejection (leading to isolation); is especially prevalent among LGBTQ youth who are at higher risk for suicide than LGBTQ adults
- Lack of support from parents and other family members
- Mental illness (including depression and anxiety)
- Predisposition to depression, anxiety and substance misuse
- Isolation from conventional society
- Body image anxiety
- Access to lethal means (e.g. firearms, prescription drugs)

LGBTQ individuals who consider suicide face a dual stigma of being different in sexual orientation and the stigma of suicide in general.

FACTS

While suicide ranks as the second-leading cause of death among youth and young adults (ages 10-24), LGBTQ youth are at increased risk.

- 1 out of 6 students nationwide (grades 9–12) seriously considered suicide in the past year
- LGBTQ youth seriously contemplate suicide at almost **three times** the rate of heterosexual youth
- LGBTQ youth are almost **five times** as likely to have attempted suicide compared to heterosexual youth
- Of all the suicide attempts made by youth, LGBTQ youth suicide attempts were almost **five times** as likely to require medical treatment than those of heterosexual youth
- LGBTQ youth who come from highly rejecting families are **8.4 times** as likely to have attempted suicide as LGBTQ peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection
- Each episode of LGBTQ victimization, such as physical or verbal harassment or abuse, increases the likelihood of self-harming behavior by an average of **2.5 times**

Warning Signs

Any significant change in behavior or mood is a warning sign that someone may be thinking about suicide, for example:

- Losing interest in a previously enjoyed hobby or activity
- Disconnecting from friends or family
- Change in sleeping or eating patterns
- Drinking alcohol or mis-using drugs



Statements of hopelessness or talk of being a burden can also be warning signs such as:

“I don’t fit in at all with my classmates... it feels like I’m the only gay person I know”

“I wish my family members would accept me for who I am... I feel like I have no one in my family to talk to”

If you notice anyone exhibiting the following signs, immediately call 9-1-1, your local Mobile Crisis Response Team (800) 688-3544 or the Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255.

- Threatening to hurt or kill themselves
- Talking or writing about dying or suicide
- Seeking out ways to kill themselves

Treatment and Support



Developing self-love, self-esteem and self-confidence can set one on a path to mental wellness and happiness. Critical factors that strongly protect LGBTQ individuals, especially youth, against spiraling into depression and

suicidal behavior include: 1. Acceptance by family of origin (e.g., parents, siblings, grandparents, children) 2. Having a supportive social network made up of LGBTQ friends, allies, and family of choice (close relationships with people who are not biologically related but who act as a family) 3. Access to and use of LGBTQ inclusive medical and mental health care.

For LGBTQ Youth

The Trevor Project: www.thetrevorproject.org • 24-hour, toll-free, crisis intervention phone line: 1.866.488.7386 • Online, social networking community for LGBTQ youth (13 to 24 years) and allies

Peer Listening Line: <http://fenwayhealth.org/care/wellness-resources/help-lines> • Anonymous and confidential help line for accessing support from other LGBTQ youth (not specific to suicide): 800.399.PEER • Offers LGBTQ young people a safe place to call for information, referrals, and support with coming out, locating LGBTQ groups and services, safer sex and relationships, and HIV/AIDS Information.

It Gets Better Project: <https://itgetsbetter.org> • A nonprofit organization that empowers and connects LGBTQ youth through education and inspiring stories.

For Everyone

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org> • 24 hour, toll-free crisis line: 1.800.273.8255 • National network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people and their families in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

LGBTQ Helpline: <http://fenwayhealth.org/care/wellness-resources/help-lines> • Anonymous and confidential help line for accessing support from other LGBTQ people (not specific to suicide): 888.340.4528 • Offers information, referrals, support with coming out, locating LGBTQ groups and services, safer sex and relationships.

For Families of LGBTQ People

PFLAG NH: <https://www.pflagnh.org> • Organization dedicated to promoting family and community support and acceptance of LGBTQ people through education, support groups, and advocacy. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/www.pflagnh.org/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/TGNH.Support/>

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health or substance misuse crisis, Call our Mobile Crisis Response Team at (800) 688-3544. (We serve Auburn, Bedford, Candia, Goffstown, Hooksett, Londonderry, Manchester & New Boston) and available 24/7/365.



The Mental Health Center
of Greater Manchester

For appointments call: (603) 668-4111

www.mhcgm.org