



LGBTQ+ Youth in Crisis: Best Practices

State Superintendent's Conference on
Special Education and Pupil Services
Leadership
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Public Instruction
Jill K. Underly, PhD, State Superintendent

What? Now what? So what?

What? LGBTQ+ youth experience alarming rates of health disparities and other experiences that can lead to negative outcomes.

Now what? Importance of trusted, supportive adults in the lives of LGBTQ+ students

So what? Three best practices to support LGBTQ+ students and prevent suicide

Visualization



One word reaction



**Extra credit - What could an adult have done?

What? - DATA DROP



Collective Impact Council

May 6, 2022

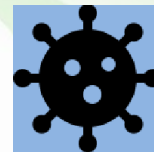
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Quick Notes

- **Timing:** These slides start with recent data from COVID and then work backward.

- The COVID data was collected in a CDC online survey between January-June 2021.
- The other data come from 2019 surveys.



- **Percentages:** These slides report the percent of high school kids, not the count of high school kids.



- **Limiting:** LGBTQ+ youth are diverse and have other social identities – race, ethnicity, religion – that likely compound their experiences. Data collected and reported cannot properly account for all the dimensions of youth.



Quick Notes

- **Terms:** These slides cover data on LGBTQ youth. I mainly use the term LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer).
 - When the survey or report that I'm referencing uses different terms, I share what was reported.
 - TGNB (transgender or non-binary) is a more recent category for researchers and often not reported out separately from LGBTQ in the research.
 - Historically our main data source, the YRBS, uses LGB. The YRBS hasn't included questions about transgender, non-binary, gender non-conforming, intersex, or queer youth. As that changes and data become available, we will proudly share.
- **Applicability:** though we do not see LGBTQI+ youth named in major data sources, the findings and solutions to exclusionary practices are applicable to all youth who identify as something other than cis hetero kids.

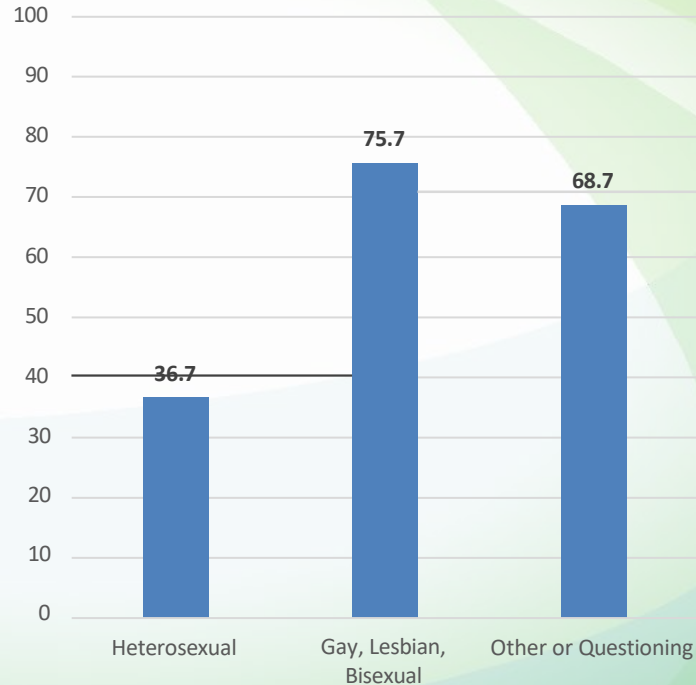


cis hetero:

