

Suicide Prevention And The LGBTQ Community: How You Can Help



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Young people are more at risk for suicide now than ever before; the [CDC](#) estimates that suicide is the third leading cause of death for people aged 10-24. For LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) youth, the numbers are even higher.

There are many factors involved in suicidal thoughts and LGBTQ youth, but for many, it starts at home and school. For some, not having the love and support of family because of their sexual identity can lead to feelings of isolation, shame, substance abuse, and depression, which can in turn lead to suicide. One study recently showed that out of 55 transgender teens, about 25% of them said they had attempted suicide at some point in their lives.

School is another big factor in the mental and emotional well-being of a teen. Bullying and homophobic discrimination can lead to depression and can also cause teens to miss school and fall behind academically. Therefore, it's important to know the warning signs of depression and also to recognize when someone is being bullied as well as when someone is using bullying behavior.

At school

Educators can help by offering support systems and [resources](#) to LGBTQ youth, including spaces they can go to if they are feeling bullied, isolated, or unsafe, group clubs that include everyone, and trained counselors who can help in crisis.

Teachers and administrative staff should be trained on how to recognize signs of bullying and depression and how to handle them. Some of the signs include several unexcused absences, withdrawing from social circles, a sudden decline in grades or performance, acting out, and receiving official reprimands. It's also imperative that materials concerning safe sex and health safety be inclusionary, meaning they should address the particular needs of LGBTQ youth and use the correct terms and language.

Because many people who die by suicide have either a mental illness or substance abuse disorder, it's also important for educators to recognize the warning signs for these. Trained counselors can assess whether a child is suffering from a mental or emotional disorder and suggest a course of action--such as seeing a therapist or doctor--and educators can watch for signs that a young person is having [issues with drugs](#) or alcohol. These warning signs include a sudden decline in appearance or health, an unfocused gaze or bloodshot eyes, showing up perpetually late for class, a sudden disinterest in things that once brought joy, and erratic behavior.

At home

Parents and other family members should create a strong support system for teens, no matter what their sexual orientation is. The teen years are turbulent at best for most kids, so keeping a safe environment where they can grow without fear is imperative. Home stresses can cause youth to run away, adding to the homelessness problem that many [LGBTQ teens](#) have.

Families who make an effort to communicate with their teens are more successful, so it's important to talk with your loved one openly and come to terms with your feelings regarding their sexuality in a calm, respectful manner.

Parents should become acquainted with the people their children spend the most time with and get involved in their lives in order to provide support and keep lines of communication open. Showing an interest in a teen's life can make a drastic impact on their health and well-being. Try to find one or two things you can share--a common goal, for instance--and build upon it.

Caroline Hampton is a parent and teacher. She created [OpenEducators.org](#) to provide fun, engaging educational resources so that teachers and parents always have access to excellent learning materials for the children in their care.