

## Coping During COVID-19: How to Support LGBTQ+ Youth

We are living in unprecedented times. Schools across the country are closed with indefinite return times and, at the time of writing, most states have “stay-at-home” orders in place or strongly recommended. Families are increasingly strained by economic pressures; there are increased concerns for physical health; and people are socially isolated from friends, extended families, and support systems. LGBTQ+ youth are especially vulnerable to the effects of social distancing because many of them rely on school staff and friends for validation and affirmation. Schools often provide a needed inclusive sanctuary where they can be their authentic selves.

### HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION YOUTH SURVEY DATA (2018)

- 95% of LGBTQ+ youth report trouble sleeping at night.
- 67% of LGBTQ+ youth hear families make negative comments about LGBTQ+ people.
- Only 24% of LGBTQ+ youth can “definitely” be themselves as an LGBTQ+ person at home.
- 78% of youth who are NOT out to their parents as LGBTQ+ hear negative comments about LGBTQ+ people.
- 48% of LGBTQ+ youth who are out to their parents say their families make them feel bad for being LGBTQ+.
- Only 11% of LGBTQ+ youth of color believe their racial/ethnic group is regarded positively in the United States.
- Transgender youth are two times more likely to be taunted or mocked by their family for their identity than cisgender youth.

### THE POWER OF ONE

This document provides resources so that school staff can continue to inspire, empower, and promote protective factors for already resilient LGBTQ+ youth. Coping skills are necessary for everyone when things are stressful in everyday life. They are not a substitute for counseling, therapy, or medication, but can be used alongside other effective treatments. Isolation can be that much more damaging for LGBTQ+ youth who are surviving in unsupportive homes and unable to be their authentic selves. Together, with the support of the caring adults they depend on, these youth can feel less alone.

### ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AND SCHOOL STAFF

Often what young people really need is just to be heard—without judgement or questioning. What can you say to a youth in crisis?

- I’m here for you.
- How can I help you?
- What supports do you need?
- It sounds like things are really hard right now.
- I support you.
- I hear you.
- You are loved.
- I need to keep you safe.

School psychologists and other staff can continue to provide the needed validation and affirmation LGBTQ+ young people need even virtually. Knowing you continue to be seen and heard can save lives.

## COPING SKILLS

When overwhelmed, young people in particular can forget learned coping skills. Without expected and predictable school schedules, kids and teens may feel even more overwhelmed. As adults, it's our job to remind them of existing capabilities and capacities. The NASP website has numerous resources on coping during periods of trauma. Below are some questions to consider when assessing how students are coping:

- Are they keeping a daily sleep/wake schedule?
- Are they using smartphone apps for meditation, calming, and stress release such as Calm, ACT Companion, Headspace, and MindShift?
- Are they listening to music?
- Are they engaging in the recommended 1 hour of physical activity each day? Go Noodle and Nike Training Club are free websites and apps which can help keep youth active and exercising.
- Have they cut off friends via social media or text?
- Do they have a trusted adult they can reach out to? Is a trusted adult checking in on them?
- Are they taking care of themselves?

If youth aren't able to effectively use coping skills to deescalate and refrain from self-harm, emergency services may be needed.

## CRISIS RESOURCES

It is critical to make clear to all students—and particularly those who may be more vulnerable—that they matter. Often, one caring adult who can provide trusted reassurance is enough. But when it's not, it is important they know how to get additional help. If needed, The Trevor Project will contact and dispatch emergency services using routing technology to locate the person in danger.

### **The Trevor Project – [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)**

Talk to a trained crisis counselor 24/7. Safe and judgement-free.

The Trevor Lifeline 1-866-488-7386

TrevorText Text START to 678678

TrevorChat instant messaging via computer

### **Trans Lifeline – <https://www.translifeline.org/>**

Peer support service run by trans\* persons. Crisis hotline with a policy against nonconsensual rescue.

1-877-565-8860

## NATIONAL RESOURCES

We are fortunate to live in a time in which we can connect virtually. Virtual resources can be a source of support, especially for closeted youth. There are organizations that assist parents in supporting LGBTQ+ youth and, alternatively, organizations which can temporarily provide 'parental' affirmation when such is lacking.

### **Ally Parents – [www.standwithtrans.org/ally-parents](http://www.standwithtrans.org/ally-parents)**

Ally parents are parents of trans\*<sup>1</sup> and nonbinary youth across the country who volunteer their time to support young people who may lack or not yet have parental support. Youth can text or call ally parents by location across the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans\* is an umbrella term inclusive of all noncisgender identities.

**PFLAG – [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)**

Sometimes the best support is the love of one’s own family. PFLAG helps family members come to understand and accept one’s gender identity and/or sexuality.

**[GLBTNearMe.org](http://GLBTNearMe.org)**

Directory of more than 15,000 LGBTQ+ resources across the country for support, medical assistance, housing, food, shelter, and more.

**LGBT National Help Center – [www.glbthotline.org](http://www.glbthotline.org)**

Free and confidential peer support and local resources.

## **CHAT ROOMS SUPPORTING LGBTQ+ YOUTH**

Sometimes the best support is the ability to talk to others who understand and don’t question one’s identity and/or orientation. We know from crisis intervention research that reconnecting with peers is essential.

**Gender Spectrum Lounge – <https://genderspectrum.org/lounge>**

This is a space for teens, parents, and professionals to connect with one another and have conversations about gender outside of the boxes.

**Q Chat – [www.gchatspace.org/](http://www.gchatspace.org/)**

Online facilitated discussion groups for LGBTQ+ teens ages 13–19.

**SMYAL – [www.smyal.org](http://www.smyal.org)**

Provides safe and supportive environments to empower LGBTQ+ youth.

## **REFERENCES**

Human Rights Campaign Foundation. (2018). *2018 LGBTQ Youth Report*. Human Rights Campaign. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report>.

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*Please visit the NASP COVID-19 Response Center at [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org) for additional resources. Contributors: Amy Cannava & Scott Greenspan, NASP LGBTQI2-S Committee.*

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