a heterosexual person whose gender aligns with what they were assigned at birth

LGBTQ Youth are Struggling

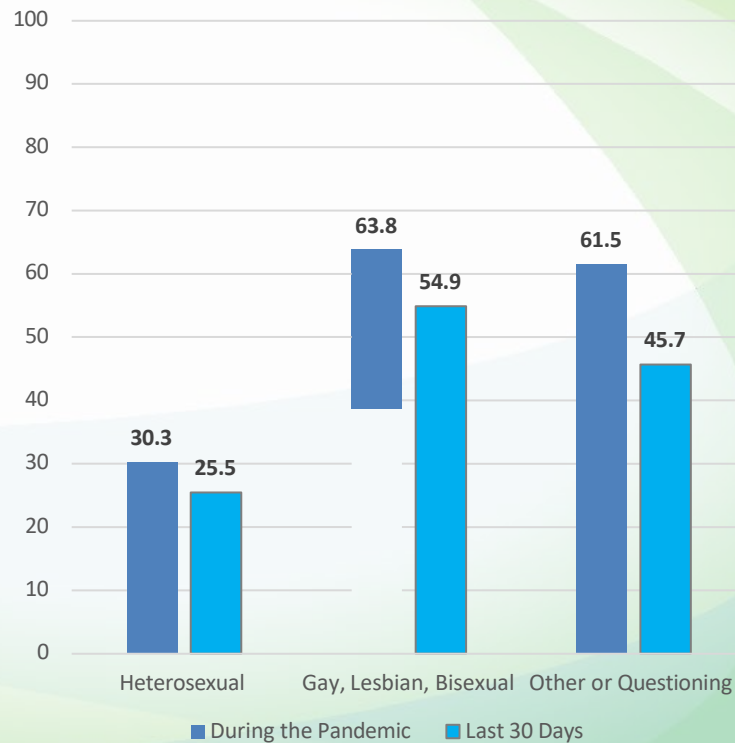
75% of high school LGBTQ youth report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness – nearly twice the rate for the overall age group.



Source: Centers for Disease Control
MMWR, April 1, 2022

Poor Mental Health

6 in 10 high school LGBTQ youth report having **poor mental health during the pandemic**, twice the rate of hetero high school students.

