

## **BULLYING and LGBT YOUTH**

Children are bullied for many reasons, but LGBT (or perceived to be LGBT) youth are bullied simply because of who they are or are perceived to be.

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children. It involves a real or perceived power of imbalance and the behavior may be repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over the course of time.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) youth, or those perceived as LGBT, while trying to deal with all the challenges of being a teenager, may also have to deal with continued excessive bullying, harassment, threats, and violence directed at them on a daily basis. LGBT youth are nearly twice as likely to be called names, verbally harassed, or physically assaulted at school compared to their non-LGBT peers, putting their mental health and education, not to mention their physical well-being, at-risk. Additionally, with the progression of technology, bullying often occurs online or through use of personal mobile phones to text, email, or send an instant message, referred to as “cyber bullying”

**Substance Use:** LGBT youth are more than twice as likely to experiment with drug and alcohol as a means to escape.

**Happiness:** Only 37% of LGBT youth report being happy, while 67% of non-LGBT youth say they are happy. However, of 80% of LGBT youth believe they will be happy eventually, with nearly half believing that they will need to transfer schools or move from their current home to find happiness.

**Self-Harm:** With each instance of physical or mental harassment, the risk of self-harm among LGBT youth is 2½ times more likely.

**Suicide:** LGBT youth are 4 times more likely to succeed in the act of suicide (as young as age 9) or to attempt suicide.

The risks are the same whether youth are LGBT, are wrongly perceived to be LGBT, or choose to hide their sexual orientation.

### **EDUCATION**

- LGBT teens in U.S. schools are often subjected to such intense bullying that they are unable to receive an adequate education. LGBT youth identified bullying problems as the second most important problem in their lives to deal with after non-accepting families.
- LGBT youth who reported they were frequently harassed in school had lower grade point averages
- A recent survey reported that 1/3 of LGBT students missed an entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe.

- LGBT youth have reported feeling they have nowhere to turn and no one to turn to while at school.
- 60% of LGBT students did not report incidents to school staff; 1/3 who did report an incident said the staff did nothing in response.

It is the responsibility of the schools to offer a safe and respectful learning environment for everyone. When bullying is allowed to take place, it affects everyone.

**WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO** - Schools can consider adding sexual orientation and gender identity to their bullying policies (Office of Civil Rights, OCT 2010). Students from schools with clear policies on LGBT related bullying:

- are likely to report a serious harassment problem
- report higher rates of feeling safe at school
- are alert to signs of distress
- work with student councils to have programs on respect, school safety, and anti-bullying
- ask school personnel to have a discussion at an assembly or an after-school activity about prejudice and respect
- arrange for presentations about bullying prevention activities and programs
- encourage anyone who is being bullied to tell a teacher, counselor, coach, nurse, or his/her parents or guardians

**PROVIDE SUPPORT** - When youth reveal same-sex attractions and relationships, this is an opportunity for parents, health, medical, and school professionals to better inform and support sexual minority youth by linking them to community resources and helping to overcome the tensions of parents, families, and peers. The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages providing facts about sexual orientation in the schools and communities and to develop support groups for LGBT youth, their friends, and their parents.

#### **REFERENCES, RESOURCES TO CONTACT, & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- Bullying and LGBT Youth / Mental Health America ([www.mentalhealthamerica.net/bullying-and-gay-youth](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/bullying-and-gay-youth))
- Human Rights Campaign ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org))
- Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays ([www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org))
- National Association of School Psychologists ([www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org))
- Just the Facts Coalition (<http://www.socialworkers.org/perssroom/media/justthefacts.pdf>)
- National Association of Social Workers ([www.socialworkers.org/diversity/new/2010/lgbtqbullying.asp](http://www.socialworkers.org/diversity/new/2010/lgbtqbullying.asp))
- National Suicide Prevention Line (800-273-8255)
- U.S. Government Department of Health & Human Services ([www.stopbullying.gov/](http://www.stopbullying.gov/))



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