

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: LEARNING FROM LGBTQ YOUTH EXPERIENCES TO TELL A NEW STORY

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Author



Partners

This report was authored by:

Movement Advancement Project

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GLSEN's mission is to ensure that every student has the right to a safe, supportive, and LGBTQ-inclusive K-12 education. We are a national network of educators, students, and local GLSEN Chapters working to make this right a reality.

PFLAG National

PFLAG is an organization of LGBTQ+ people, parents, families, and allies who work together to create an equitable and inclusive world. With hundreds of thousands of people and hundreds of chapters from coast to coast, PFLAG supports families, educates allies, and advocates for just, equitable, and inclusive legislation and policies. Since its founding in 1973, PFLAG works every day to ensure LGBTQ+ people everywhere are safe, celebrated, empowered and loved.

The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project is the leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention nonprofit organization for LGBTQ+ young people.

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Notes on Language

This report focuses on the experiences of LGBTQ young people. When we use the phrases “LGBTQ youth” or “LGBTQ young people,” we are generally referring to the broad cohort of LGBTQ people below the age of 25. This broader age range allows us to examine the experiences of those under age 18, as well as to examine the ways that people’s experiences as minors often continue to shape their lives as young adults, such as the experiences of young people aging out of foster care, entering the workforce, obtaining housing, and more.

In some parts of the report, we rely on demographic data or other research that is limited to specific age ranges, such as youth ages 13-17 or young adults ages 18-24. In these instances, we specify the age range reflected by the data or research being cited.

Throughout this report we use various terms to refer to the sexual orientations and gender identities of LGBTQ youth. Generally, when we use “LGBTQ,” we mean this to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth, as well as other identities not explicitly included in this common acronym, such as intersex, asexual, Two-Spirit, and more. Further, where we use the term “transgender,” we mean this to include nonbinary youth unless stated otherwise.

As with the approach to data discussed above, there are portions of this report that refer to specific identities (e.g., nonbinary people) as a distinct group. This again follows our attempt to accurately reflect the findings of external data or research being cited, and what group or groups that research studied (e.g., a study of only nonbinary people, or that separated nonbinary people from a larger transgender category).

For more information on these and other related terms, please refer to the definitions in the Advocates For Trans Equality resource, [“Understanding Transgender People: The Basics”](#) and GLAAD’s [“Glossary of Terms.”](#)

Notes on Quotes

This report includes quotes directly from LGBTQ young people about their experiences and perspectives. Some of the quotes come from news articles and other publications, and these quotes are attributed using the identifiers (e.g. name, state where they live) that were used in those publications.

MAP also reached out to organizations working with LGBTQ youth to hear from them directly. These quotes appear separately in spotlight boxes that we have titled “In their Own Words.” These quotes are attributed using those youths’ self-identified LGBTQ and racial identities, and their ages, but not their names to protect their anonymity. MAP compensated these youth for their time in sharing their experiences.

To each of the youth who shared quotes with us, thank you for your time and thoughtfulness. Thank you also to Advocates for Youth and GenderCool for connecting us with these brilliant young people.

INTRODUCTION

Like all young people, LGBTQ youth need safety, community, and support. They have dreams, goals, struggles, triumphs, good days, and bad ones. They want to be embraced by their family, peers, and wider communities for who they are, as they are. Like all young people, LGBTQ youth deserve peace and joy. But for LGBTQ youth in particular, their surroundings do not always grant these opportunities—and instead they often face significant social and structural obstacles, from stigma and isolation to discriminatory laws and political leaders. While LGBTQ youth and their allies often find ways to meet their own needs regardless, they should not have to fight against the world around them simply to live as themselves.

Many factors shape LGBTQ youth's daily lives and experiences, from where they live to who is in their corner; from how safe they feel to how healthy they are; and from how they see themselves reflected in the world around them to whether they see a space for themselves in the world at all. This means they need to be cared for, whether at home or in health care; they need to be nurtured and supported by the trusted adults in their lives, including being given chances to lead and grow in their own right; and they need to be treated equally under the laws and policies of the places where they live and learn at the local, state, and national levels.

However, LGBTQ youth are much less likely to have these vital needs met. There remain high levels of social stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ people, especially transgender and nonbinary people, in the United States, and this impacts LGBTQ youth. Laws and policies still lag in actively supporting LGBTQ youth—and increasingly operate in ways that are directly harmful to their wellbeing. These social and political obstacles, including how they vary across states, impact LGBTQ youth across many key areas of their lives, from their home and family environment to their schools and their access to health care.

