

BUILDING GENDER-INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

In 2022, HRC and the University of Connecticut surveyed over 12,000 LGBTQ+ youth (age 13-18) from across the United States on their health, well-being, school and home experiences, and more. Below, we present key findings on what we learned about how LGBTQ+ youth are identifying their gender, along with action steps you can take to build gender-inclusive environments in your community.



KEY FINDINGS

GENDER IDENTITY:

Over two-thirds of youth in the survey (**69.5%**; **n=8,768**) identified as at least one non-cisgender gender identity and are included in the transgender and gender-expansive group used throughout this report (respondents were able to report multiple gender identities, as well as write in gender identities).

- Approximately a third of the sample (**31.4%**) identified specifically as transgender, including those who identified as transgender girls/women, and transgender boys/men.
- Over a quarter (**26.6%**) of the sample identified as non-binary – over twice that identified as such in 2018 (**12.2%**).
- More than a quarter (**28.4%**) identified as another non-cisgender identity, such as gender non-conforming, genderqueer, agender, demigender, genderfluid, and more.

LGBTQ+ YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH:

LGBTQ+ youth are experiencing a mental health crisis, even worse than the one seen for youth and adolescents in general.

- **55.1%** of LGBTQ+ youth, including **60%** of transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary (transgender and genderexpansive) youth, screened positive for depression (on the PHQ-2 included in the survey)
- In comparison, **42%** of all high school youth, and **35%** of heterosexual high school youth, surveyed

on the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS) report persistent feelings of sadness

- **63.5%** of LGBTQ+ youth, and 68.2% of transgender and gender-expansive youth, screened positive for anxiety (on the GAD-2)
- **30.9%** of LGBTQ+ youth screened positive for severe psychological distress (on the PHQ-4)

GENDER AFFIRMATION AT HOME:

Many transgender and gender-expansive youth report that their gender identity is not affirmed at home—potentially resulting in substantial negative effects for their mental health.

- **41%** of transgender and gender-expansive youth never have their chosen name used at home.
- Seven in ten (**72.1%**) transgender and gender expansive youth whose families never refer to them with the correct name screened positive for anxiety; six in ten (**61.9%**) of those whose families always use the correct name did so.
- **49.5%** never have their correct pronouns used at home
- Two-thirds (**65.5%**) of transgender and gender expansive youth whose families never refer to them with correct pronouns screened positive for depression; less than half (**49.8%**) of transgender and gender-expansive youth whose families always use the correct pronouns did so.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SUPPORT LGBTQ+ YOUTH IN YOUR PRACTICE?

Utilize gender-affirming language and steer clear of language rooted in assumptions based on the gender binary. For example, avoid using terms like “ladies, gentlemen, guys, etc.,” and consider using “folks, everyone, friends, etc.”.

- Review all forms for gender-inclusive language and remove language rooted in “cissexism” and/or “heterocentrism”.
- Ensure all forms and youth files allow for chosen names and add a section for pronouns of clients.

Ensure your organization has an inclusive non-discrimination statement that explicitly includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression—both for patients/students and staff.

Seek out training to better meet the mental health needs of LGBTQ+ youth.

Implement policies and practices to encourage trans-gender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary youth to be able to be their full authentic self at your organization without fear of being outed to their parents, caregivers, and/or family by ensuring their chosen names and pronouns are kept confidential.

Create opportunities for people to share their pronouns with you rather than assuming you know their pronouns based on their appearance. For example, when introducing yourself share your pronouns like this:

- In one-on-one conversation: “Hi, I’m Sky and use he/him pronouns.. Nice to meet you.”
- In a meeting: “Hi everyone. I’m Mariela. I’m the senior program manager and I go by she/her.”
- In your e-mail signature next to your name: E. Jackson (pronouns: they/them/theirs)

Always use someone’s chosen pronouns and/or chosen name unless you’ve been asked not to do so for a specific reason (e.g., safety or privacy concerns). What to do when you are not sure of someone’s pronouns:

- If you don’t know, ask.
- You can (and should) avoid using pronouns for someone when you don’t know them. Just use their name!

If you make a mistake, apologize and move on. Help others by gently and consistently correcting them if they misgender someone. (Tip: Call them in, rather than calling them out.)

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

It takes intention to consistently use someone’s correct pronouns if you previously used different pronouns for that person or if you’re using pronouns that are new to you. Take the time to practice referring to the person with the correct pronouns in conversation and in written communication:

| SHE/HER/HERS | HE/HIM/HIS | THEY/THEM/THIS |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| She is here now. | He is here now. | They are here now. |
| Her phone call just started. | His phone call just started. | Their phone call just started. |
| She excused herself from the meeting. | He excused himself from the meeting. | They excused themselves from the meeting. |
| Let’s wait for her. | Let’s wait for him. | Let’s wait for them. |