



## LGBTQ+ Teen Counseling: A Guide for Parents

As a parent, you want your teenager to feel supported, loved, and able to thrive as they figure out who they are. If your teen has come out to you as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTQ+), counseling can help support them during this important time. Here are some things for parents to know about LGBTQ+ teen counseling.

### **Why Counseling Can Help**

Adolescence is already a challenging time of transition and identity development. LGBTQ+ teens face additional stressors like stigma, lack of acceptance, bullying, and inner conflict around their orientation or identity. This puts them at higher risk for mental health issues like depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts.



Counseling provides a safe, non-judgmental space for LGBTQ+ teens to explore their feelings, gain clarity and self-understanding, develop coping strategies, and feel empowered in who they are. Having support for the unique issues they face improves mental health outcomes and can literally save lives.

## **Finding the Right Counselor**

Not all counselors are equipped to counsel LGBTQ+ teens competently. When looking for a counselor:

- Ask if they have specific experience and training in working with LGBTQ+ youth. This specialty requires understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation issues.
- Look for counselors who display LGBTQ-positive symbols like Safe Space stickers or Pride flags. This signals acceptance.
- Avoid counselors who advertise treatment to “cure” or change sexual orientation or gender identity. Major medical associations advise against this.
- Interview potential counselors about their approach before committing. Ask how they handle issues common to LGBTQ+ teens.
- Look for LGBTQ+ counselors. They will have personal as well as professional experience to draw from.
- See if there are LGBTQ+ youth support groups or gay-straight alliances at local high schools. The counselors facilitating these are likely good options.

## **What to Expect**

Counseling appointments usually start with the counselor getting background information about what brings the teen in. They will ask questions to understand the teen’s situation, feelings, and goals for counseling.

Some common topics that may come up in LGBTQ+ teen counseling sessions include:

- The coming out process: discussing fears, reactions from others, and feelings of freedom or shame
- Identity: exploring gender identity and sexual orientation; addressing confusion or uncertainty
- Relationships: talking about crushes, dating, sex and intimacy, and dating as an LGBTQ+ teen
- Bullying and discrimination: developing strategies for dealing with harassment, bigotry, or lack of acceptance
- Anxiety, depression, and self-esteem: improving mental health and building a positive self-image
- Religion/spirituality: resolving conflicts between faith beliefs and identity; finding accepting communities
- School and future: making decisions about things like name changes, pronouns, whether to come out at school or work, college plans, etc.

The counselor may suggest books, connect teens with LGBTQ+ resources or support groups, teach coping techniques, or help teens talk with family. Each teen's needs are unique.

Confidentiality is essential so teens feel safe opening up. In most cases, counselors are legally and ethically bound to keep sessions private. They can't reveal details to anyone, including parents, without the teen's consent. Exceptions may occur if the teen seems at risk for self-harm.

## Ways for Parents to Support the Process

While counseling sessions themselves are private, you play an important role as parent in supporting the process:

- Affirm your love and acceptance of your teen. Let them know you have their back. Use their preferred name and pronouns.
- Don't pressure them to come out before they are ready. Give them space to do this in their own time.
- Check in about counseling but don't expect details about sessions. It's meant to be a safe space for the teen to share openly.
- Work on your own feelings if you are struggling with your teen's identity. Consider joining a support group for parents of LGBTQ+ youth.
- Make counseling accessible. Arrange transportation if needed. Ensure it fits within the family budget.
- Communicate any concerns to the counselor directly rather than putting pressure on your teen.
- Seek family counseling if needed to improve communication or work through conflicts related to your teen's LGBTQ+ identity.

Counseling can empower LGBTQ+ teens to live authentically. By providing a supportive environment for this process, you are giving your teen the best chance to thrive. With time and the right help, they will grow into the happiest, healthiest version of themselves.