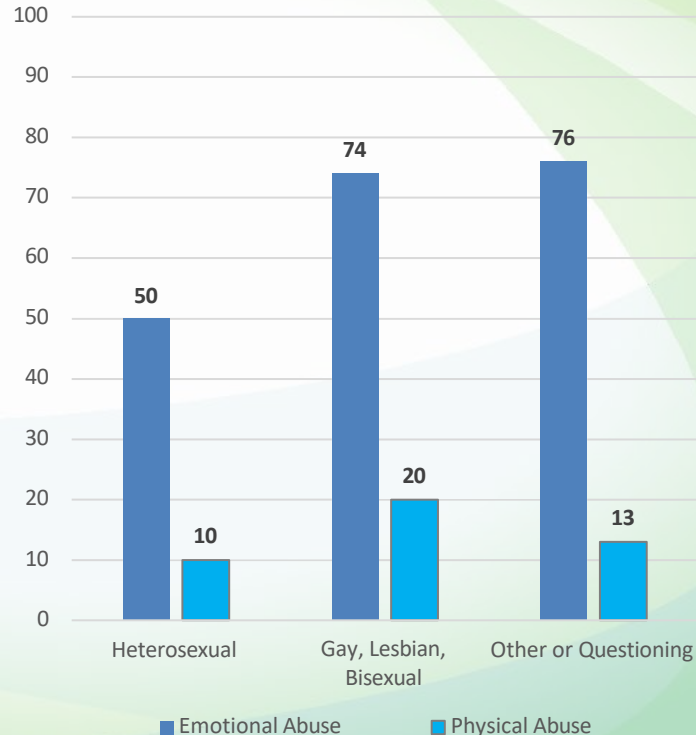


Source: Centers for Disease Control
MMWR, April 1, 2022

Abuse in the Home

75% of high school LGBTQ kids experienced **emotional abuse at home.**

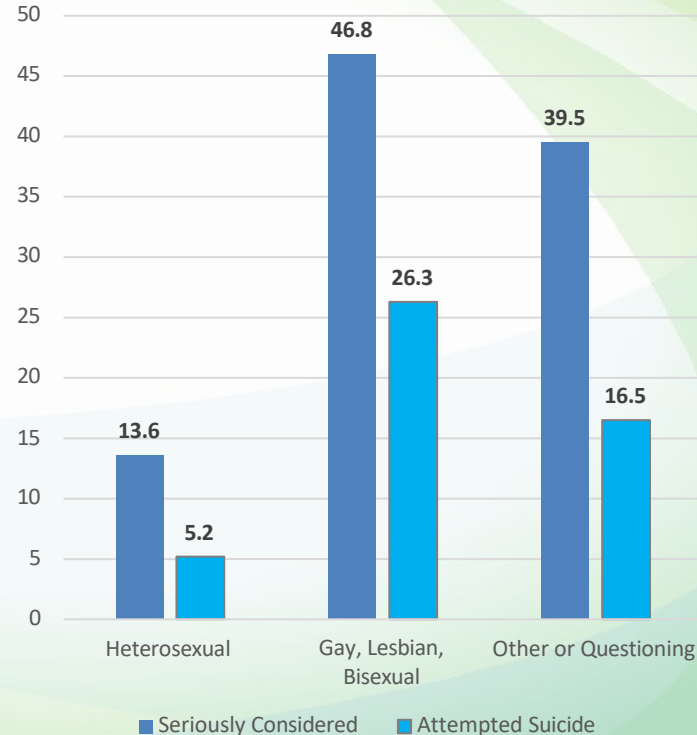
Gay, lesbian and bisexual kids were **twice as likely** as hetero kids to be **physically abused** in the home.



Source: Centers for Disease Control
MMWR, April 1, 2022

High Rates of Suicidality

Nearly half of high school LGBTQ seriously considered attempting suicide during the pandemic, more than three times the rate of hetero high school students. More than a quarter attempted suicide, five times the rate of hetero kids.

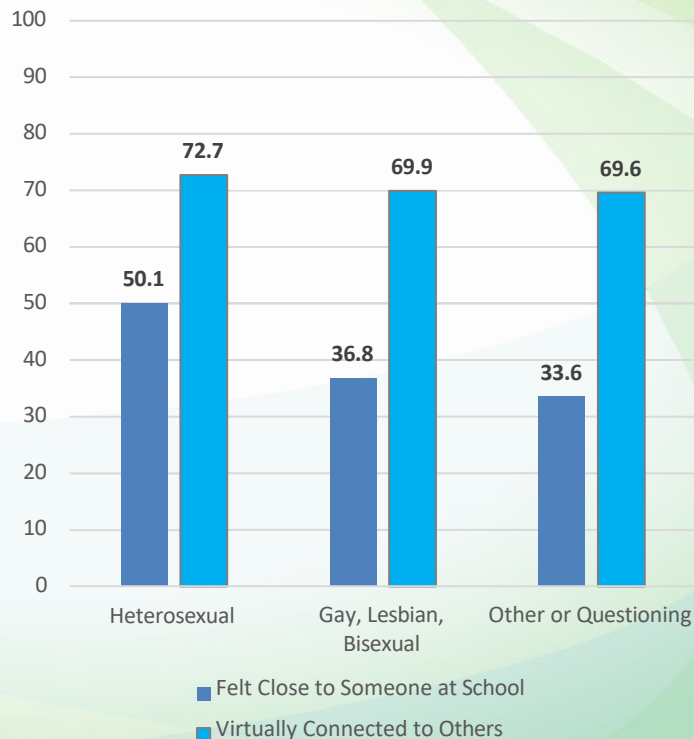


Source: Centers for Disease Control
MMWR, April 1, 2022

Connectedness

About a third of high school LGBTQ **felt close to someone at school**, significantly lower than the rate of hetero students.

A clear majority of LGBTQ teens lack a close connection to someone at school.

