

# Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth: Embracing diversity and promoting inclusion

## OVERVIEW

**L**esbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth face tremendous physical, psychological and social adversity in a society where heterosexuality is predominately viewed as the only accepted sexual orientation. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the stigma of being LGBT, along with related harassment and discrimination, can cause

LGBT youth to develop more troubling health behaviors than their heterosexual counterparts, including depression, homelessness, violence (e.g., bullying, teasing, harassment, physical assault, and suicide-related behaviors), early exposure to sexual activity and drug use.<sup>1</sup> The LGBT youth population is one of the most vulnerable groups in our community. Just being an LGBT teen does not lead to risky behaviors, rather, societal stigma and discrimination can lead LGBT youth to seek emotional outlets – which may include unhealthy and unsafe behaviors.<sup>1</sup> However, there are many organizations that tailor care and resources to the LGBT youth community. With a strong support system in place, obstacles to health can be reduced and a quality of life can be improved.

## National Perspective

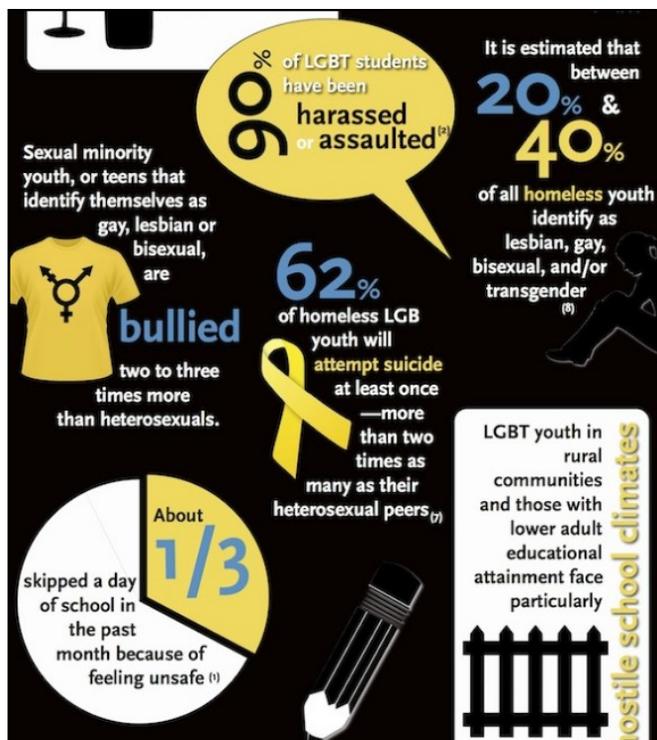
- Nearly 5-7% of American youth identify as LGBT, which roughly equals 2.7 million young adults.<sup>2,3</sup>
- More youth are coming out (or revealing their sexuality/orientation to family or friends) as LGBT at a younger age than in previous years. Recent studies show the average age for a teenager to come out is 16 years old.<sup>3</sup>
- A lack of family and social support are factors in the LGBT youth homelessness rate of 40%.<sup>2</sup>
- In a study conducted by the CDC, LGBT youth were 63.8% more likely to exhibit risky behaviors; such as, physical violence, unprotected sexual activity, drug use and abuse, and self inflicted violence, compared to youth not identifying.
- When compared to their heterosexual peers, LGBT youth are:
  - ⇒ Five times more likely to have been injured in a physical fight
  - ⇒ Three times more likely to have experienced dating violence
  - ⇒ Three times more likely to have been raped
  - ⇒ Four times more likely to have attempted suicide
  - ⇒ Five to seven times more likely to have used heavy drugs<sup>4</sup>

**Key Words:** LGBT, community, family, sexual orientation, sexual behavior, STI, violence, drug use and abuse, harassment, school

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Courtesy of It Gets Better Project

### Take Action

Urge your Congressperson to support the Safe Schools Improvement Act, which modifies the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and require schools and districts that receive federal funding to adopt codes of conduct prohibiting bullying and harassment, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. You can do so by visiting, [www.amplifyyourvoice.org/help-lgbt-students](http://www.amplifyyourvoice.org/help-lgbt-students).

