

ROADMAP TO LGBTQ+ MENTAL HEALTH

Sexual identity and gender identity are core parts of who we are. While there is no one-size-fits all, there are some shared experiences that often go along with being part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender nonconforming, queer, questioning+ (LGBTQ+) community. Since mental health touches all aspects of life, it also overlaps with gender and sexual identity.

Whether you identify as LGBTQ+ yourself or love someone who does, read on to learn more about LGBTQ+ mental health.

*Materials prepared by MHC's research team and reviewed by experts in the field for accuracy



WHAT IS LGBTQ+ MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental Health is your general sense of emotional, psychological, and cognitive wellbeing ([more info here](#)). Everyone has mental health, but it can look different based on cultural factors and social group identities like sexual and gender identity. Focusing on LGBTQ+ mental health allows us to consider some of these unique experiences.

It's important to stress that difficulties related to identifying as a sexual minoritized or gender diverse individual can be challenging not because of these identities themselves, but because of the broader societal fabric that creates a

difficult environment to thrive in. Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ are often affected by the daily realities of heterosexism, cisgenderism, homophobia, transphobia, cisnormativity, and heteronormativity. Many also experience racism, classism, ableism, sexism, and/or xenophobia. These each can create experiences of discrimination-based rejection, which impact self-esteem, mood, career, relationships, and of course, mental health. Despite these systemic-level challenges, there are countless examples of thriving within and because of LGBTQ+ communities, which we'll also highlight here.

More info from our partners doing meaningful work in this space:

[Trans Lifeline](#)

[The Trevor Project](#)



DAILY LGBTQ+ MENTAL HEALTH

Daily LGBTQ+ mental health is comprised of the parts of everyday life that are stressful. Consider which of these daily nuisances impact you most. With awareness comes resistance and growth.

Each of these is difficult in its own way. Over time, if not addressed, these can lead to mental health concerns, like those outlined here. We've also included on pages 6-7 tips for fostering the mental wellbeing you deserve.

DAILY NUISANCE

Disclosure fatigue

Internalized guilt, shame, and stigma

Expectations of others

Code switching

Small and big rejections

Self-doubt and negative self-appraisals

EXPLANATION

It can get exhausting to constantly consider when and where to share your identity. Considerations of safety, acceptance, and understanding from others can wear on you and create disclosure fatigue.

There are many ways that you might contend with the typical "mold" for who you are "supposed" to be, and because of this, you might have been taught to experience guilt and shame about who you are. This can leave you feeling stuck or tempted to shrink yourself.

Ever notice that you feel the weight of others' expectations? This can create a need to separate your own self-expectations and those from other people. This can be especially salient for LGBTQ+ people of color due to community expectations and experiences of racism.

Navigating a cisnormative and heteronormative world can leave you feeling like you have to change how you present yourself based on who you're around. And sometimes this becomes a safety concern. Constant code switching (which you might have to do even more often if you are a person of color) can leave you tired and questioning your own authenticity.

From individual insults to seeing LGBTQ+ rights jeopardized on a large scale, rejections big and small can take a major toll. This might impact your mood, sense of wellbeing, physical safety, or you might have become immune to their impact in order to protect yourself. Either way, these can challenge your sense of self-worth.

Managing questions of where you fit in and rejection from others can lead to internalized self-doubt. That voice inside your head that sounds like a bully toward yourself is what negative self-appraisals sound like. These can get in the way of recognizing all that you have to offer.



CLINICAL LGBTQ+ MENTAL HEALTH

Clinical mental health concerns exist across all communities, and here are some difficulties that tend to impact individuals from the LGBTQ+ community more than others. Understanding these can help you recognize difficulties before they begin or when support would be helpful. If you or a loved one are experiencing any of these warning signs, follow the links for more information.

EATING & WEIGHT DISORDERS

Many LGBTQ+-identified individuals experience internalized negative beliefs about oneself that are harmful for body image and eating habits.

Strong dissatisfaction with how your body looks and fear of gaining weight

Frequent checking of how your body looks

Taking actions to avoid weight gain that are harmful to your body

A sense of loss of control over your eating

More information from: [NEDA](#), [AEDA](#)

TRAUMA

LGBTQ+-identified individuals unfortunately experience many types of trauma that can have long-term effects on wellbeing.

Witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event

Having dreams, flashbacks, or intrusive memories of the event

Feeling constantly on edge or on high alert

Strong reactions to or avoiding things that remind you of the event

Difficulty with uncontrollable feelings

Feeling detached from your emotions or body

More information from: [National Council](#)

ANXIETY & DEPRESSION

The rate of anxiety and depression is 1.5-2.5 higher among LGBTQ+ individuals, often in response to chronic experiences of prejudice and discrimination.

Feeling hopeless, guilty, or worthless

Intense worry that feels hard to set aside

Physical discomfort including tension, shakiness, headaches, rapid breathing or heart rate, and/or stomach pains

Low mood that impacts your ability to function

Loss of interest in what you used to enjoy

Notable changes in appetite, weight, or sleep

More information from: [ADAA](#), [The Trevor Project](#), [WBT](#)

THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

Thoughts of suicide are higher among gender and sexual minoritized individuals. Strong social and parental support can significantly reduce suicide rates, but many LGBTQ+ individuals struggle silently, so warning signs are particularly important to pay attention to.