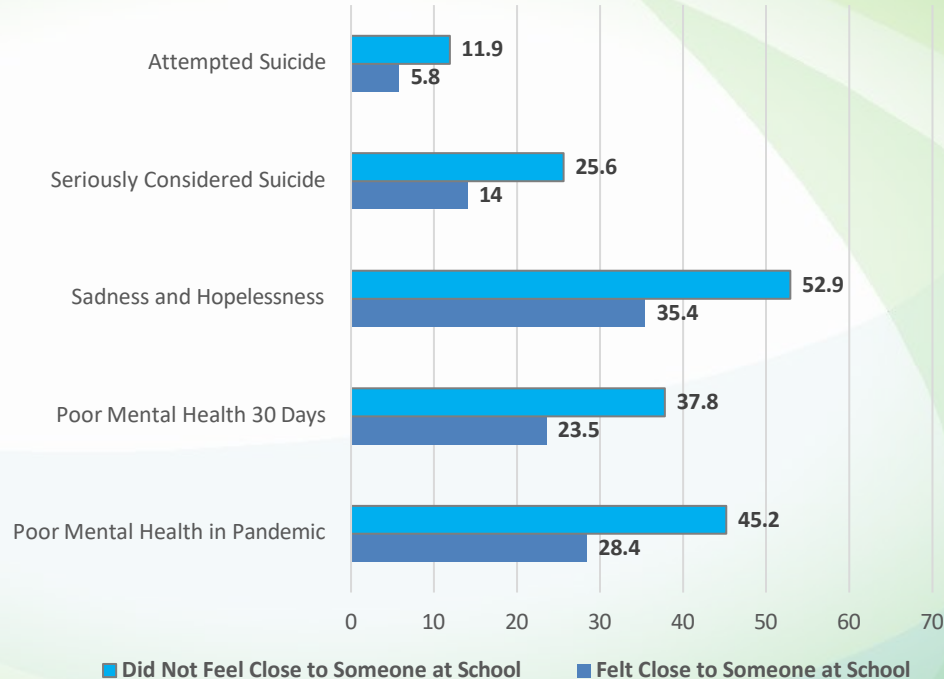


Source: Centers for Disease Control
MMWR, April 1, 2022

Connectedness

Feeling connected to someone at school = better mental health on all measures.

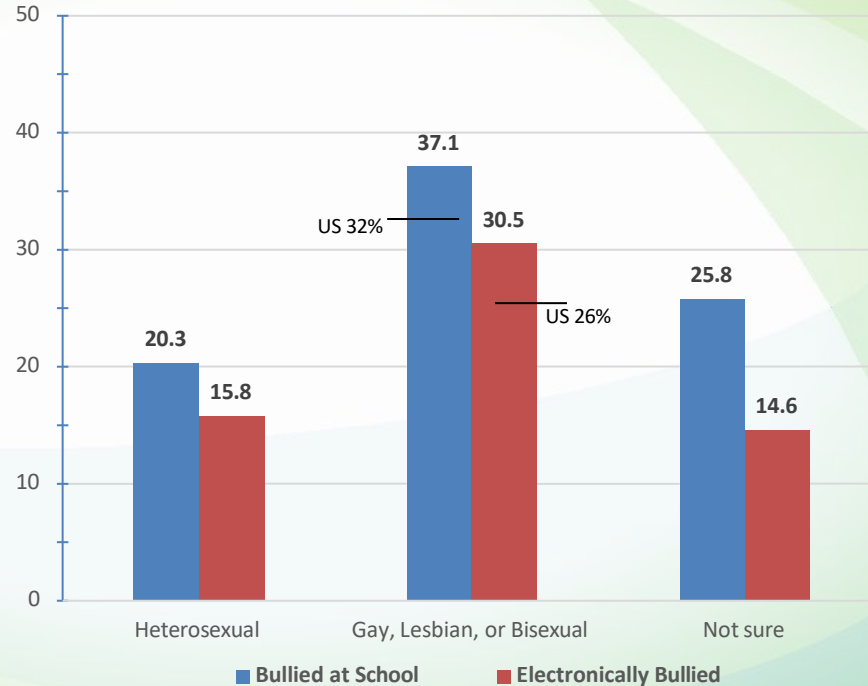
Twice as many attempted suicides among those who lack a school connection.



