

## **SUICIDE: LGBT YOUTH**

It would be wonderful if lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth were happy and thriving during their adolescent years, attending to a school that creates a safe and supportive learning environment for all students, achieving good grades, and maintaining good mental and physical health. However, some LGBT youth are more likely to experience difficulties in their lives and school environment such as violence. Negative attitudes towards LGBT youth put them at increased risk for adverse experiences that can include bullying, teasing, harassment, and physical assault, leading to depression and suicide related behaviors.

LGBT teens are 2 to 5 times more likely than their peers to attempt suicide and questioning youth (LGBTQ) are 4 to 6 times more likely to partake in behaviors that result in injury, poisoning, or overdosing, requiring treatment from medical personnel.

### **WHY ARE LGBT YOUTH SO MUCH MORE AT RISK?**

There are two main reasons why LGBT youth are at higher risk:

1) Lack of parental support for their gender/sexual identity. An alarmingly high number of LGBT teens are rejected by their parents. Studies have shown that having the support of parents is a buffer for LGBT teens against the criticism and judgment of the world outside the family. However, some parents react negatively and aggressively to learning that they have an LGBT child and, in some cases, parents will no longer allow their LGBT teens to remain in the home. Stress, rejection, and conflict at home can cause a greater risk for homelessness, making them more vulnerable to physical and/or sexual victimization while on the streets.

To be supportive, parents should talk openly with their teen about any problems or concerns and be watchful of behaviors that might indicate their child is a victim of bullying or violence. If bullying, violence, or depression is suspected, parents should take immediate action, working with school personnel and other resources in the community.

2) School bullying is the second risk factor for LGBT youth. The prevalence of bullying in middle and high school may be high for all kids, but it is extremely high for LGBT youth that are being verbally harassed, physically harassed, and/or physically assaulted. Youth who are gender nonconforming are by far at most risk of being bullied – they “standout” the most, are visibly “different,” and therefore trigger the most negative reactions from others.

- LGBT students have to navigate school hallways, parking lots, and locker rooms in ways that their straight peers don't have to.
- 8 out of 10 LGBT hear homophobic remarks regularly
- 50% hear transphobic comments regularly
- 19% hear LGBT comments from staff regularly
- Students who were questioning their sexual orientation reported more bullying, homophobic victimization, unexcused absences from school, drug use, feeling of depression, and suicidal behaviors.
- All students, regardless of sexual orientation, reported the lowest levels of depression, suicidal feelings, alcohol and marijuana use, and unexcused absences from school when they were
  - in a positive school climate and
  - not experiencing homophobic teasing

Schools can implement clear policies, procedures, and activities designed to promote a healthy environment for all youth. In schools, with LGBT support groups (such as gay-straight alliances), LGBT students were less likely to experience threats of violence or miss school because they felt unsafe and they had fewer thoughts and/or attempted suicide than those students in schools without LGBT support groups.

LGBT youth suicide rates are more than alarming. Although LGBT youth make up no more than 10% of the population, they account for 30% of youth suicides. The reasons for LGBT suicide are a major concern, but they are concrete, identifiable, and correctable through education, understanding, and acceptance.

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

- Centers for Disease Control Fact Sheet: Parents' Influence on the Health of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Teens ([http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parents\\_influence\\_lgb.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parents_influence_lgb.pdf))
- Family Acceptance Project (<http://familyproject.sfsu.edu>)
- Gender Spectrum Education and Training (<http://www.genderspectrum.org>)
- PFLAG (<http://www.pflag.org>)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm>)
- LGBT Advocacy Organization (<http://www.one-colorado.org/about-us>)
- Transgender (LGBT) Children - by Caitlin Ryan, Ph.D., A.C.S.W., National Center for Cultural Competence
- LGBT Youth Suicide: As Serious As It Is Preventable - by Margaret Nichols

**If you need immediate assistance contact the  
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255  
Colorado Crisis & Support Line 1-844-493-8255**