Feeling hopeless, guilty, or like a burden to others

Thinking or talking about killing yourself

Having no reason to live

Feeling trapped

Experiencing severe psychological pain

If you or someone you know is in crisis, having thoughts of suicide, or needs a safe place to talk, you can call:

Trevor Lifeline: 1-866-488-7386

Trans Lifeline: 1-877-565-8860

More information from: [ADAA](#), [AFSP](#), [FAP](#), [VEH](#)

WARNING SIGNS

LGBTQ+ MENTAL WELLBEING

LGBTQ+ mental wellbeing is a sense of cognitive, mental, and emotional wellbeing among those who identify as LGBTQ+ ([more info here](#)). Of course, this just scratches the surface on the countless strengths among the members of this community, but this is what tops the list in terms of recent research findings:

STRENGTH:

Social Intelligence

It's not uncommon for LGBTQ+ folk to code switch and pick up on social cues so that they can determine which people are more likely to be safe and accepting — this skill can apply to other situations as well which lead to better communication and listening skills.

Empathy for Others

Often because of lived experiences with rejection and discrimination, LGBTQ+ folk tend to more easily empathize with others. This allows for community building, support and mentorship, and fighting for the rights of those who are also affected by oppressive systems.

Courage

Living authentically can often be scary for fear of rejection or safety, especially for folks with intersecting minoritized identities. But those who are able to do so have often built up courage and determination to stop allowing society's norms to dictate how they live their lives.

Creativity

Since queerness has been taboo for so long, many people have turned to art to express their identity, emotions, and experience. Exploring creative aspects of yourself can increase self-esteem, self-awareness, and can be a profound method of sharing stories with others.

Authenticity

Self-acceptance can be a challenge for many LGBTQ+ folk, especially due to experiences of rejection and internalized stigma. After learning to accept, cherish, and celebrate what makes you unique, you can learn to be more true to yourself in daily life.

Resilience

LGBTQ+ folk often unfortunately have to deal with additional hurdles and obstacles because of systemic injustice and discrimination. Thriving despite these hurdles is often a sign of resilience and strength in the face of adversity.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE



Tips for fostering mental health

Difficult experiences provide an opportunity to adapt and develop strengths. Below are some tips on how to do this. Take a look, and consider what feels most important to you and how you could start practicing today.

THE SKILL	THE WHY	THE HOW
Find your people .	Community support can offer a sense of belonging and resistance. It can buffer against the effects of the difficulties listed above.	Queer communities exist both online and offline, often for particular subgroups of identities or cultures. Try finding a community in whatever form suits you and see where it takes you!
Let yourself shine .	To contend with everything outlined above, the urge to shrink yourself is understandable. Finding spaces where your authentic self is appreciated will help you feel freer and better able to attain your goals.	Being authentically yourself can mean dressing in a certain way, speaking out about certain political beliefs, or opening up to a partner. Find others who are already doing that and let them inspire you to do the same.
Foster self-love .	As a result of internalizing negative messages from our culture, LGBTQ+ individuals can sometimes be too hard on themselves. Self-love is the antidote to this.	See the Mental Health Coalition's Roadmap to Self-Love .
Trust your gut .	Letting yourself be guided by your own instinct rather than others' expectations will allow you to feel freer. You'll also be more likely to flex your resilience.	Reflect on how you feel emotionally and cognitively throughout the day. This will give you practice tuning in to yourself and your own instincts.
Seek out affirming content .	Seeing yourself represented is affirming and fosters mental wellbeing. It can also serve as a reminder that your experiences are valid and important.	Find content that represents your experience and takes into account factors like race, culture, class, and ability status. This could be in TV, art, music, books, movies, or podcasts. Suggestions: OOS



Tips for fostering mental health (cont.)

THE SKILL	THE WHY	THE HOW
Take a break from news and social media.	It can be exhausting to see the lives and rights of LGBTQ+ community members put in jeopardy or denied. Sometimes the best form of self-protection is a break from this content.	Allow yourself to have a break from social media for a scheduled period of time each week. You can also edit your settings to limit the amount of time you spend on social media each day. Use this extra time to do something that makes you feel refreshed or rested.
Feed your assets .	Recognize your strengths and take a moment to appreciate them. This can be difficult and takes regular practice.	Try making a list of qualities you like about yourself, your community, or skills that you'd like to work towards. Sometimes when you're not feeling your best, looking back at this list can remind you of the things you're proud of and promote self-love.
Seek out professional support.	Sometimes, especially if you are experiencing clinical mental health concerns, support from a professional is important. This can be scary, but there are accessible ways to do it.	Create a plan to find a licensed mental health clinician by looking up local mental health organizations, the mental health department of hospitals, or online therapist directories. This can be an overwhelming process, so take it one step at a time. You might also check out your local LGBTQ+ center, where you might be able to find low cost and affirming providers. Tips on what to look for in a therapist: DBSA



IF YOU STILL HAVE QUESTIONS, THAT'S OK.

Remember that this is just a start to looking at LGBTQ+ mental health, and you can find resources specific to the LGBTQ+ community [here](#).

If you would like to learn more about mental health or additional social group identities, be sure to also check out the Mental Health Coalition's [Resource Library](#).

Also see below for resources from our partners that provide comprehensive information, resources, and tools for supporting LGBTQ+ mental health:

[Trans Lifeline Resources Page](#)

[The Trevor Project Resources Page](#)

[Trevor Space](#) (An affirming international community for LGBTQ+ young people ages 13-24.)

[The Trevor Project Guide to Approaching Intersectional Conversations](#)

[The Trevor Project Guide to Being an Ally](#)