Source: Centers for Disease Control
MMWR, April 1, 2022

Bullying in WI

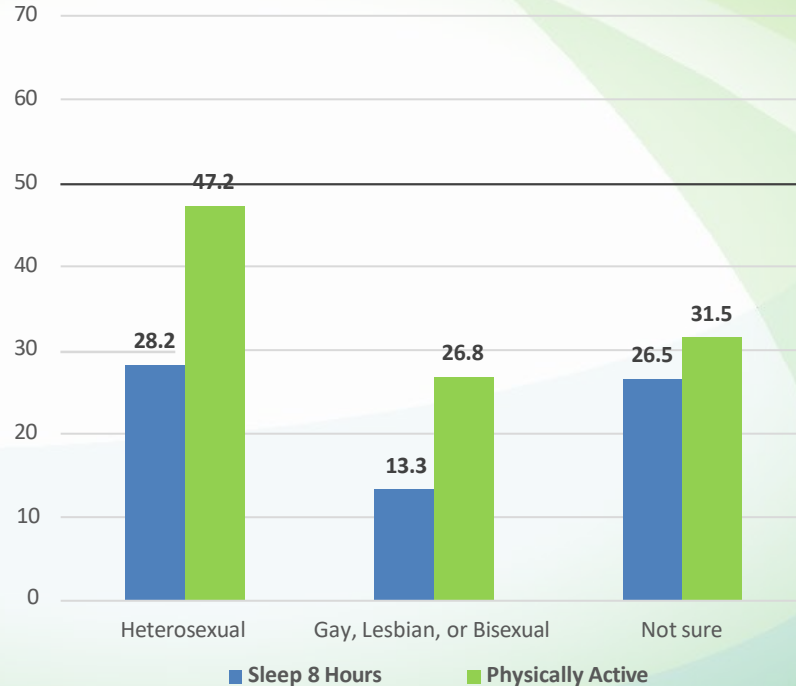
LGBTQ kids are more likely to be bullied at school than heterosexual students, and twice as likely to be cyber bullied.



Source: CDC YRBS 2019 Wisconsin

Healthy Behaviors in WI

LGBTQ kids get less sleep and less exercise, two key habits that improve mental health.



Source: CDC YRBS 2019 Wisconsin

Intersectionality

- Among Black, female, sexual minority youth, only twenty-two percent (22%) feeling connected at school - the least of any group.
- Black students were most likely to report hunger, with nearly a third reporting that there was not enough food in their home during the pandemic.
- More than one third of all U.S. high school students felt they had been treated badly or unfairly at school because of their race or ethnicity.

Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey (ABES), CDC, 2022.

LGBTQ Challenges in US

Prior to the Pandemic

- Less than half LGBTQ youth were out to an adult at school.
- 2 in 3 LGBTQ youth report that someone tried to convince them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- 71% of LGBTQ youth report discrimination due to either their sexual orientation or their gender identity
- 78% of trans and non-binary youth report discrimination due to their sexual orientation.
- 85% of trans youth reported suicidal ideation during their lifetime, and more than half had a prior suicide attempt.

LGBTQ Challenges in WI

Prior to the Pandemic

- 78% of LGBT youth reported anxiety
- 43% of LGBT youth experienced sexual coercion or assault
- 42% of LGBT youth seriously considered suicide

LGBTQ Youth and Homelessness

Up to 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ. The most common cause of homelessness is being forced out or having run away.

Choi, S.K., Wilson, B.D.M., Shelton, J., & Gates, G. (2015). *Serving Our Youth 2015: The Needs and Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Experiencing Homelessness*. Los Angeles: The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund.



So what?

“For parents and caregivers, a little change – being a little less rejecting and a little more accepting – can make an important difference in reducing a young person’s risk for serious health problems, including suicide and HIV.”

Family Acceptance Project, *Supportive Families, Healthy Children*, C. Ryan, 2009.

Now What: What Helps

Pronouns Can Save Lives

- Affirming LGBTQ youth's gender by using pronouns that align with their gender identity has been shown to improve mental health.
- TGNB youth who did not have their pronouns respected attempted suicide twice as often as the kids who did have their pronouns respected.