LGBTQ youth are speaking out today, asking for the help they need in news interviews, in their responses to numerous surveys, in their direct advocacy, and much more. It is time we all listen.

More than 2 million youth ages 13 to 17—or roughly 9.5% of all youth—in the United States identify as LGBTQ, according to recent estimates.¹ This report shows what we currently know about who LGBTQ youth are, the key areas of their life, and how social dynamics and public policy can impact day-to-day life for these young people. The report also offers key recommendations for best supporting LGBTQ youth and ensuring they have an equal chance to thrive as their full selves.

In Their Own Words: What does LGBTQ joy mean to you?

"LGBTQ joy, to me, means freedom without fear. It's when I can exist as my full self—Black, trans, and proud—without worrying about being stared at, misgendered, or hurt. It's laughing with my friends who get me, blasting music on the train, wearing what I want without second-guessing, and feeling safe in my own skin. Joy is being seen and celebrated, not just tolerated." – *Black Trans youth, 16*

"Being LGBTQ means not only being a part of a beautiful community with a built-in support network, but also automatically knowing that the people in my community will be accepting of my identity. The joy I'm faced with when bonding over the little moments has provided me with a network I've been yearning for since youth as a young Asian American raised in a location with predominantly straight white men and women." – *Asian American Pacific Islander Pansexual Sapphic youth, 17*

"For me, LGBTQ joy simply means being able to feel happiness while being myself and while watching other queer people be themselves. This joy could originate from sources as complicated as seeing policy that supports queer people pass on a national level or as simple as reading a romance between two girls." – *Black Omnisexual youth, 17*

SECTION 1: WHO ARE LGBTQ YOUTH?

Everyone develops an internal sense of self throughout their childhoods and on into the rest of their lives. While conversations regarding sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) tend to revolve around LGBTQ people, it is important to remember that everyone has a sexual orientation and gender identity. And while different people may come to realize their sexual orientation or gender identity at different times in their life, research shows that LGBTQ youth live across the country, in communities large and small, and have many of the same interests, challenges, and dreams for their futures as other youth.

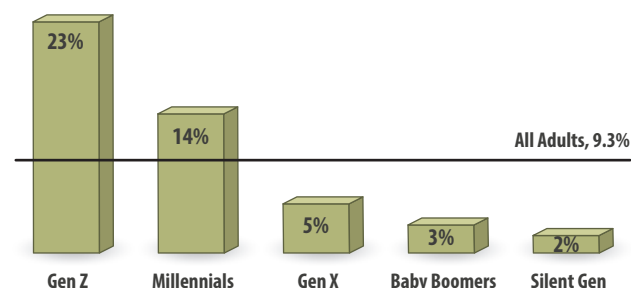
Younger People Are More Likely to Say They Are LGBTQ—Especially Bisexual

Most key federal government surveys, like the U.S. Census or American Community Survey, do not ask questions about people's sexual orientation or gender identity. As a result, there are far less data available about LGBTQ people—including LGBTQ youth—than there are available for many other communities in the United States. Much of what we currently know about LGBTQ youth—including even basic information like how many LGBTQ youth there are—is limited by what data or research are currently available.

Estimates of the number of LGBTQ youth nationwide vary, but research clearly and consistently shows that younger people are more likely to identify as LGBTQ, and that the number of LGBTQ youth is growing over time. Research from Gallup² (as shown in *Figure 1*) and the Pew Research Center³ both show that younger people are more likely to identify as LGBTQ on surveys than older people. For instance, nearly one quarter (23%) of Generation Z participants are LGBTQ, compared to 3% of Baby Boomers.⁴ Research also shows that a growing share of youth in the United States identify as LGBTQ. For example, the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), a health-focused survey of youth ages 13-17, reported that 26% of high schoolers identified as LGBTQ in 2023, up from 11% in 2015.⁵

As discussed in the spotlight on page 3, these patterns of growth may reflect many causes, such as growing social acceptance of LGBTQ identities, growing willingness to answer survey questions about LGBTQ identities, evolving understandings of sexuality and gender over time, or still other reasons.

Figure 1: Younger Adults Are More Likely to Identify as LGBTQ
% of U.S. adults identifying as LGBTQ, by generation (2024)



Source: Gallup. 2025. "LGBTQ+ Identification in U.S. Rises to 9.3%."

