# LGBTQ+ YOUTH

There are more students who identify as LGBTQ+ in your classroom now than ever before. According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data from 2021, about 26% of high school students identify as LGBTQ, compared with 11% in 2015.[1] Now more than ever, it is critical that our programming be inclusive of LGBTQ+ youth.

## QUICK FACTS ABOUT LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE U.S.[2]

**11.1** is the average age that LGBQ+ youth surveyed realized that they were something other than heterosexual.

**12.5** is the average age that transgender and gender expansive youth surveyed realized they were something other than cisgender.

**1 in 5** youth have access to LGBTQ+ inclusive sex education.

## IMPORTANT DATA[3]

In 2023 **approximately 15% of LGBTQ+ students had ever used select illicit drugs and 18% had ever misused prescription opioids compared with 8% and 8%, respectively, among their heterosexual peers. Alcohol use, cannabis use, and vaping rates were also higher among LGBTQ+ students than among their cisgender and heterosexual peers.**

In 2023 **29% of LGBTQ+ high school students were bullied at school and 25% were electronically bullied. LGBTQ+ students were nearly twice as likely to miss school because of safety concerns than their cisgender and heterosexual peers.**

In 2023 **17% of LGBTQ+ high school youth said they had ever been forced to have sex, compared with 6% of cisgender and heterosexual youth surveyed.**

In 2023 **65% of LGBTQ+ youth experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and 20% of LGBTQ+ students reported that they had attempted suicide. They were more than 3 times as likely to attempt suicide than their cisgender and heterosexual peers.**

## FACTORS AFFECTING LGBTQ+ YOUTH[2]

### PARENT/FAMILY SUPPORT

- 40% of LGBTQ+ youth were out to their parents/guardians/caregivers, while around 4% were out to grandparents or extended family members.
- Family support is a significant factor in the mental health of LGBTQ+ young people. Two-thirds of transgender and gender-expansive youth who reported that their families never use the correct pronouns were depressed, versus only half of youth whose families always used the correct pronouns.

### SCHOOL CLIMATE

- 72.8% of high school students said that their school had a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or a similar club at school. However, these resources vary greatly by geographic location, with 83% of schools in the northeast having a GSA vs. 63% in the south.
- About half of LGBTQ+ students do not feel safe at school. The places that they feel most unsafe are bathrooms and locker rooms. Many adults (including school personnel) are either unaware of the bullying or are explicitly unhelpful when informed.

### POLICY

- As of 2023, over 500 anti-LGBTQ+ bills were introduced into state legislatures, and more than 80 of those were signed into law:
  — 23 states have passed "sports bans," which limit or eliminate the ability of transgender and gender-expansive youth to participate on sports teams that match their gender identity.
  — 6 states have passed "forced outing" bills, which require school staff to report to parents if a child is using a different name, pronoun, or style of dress at school.
  — 6 states have passed "Don't Say LGBTQ+" bills, which censor or ban content that discusses LGBTQ+ people, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

* A note on terms used in this report:
- **LGBTQ** is an acronym representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning populations. A "+" references additional identities under the gender and sexual minority umbrella. There are variations of this acronym, such as "LGBTQIA2S+ in which the "I" represents intersex individuals, the "A" represents asexual or agender identities, and "2S" represents indigenous two-spirit identities. The term LGBTQ+ is used throughout this report; however, other versions of the acronym also are used to reflect the terms used in the referenced data sources.
- **Out:** A lifelong process of self-acceptance. People come to understand their own sexual orientation first, and they may then reveal it to others.
- **Gender-expansive:** A person with a wider, more flexible range of gender identity or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.

## WHAT CAN ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY PREVENTION (APP) GRANTEES DO?

1. **Ensure representation.**
   - Educate students about sexual orientation and gender identity. Some curricula have a lesson or a pre-session on sexual orientation and gender identity. If school/organization/state policies permit this content, use these resources!
   - Incorporate LGBTQ+ narratives in your programming. Many curricula have roleplay activities that incorporate LGBTQ+ characters or stories. Others have gender-neutral names and omit pronouns so that they can be interpreted as LGBTQ+. If your curriculum does not have those features, you can ask questions to bring in the voices of LGBTQ+ students. For example: "Do you think this roleplay would be different if the characters were LGBTQ+? Why or why not?"
   - Use images of LGBTQ+ people in presentations, pamphlets and other resources. Check out Affect ⬀ for free images.
   - Regardless of your curriculum or what school policies are in place, there are language changes you can include to make your presentations more friendly to LGBTQ+ youth. Say "partner" instead of "girlfriend" or "boyfriend." Use specific terms to refer to sex and sexual acts so students are clear that you are not talking about only penis-in-vagina sex.

2. **Provide ongoing professional development to your staff on ways to support LGBTQ+ youth. These organizations offer a variety of options:**
   - GLSEN (The Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network) ⬀
   - American Psychological Association: Respect Workshop
   - Welcoming Schools ⬀
   - Los Angeles LGBT Center: Training & Lesson Plans ⬀

3. **Shut down bullying in your classrooms.**
   - Most curricula include an activity on creating group agreements. Be sure to include the concept of "respect" in group agreements. Talk about what each agreement will look like in practice and how the agreements will be enforced.
   - If you hear derogatory comments, address them immediately. Refer to the group agreements as needed.
   - Know the school or host organization's bullying policies and bring in their faculty/staff as needed.

4. **Connect youth and parents to resources.**
   - Know your local LGBTQ+ resources and make sure they are youth-friendly before referring students. Some national resources include the following:
     — The Trevor Project ⬀
     — Human Rights Campaign ⬀
       – 2023 Youth Report for Parents and Caregivers ⬀
     — Trans Lifeline Hotline ⬀ 877-565-8860
     — Q Chat Space ⬀
     — PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) ⬀
     — Education USA: Resources for LGBTQI+ Students

## RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONALS

*Resources from The Exchange*

- Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQ+ Youth (webinar)
- LGBTQIA2S+ Youth of Color Speak Out: Tips for Inclusive Reproductive Health Programming for Youth-Serving Providers (video and discussion guide tool)
- Going Beyond the Acronym: Meaningful Inclusion of LGBTQ Youth (topical training; sign-in to *The Exchange* required)
- Creating Inclusive Spaces: A Facilitator's Guide to Equity and Inclusion in the Classroom (facilitator guide)
- Youth Voices: Helping Facilitators of APP Programming Create Safe Spaces for Young People (video)

*Other Resources*

- Human Rights Campaign: 2023 Youth Report for Educators and Administrators ⬀
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: LGBTQI+ Resources

## REFERENCES

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3. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *Youth risk behavior survey data summary & trends report: 2013–2023.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/dstr/index.html