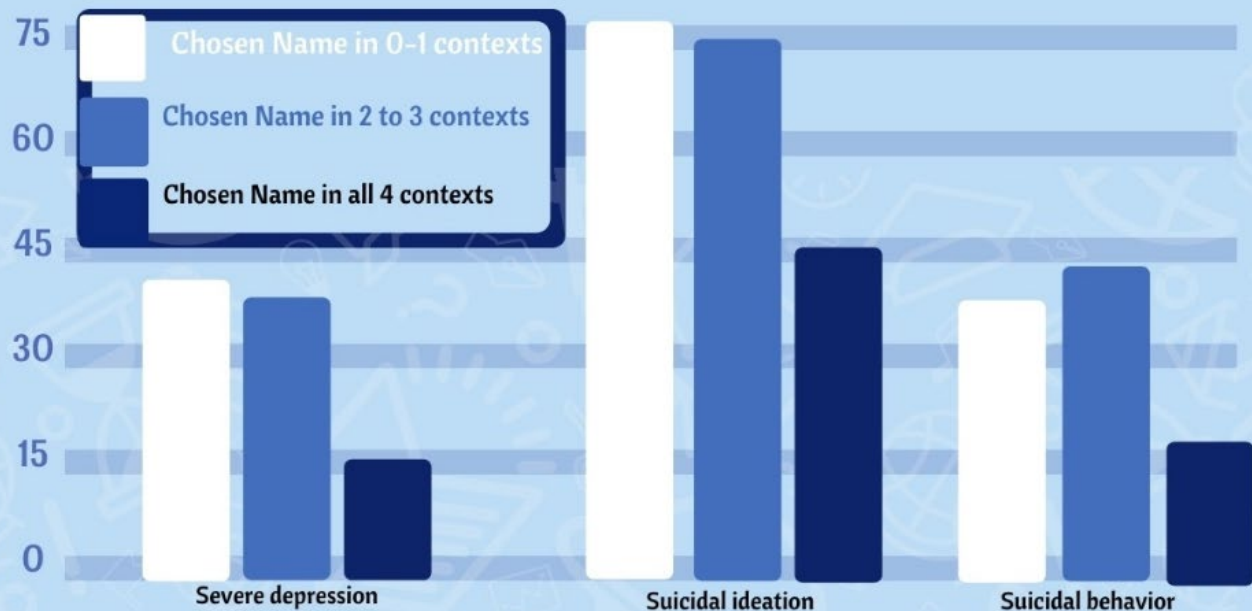


Hello
my name is

my pronouns are

Source: The Trevor Project's 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health

Transgender Youth Who Could Use Their Chosen Name at Home, School, Work, and with Friends Had the Lowest Levels of Mental Health Problems



Source: Population Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin (2018)

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Now What: What Helps

One Trusted Adult

- LGBTQ youth who have just one accepting adult in their life can reduce the risk of suicide attempt by 40%.



(And...the best practice is for youth to be supported in ALL parts of their lives!!)

What words do I actually say?

- ▶ What name or pronoun would you like me to use for you?
- ▶ Tell me about the people who live in your house.
- ▶ Who are the adults responsible for your care?
- ▶ Tell me more about your partner(s). How do they identify?
- ▶ I have not heard that term before. What do you want me to know about you?



What words do I actually say?

- Good afternoon,
learners/friends/superheroes/etc.
- When this activity is done you can
find your family and get a snack.
- A kid left their backpack in my
office today.



Now What: What Helps

School Connectedness

ABES data showed that youth who felt more connected to people at their schools had better mental health; however, young people who experienced racism were less likely to benefit from this protection. More must be done to ensure that schools provide a safe and supportive environment where all students feel connected to people who care, so that all students can fully benefit from the protections connectedness provides.

Source: Centers for Disease Control
MMWR, April 1, 2022

What is standing in the way?

2020 School Profiles data show that:

- 97% of middle and high schools prohibit harassment of LGBTQ students and 80% identified safe spaces for LGBTQ youth, but
- only 44% of middle and high schools have a gay-straight alliance or similar club, and
- only 30% of middle and high schools report training staff on how to support LGBTQ students.

Next steps: One thing to do soon



Questions and Close