For example, studies show that over time, people are recognizing that they are LGBTQ and coming out earlier in life. A study from UCLA's The Williams Institute found that participants who were ages 18-25 at the time of the study on average knew their sexual orientation at 14 years old and came out to others at 17 years old; people who were ages 34-41 knew around age 16 years old and came out at 22 years old on average; and people ages 52-59 identified their sexual orientation at 18 years old and came out to others at 26 years old on average.⁶ Similarly, research from Gallup showed that younger LGBTQ people self-identified and came out to others earlier in life than older LGBTQ participants in the survey.⁷

Importantly—and contrary to the claims of many politicians and pundits—research also indicates that this growth in LGBTQ identification is due to more people identifying as bisexual and/or nonbinary.^a For example, Gallup reported that 59% of LGBTQ people in Generation Z identify as bisexual, compared to 19% among LGBTQ Baby Boomers.⁸ Similarly, research by the Williams Institute shows that the largest share of nonbinary adults (76%) are young adults (ages 18-29).⁹ This is in contrast to the relatively stable number of people who say they are transgender over time, as shown in research by the Williams Institute that found that 0.6% of American adults said they were transgender in 2016, and that 0.5% said the same in 2022.¹⁰

^a While nonbinary and transgender are related terms, and some nonbinary people also identify as transgender, it remains the case that rates of identifying as transgender remain relatively stable, even as rates of identifying as nonbinary have increased, as shown by the Williams Institute research cited above. Please refer to the "Notes on Language" section above for more information about each of these terms.



Why are more youth identifying as LGBTQ over time?

Much has been made of the rising numbers of people identifying as LGBTQ in recent years.ⁱ Some have misattributed this rise in LGBTQ identification, especially among youth, to the false and harmful notion that youth are being coerced into these identities. The reality is that societal acceptance of LGBTQ people has significantly increased in the last 20 years. For example, Gallup data from 1996 show that at the time 68% of people opposed equal recognition of same sex marriages, and only 29% were in favor.ⁱⁱ By 2024 these attitudes have almost perfectly flipped, with only 27% opposing marriage equality and 69% supporting it.

Some of the reasons for that increased acceptance may include:

- Growing state and federal protections for LGBTQ people;ⁱⁱⁱ
- Increased visibility of LGBTQ people in the media and popular culture;^{iv}
- Increased connectedness via the internet, allowing people to find community and support in a way that was unavailable to prior generations.^v

These advances in social acceptance and the progress towards equality, at least in some parts of the country, are reasons why more youth may identify as LGBTQ youth today than in prior eras. It is a safer time for many LGBTQ people to be their full selves in all sectors of their life.

ⁱ KMPH News Staff. Feb 13, 2023. "What's Behind Explosive Growth in LGBTQ-Youth Numbers." Fox26News. See also Marc Ramirez. March 14, 2024. "Portion of US Adults Identifying as LGBTQ has More than Doubled in Last 12 Years." USA Today.

ⁱⁱ Gallup. "LGBTQ+ Rights." Accessed July 11, 2024.

ⁱⁱⁱ Movement Advancement Project. 2020. *Mapping LGBTQ Equality: 2010 to 2020*.

^{iv} Compare GLAAD's (2006) *Where We Are on TV: GLAAD's 11th Annual Study Examines Diversity of the 2006-2007 Primetime Television season* with GLAAD's (2023) *Where We Are on TV 2023-2024*.

^v Rebecca Torrence. 2019. "Queer Youth Exploring Their Identity, One Webpage at a Time." Center for the Study of Social Policy.

LGBTQ Youth Have Many Different Lived Experiences

LGBTQ youth are diverse and have many different lived experiences. To better understand the diversity and complexity of LGBTQ youth, it is important to consider not only their LGBTQ identity, but also other facets of who they are and how those can affect their lives. While, like all youth, LGBTQ youth experience joys and challenges, elements of their day-to-day triumphs and setbacks may be unique to their specific sexual orientations, gender identities, racial identities, and the intersections of these and other parts of their lives.

As previously discussed, there are currently limited national data available about LGBTQ youth. However, what data are available show the clear diversity of LGBTQ youth.

When it comes to **sexual orientation**, for example, the CDC's 2023 YRBSS shows that, among all youth that

identify as something other than heterosexual, 17% are gay or lesbian, 47% are bisexual, and 36% selected "other/questioning."¹¹ Surveys that focus only on LGBTQ youth, rather than the YRBSS's study of all youth, further illustrate the diversity of sexual orientations among LGBTQ youth. On average, across the most recent LGBTQ youth surveys^b from The Trevor Project (2023),¹² GLSEN (2021),¹³ and the Human Rights Campaign (2023),¹⁴ 29% of youth said they were gay or lesbian, 29% said they were bisexual, 11% said they were queer, 27% said they were of some other sexual orientation, and 2% said that they were questioning their sexual orientation or unsure.

