

Sexual minorities and suicide

LGB people face stressors that are unique, including the experience of discrimination and institutional prejudice. Studies and surveys have shown many LGB people have thought about or attempted suicide, and previous behaviours such as these are the most reliable indicators of future suicide risk (Suicide Prevention Resource Center [SPRC] & Rodgers, 2011).

Sexual orientation includes sexual behaviour, romantic attraction and self-identification.

Sexual minorities generally refer to those who have a different sexual orientation than the majority population.

LGBTQ2S+ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and Two-Spirit. We refer only to LGB people in this fact sheet because the research we cite refers specifically to these groups. We have a separate transgender and suicide-specific fact sheet, and acknowledge that more research into queer, questioning and Two-Spirit people and suicide is needed.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are:

5x more likely to consider suicide

7x more likely to attempt suicide

(Suicide Prevention Resource Centre [SPRC], 2008)

Approximately

3%

of the Canadian adult population identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Statistics Canada, 2017)

Why are LGB people at risk?

There are a few factors that put LGB people at risk of suicide, factors that can put strain on one's mental health and potentially lead to thoughts of suicide:

- Discrimination manifesting as bullying, physical violence, rejection (leading to isolation); this is especially prevalent among LGB youth who are at higher risk for suicide than LGB adults
- Lack of support from family members, which can also lead to isolation
- Predisposition to depression, anxiety and substance abuse
- LGB individuals who consider suicide face the stigma of being different in sexual orientation and the stigma of suicide in general
- Institutional prejudice (laws and public policies which create inequalities and/or fail to provide protection from sexual-orientation-based discrimination) (Haas et al., 2011; SPRC, 2008; Pachankis et al., 2015)

What can reduce risk?

- Effective mental health care and health care
- Community and school supports
- Strong relationships with family and friends
- Self-awareness and acceptance
- Independence of thought (ability to see past the traditional views of society) (Saewyc et al., 2014; Haas et al., 2011).

Warning signs

Any significant change in behaviour or mood is a warning sign that someone may be thinking about suicide, for example:

- Losing interest in a previously enjoyed hobby or activity
 - Disconnecting from friends or family
 - Change in sleeping or eating patterns
 - Drinking alcohol or taking drugs to excess
 - “I wish my family members would accept me for who I am... I feel like I have no one in my family to talk to”
- If you notice anyone exhibiting the following signs get that person help immediately – call 9-1-1 or your local crisis centre.
- Threatening to hurt or kill themselves
 - Talking or writing about dying or suicide
 - Seeking out ways to kill themselves (American Association of Suicidology, 2017)

Statements of hopelessness can also be a warning sign, or talk of being a burden:

- “I don’t fit in at all with my classmates... it feels like I’m the only gay person I know”

What can communities do to help reduce suicide among LGB people?

The implementation of policies and laws that protect LGB people from sexual-orientation-based discrimination and encourage acceptance can reduce suicide risk. For example:

- Schools can implement safe-school policies specifically addressing homophobia (Saewyc et al., 2014; Egale, 2011).
- Health care workers can learn how to identify and reach out to LGB people who may be at risk of suicide.

What can we all do to help reduce suicide among LGB people?

If someone you know is exhibiting warning signs, have an open, non-judgmental conversation with them.

You can start the conversation by mentioning your concerns, “I’ve noticed you’re not coming to class as often as you used to, how’re you doing?” or, “You say your mom hasn’t been very supportive since you’ve come out to her. Are you okay?” Listen to them, be there for them. You don’t have to offer solutions. If the person responds with statements of hopelessness or being a burden, ask them about those feelings. Then, ask them directly, “Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

What can LGB people do to stay mentally healthy?

1

HANG OUT WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE LOVING AND SUPPORTIVE

Prioritize relationships with supportive family members and friends and consider becoming involved in LGB community organizations or Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs).

2

MAINTAIN MENTAL HEALTH AND ASK FOR HELP WHEN IT IS NEEDED!

Try to limit alcohol and drug use and when support is needed, reach out for help. When struggling to cope with life, tell a trusted loved one or call your local crisis line, which you can find at suicideprevention.ca/need-help/

RESOURCE

The Genderbread Person by It’s Pronounced Metrosexual itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2018/10/the-genderbread-person-v4/
Egale Canada
egale.ca



If you are in crisis, call 211 or your local crisis line. First Nations people and Inuit can also call 1.855.242.3310

hopeforwellness.ca
suicideprevention.ca/need-help

VISIT SUICIDEINFO.CA FOR MORE RESOURCES



Financial contribution from:



References

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ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

Anyone can learn to identify someone at risk of suicide and get them help.

Call us.

We are the Centre for Suicide Prevention. For 35+ years we've been equipping Canadians with knowledge and skills to respond to people at risk of suicide. We can equip you too. We educate for life.

ABOUT THE MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) is a catalyst for improving the mental health system and changing the attitudes and behaviours of Canadians around mental health issues.



If you are in crisis, call 211 or your local crisis line. First Nations people and Inuit can also call 1.855.242.3310

hopeforwellness.ca
suicideprevention.ca/need-help

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