### Vulnerable Populations

- When compared to LGBT youth with supportive families, LGBT youth with unsupportive families are:
  - ⇒ Eight times more likely to report having attempted suicide
  - ⇒ Almost six times more likely to report high levels of depression
  - ⇒ More than three times as likely to use illegal drugs
  - ⇒ Three times more likely to be at high risk for HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)<sup>7</sup>
- Black young men who have sex with men African American (YMSM) have a greater risk of developing sexually transmitted infections (STIs), specifically HIV. Black YMSM accounted for 63% of HIV infection among 13 to 24 year olds, compared to white (18%) and Hispanic (16%) YMSM.<sup>6</sup>
- LGBT youth of color are at high risk for harassment. In a nationwide study of homophobia in schools, more than 33% of LGBT youth of color had experienced physical violence because of their sexual orientation.<sup>7</sup>

### Strategy in Action!

#### Providing Training for School Personnel to Create Safer Schools for LGBT Students

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) responded to requests from school districts concerned about creating a safe and secure space for LGBT students when in school. As a result, the MDE developed the resource guide *A Silent Crisis: Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth*. In addition, school personnel have the opportunity to attend workshops and trainings to better understand the health risks associated with LGBT youth and what schools can do to create bully free zones. For more information on practices, goals, and outcomes, visit [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/SMY\\_Flyer\\_for\\_S3\\_Schools\\_6\\_2011\\_359565\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/SMY_Flyer_for_S3_Schools_6_2011_359565_7.pdf)

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### Tips for Health Educators and Public Health Professionals

1. Attend a Human Rights Campaign (HRC) community or gala event in your area. Keep up with the work people are doing to secure LGBT equality. To find the nearest HRC event in your area, visit <http://hrc.org/events/>.
2. When working with LGBT youth, ask them what pronoun they prefer. Never assume when using he or she.
3. Advocate for human rights' nomenclature. For example, petition your local government to include "sexuality" and "sexual orientation" in discrimination clauses.
4. Talk with local school districts about developing a gay-straight alliance (GSA) club. GSAs are student run clubs, overseen by a faculty advisor, allowing students a safe space to meet, talk, and support each other.
5. Develop community outreach programs that provide a support system and encourage additional learning and acceptance for parents and families of LGBT youth. Create a relationship with the local PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) to use a resource and referral.
6. Encourage school district and school staff to develop and publicize trainings on how to create safe and supportive school environments for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity and encourage staff to attend these trainings.
7. Facilitate access to community-based providers who have experience providing health services, including HIV/STD testing and counseling, to LGBT youth.
8. Facilitate access to community-based providers who have experience in providing social and psychological services to LGBT youth.
9. Encourage federal, state, local agencies to ensure that LGBT youth are placed in safe foster homes.



### Start Today

straight  
FOR  
equality

The "Straight for Equality" is a national outreach and education project led by Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gay (PFLAG) National to provide information and resources that will help straight allies understand their role in supporting and advocating for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people. Request the "Straight for Equality" training for faculty at a local school district or youth center employees/volunteers. You can do so by visiting the PFLAG website at [www.straightforequality.org/](http://www.straightforequality.org/)

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### Resources

#### Advocates for Youth

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/topics-issues/glbqt?task=view>

A variety of information from tips for educators to advocacy to a parents' corner. Advocates for Youth offers lesson plans, best practices, and LGBT specific issues.

#### Family Acceptance Project

[http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/files/FAP\\_English%20Booklet\\_pst.pdf](http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/files/FAP_English%20Booklet_pst.pdf)

A 24 page booklet encouraging and empowering families of LGBT families to stand up for their children's rights. This resource guides parents in best practices to avoid the many health risks associated with LGBT young adults. The booklet is available in English, Spanish, and Chinese: GSA Network: Find tools and resources that empower youth to get involved in fighting homophobia and transphobia. Learn how you can get involved in creating a national movement:

<https://www.gsanetwork.org/>

#### MPOWERED: Best and Promising Practices for LGBT Tobacco Prevention and Control

[Www.sophe.org/Sophe/PDF/MPowererd.pdf](http://www.sophe.org/Sophe/PDF/MPowererd.pdf)

This document is a comprehensive resource for best and promising practices for tobacco prevention and control for the LGBT community.

#### Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/home/index.html>

GLSEN is a national organization addressing anti LGBT behavior and harassment in schools. Various campaigns come from GLSEN such as ThinkB4YouSpeak and Day of Silence. Trainings and tool kits to design LGBT drop in centers or Safe Spaces are available online.

#### Youth Resource

<http://www.amplifyyourvoice.org/youthresource>

Youth Resource is a website created by and for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) young people. Youth Resource takes a holistic approach to sexual health and exploring issues of concern to GLBTQ youth, by providing information and offer support on sexual and reproductive health issues through education and advocacy.

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