



Preventing Suicide in LGBTQ Youth—Recognizing Risks, Providing Support

Compared to heterosexual peers, LGBTQ adolescents face starkly higher risks of suicide attempts and completions. Up to 40% of transgender youth report making at least one attempt, and overall, LGBTQ youth are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than straight teens.

Drivers including discrimination, bias, family rejection, minority stress, mental illness, and social isolation converge to create harrowing vulnerability for youth exploring gender and sexual identity. But with compassionate, tailored support, we can curb suicidal urges in this high-risk group.

Understanding the scope of the problem equips caring adults to recognize the signs that something's wrong and respond with life-saving care and intervention. One young life lost to the preventable tragedy of suicide remains one too many. We all must make stemming the tide a priority.

Heightened Suicide Risk in LGBTQ Youth— The Statistics

- LGBTQ youth are over 5 times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to heterosexual youth.
- Up to 40% of transgender adolescents report attempting suicide in their lifetimes.
- Questioning youth are 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than those certain of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Over 50% of transgender male teens who identify as gay or bisexual have attempted suicide.
- LGBTQ youth who come from highly rejecting families are over 8 times as likely to have attempted suicide as those from accepting families.
- 31% of LGBTQ students report missing at least one full day of school per month over feeling unsafe or uncomfortable. Absenteeism contributes to suicidal thinking.
- Only 27% of LGBTQ students report a school staff member regularly supporting or advocating for them.

Clearly these figures reveal potentially lethal cracks in the system of support meant to nurture youth through already vulnerable adolescent phases. Bolstering social safety nets and emotional protection becomes imperative.

Unique Risk Factors Facing LGBTQ Youth

Alongside common adolescent depression and anxiety triggers, LGBTQ teens shoulder additional burdens amplifying suicide vulnerability:

- Stigma and lack of acceptance from family, friends, schools, or society regarding gender/sexual identity. Bullying and discrimination still run rampant.
- Struggling with shame or confusion during the coming out process without sufficient social support.
- A sense they must keep their gender identity or sexual orientation secret from unaccepting parents/peers. This prevents seeking help.
- General minority stress resulting from being part of a marginalized, invalidated group subject to prejudice.
- Social isolation from family rejection after coming out or from loss of LGBTQ friends due to suicidal behavior.

- Hesitance discussing mental health issues over fears therapists will stigmatize or attempt to change rather than affirm their identity.

Unchecked, these pressures boil over into catastrophic hopelessness for many LGBTQ adolescents. But compassionate understanding of unique burdens enables caring adults to better uplift and empower vulnerable youth.

Recognizing Suicide Warning Signs in LGBTQ Youth

Along with common signals like mood changes, risky behaviors, and discussing death, look for these additional red flags in LGBTQ youth:

- Withdrawal from LGBTQ friends or communities that previously provided vital support
- Rejection of previously embraced LGBTQ identity through dress, behaviors, or speaking about identity negatively
- Defensiveness or lashing out when questioned about abrupt changes in gender expression
- Severe reaction to a breakup, rejection, or exclusionary treatment by LGBTQ peers
- Confiding they feel invisible, a burden to others, or that the world would be better off without them
- Giving away prized belongings and distancing from activities once enjoyed
- Statements about hopelessness over never being able to live freely as their true self due to family, culture, or society

Take all ominous comments or warning signs seriously, even if made casually, sarcastically, or while intoxicated. Teens drop hints when inner distress becomes unbearable.

Securing Immediate Crisis Intervention

If an LGBTQ youth confides active suicidal thinking, makes an attempt, or exhibits warning signs requiring immediate intervention:

- Remain calm and validating. Let them know you care and take the situation seriously.
- Ask direct questions to gauge imminent risk like if they have a specific plan, means to follow through, or timeline.
- If risk seems high, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988 immediately to mobilize help. Do not leave the child alone.

- If the threat is lower but concerns still exist, call the Trevor Project hotline at 1-866-488-7386 to speak with counselors trained specifically in LGBTQ youth suicide prevention. Arrange same-day mental health evaluation.
- Reassure the child that suicide is not the answer. There are solutions to their struggles and people who want to help. Remind them of reasons for living: future dreams, interests, loved ones.
- If attempts or high risk present, get caregiver permission to remove dangerous items from their environment like weapons, medications, or sharp objects until professionally assessed.

Never downplay suicidal statements as simply wanting attention. All threats require taking life-saving actions rooted in compassion, not dismissal.

Fostering Lasting Protection Through Support

While crisis intervention addresses the short-term threat, securing ongoing caregiver support and mental health treatment protects LGBTQ youth long-term.

For parents/families:

- Lead with unconditional love and acceptance, no matter what. Make home a judgment-free safe haven.
- Stand up against gender/orientation-based discrimination at school, socially, in healthcare settings, etc. Let your LGBTQ youth see your support visibly.
- Maintain open communication without overreacting. Prioritize listening without lecturing.
- Learn about gender/sexual identity. Don't pressure teens to disclose before they are ready.
- Participate in family therapy focusing on nurturing identity exploration and social support.

While battling uphill societal prejudice, LGBTQ youth armed with inner strength, community, and a secure support network can persevere over painful challenges. We all play a role ensuring their precious light keeps shining.



There is hope beyond the darkness. No child or teenager deserves to feel so hopeless that suicide seems the only option. Surrounded by unconditional love and support, LGBTQ youth can envision the bright futures meant for them beyond prejudice's shadow.

By gaining awareness, taking warning signs seriously, intervening with care, securing mental healthcare, and surrounding LGBTQ youth with openness, we write stories where possibilities outpace pain. Their journey may be complex, but they do not have to walk it alone anymore.