



Depression and Suicide Prevention among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) Students

What Is Depression?

Depression is a condition that affects people of all ages, races, genders, and sexual orientations. Contrary to what many believe, a person with depression cannot “get over it” or “snap out of it” any more than someone with a medical problem can get over an illness. Depression can be passed from one generation to the next; sometimes stress or other life events trigger depression, or depression results from a combination of factors. When someone is depressed he or she typically feels sadness that lasts longer than a few days or weeks and this can be accompanied by thoughts of wanting to hurt or kill oneself. Fortunately, depression can be treated. This flyer is intended to provide education to help you better understand depression and know how and when to seek help when you or someone you know is experiencing depression.

What Does Depression Look Like?

Recognizing depression is a critical first step in getting yourself or a friend the help needed. It is important to keep in mind that friends or loved ones may not know how to ask for help, so understanding what to look for is important.

Common concerns among LGBT college students who experience depression

- Relationship problems: Conflicts with roommates, parents, friends, partners, and/or professors, rejection by peers, feelings of social isolation
- Engaging in risky behaviors: Violence, unprotected sexual practices, alcohol and other drug abuse, and/or driving under the influence
- Academic problems: Missing classes, not completing assignments, inattentiveness, and/or failing exams and courses

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among college-aged students ranging from 18 to 21 years old

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) college students are one of the groups at highest risk for suicide, as they are at two to three times greater risk of attempting suicide than their heterosexual peers.

Some research shows that the rate of suicide attempts of transgendered individuals aged 15-24 is very high. Research with the gay/bisexually identified male college-aged population showed that close to one quarter of those surveyed had attempted suicide at least once. One study of LGBT college students found that lesbian/bisexually identified college students were 3-7 times more likely to consider suicide than their heterosexual peers.

Risk Factors for Suicide within the LGBT Community

- Experiences of verbal and physical harrassment
- Lack of family support and acceptance of their sexuality
- A history of abuse
- A family history of depression and/or suicide
- Easy access to pills and other chemicals
- Stigmatization for their sexuality
- Impulsive or aggressive inclinations
- Academic problems
- Conflicts with friends, roommates, or peers
- Having made a previous suicide attempt or has had previous thoughts of killing oneself

- Having experienced a recent loss (e.g., death or break-up)
- Unwillingness to seek help because of shame in seeking mental health services

Know the Warning Signs

Although individuals may vary in how they respond to suicidal thoughts, there are common warning signs that may suggest an individual is considering suicide. An individual may be at risk for suicide if he or she:

- Reports feeling very depressed
- Talks about wanting to commit suicide
- Experiences anxiety and/or stress
- Is focused on death and dying
- Writes poems, letters, or stories about death and/or suicide
- Experiences feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Starts giving away possessions
- Withdraws from friends and activities he or she once enjoyed
- Prepares for death by making out a will
- Says things like, "I don't deserve to be here," "I wish I were dead"
- Increases use of alcohol and/or other drugs
- Engages in reckless behaviors

it is important to notice and follow up when someone you know is acting out of character

You Can Help

First and foremost, take suicide seriously. It is always better to over-react than under-react. Additionally, here are some other things you can do when someone you know is thinking about suicide:

- Seek support from others. Do not allow yourself to be sworn to secrecy
- Listen and accept the other person's feelings. Try not to judge or argue
- Be direct and listen. Don't act shocked by their plans
- Never dare someone to kill themselves
- If possible, never leave the person alone

Offer to go with the person to seek help from his or her parents, a counselor, or other source of support

Find Someone Else Who Can Help

- The Counseling Center
- Resident Advisers
- Campus Security
- Family or friends
- A religious or spiritual counselor