Similarly, when it comes to **race and ethnicity**, averages across the same surveys by The Trevor Project, GLSEN, and the Human Rights Campaign^c show that the majority (64%) of LGBTQ youth said they were white,

^b See the Appendix for more detail on responses across these different surveys.

^c See the Appendix for more detail on responses across these different surveys.

15% said they were Hispanic or Latinx, 5% said they were Black, 5% were Asian or Pacific Islanders, less than 1% said that they were American Indian or Alaska Natives, and 9% said they were multiracial.¹⁵ While these private survey responses are less racially diverse than the youth population as a whole (see Appendix), this further underscores the need for LGBTQ-inclusive data collection on federal surveys like the American Community Survey, to gain better and more accurate insight into the demographics of LGBTQ people, including youth.

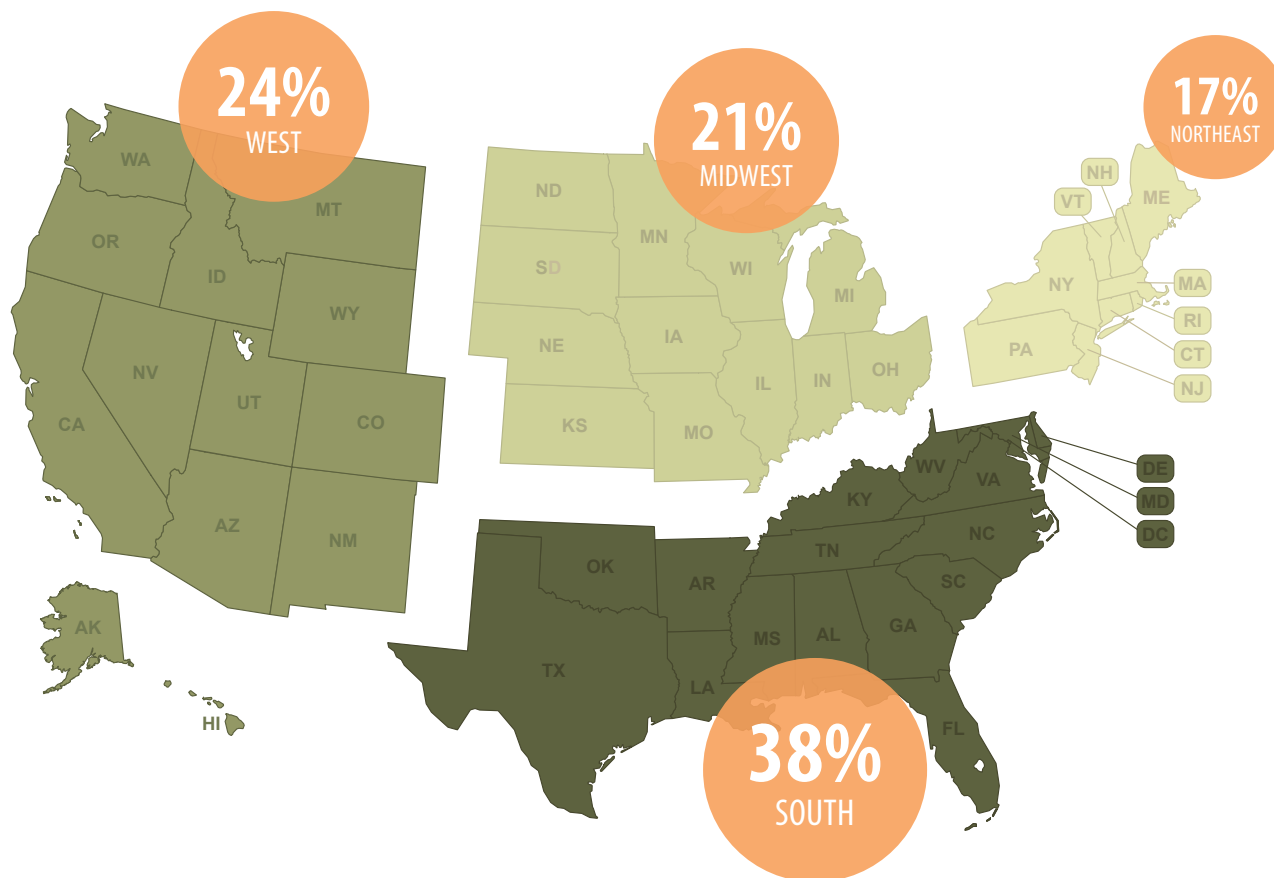
Where LGBTQ youth live in the U.S. can have a big impact on what their everyday life is like. As discussed in more detail later in this report, different states and regions of the country have often drastically different policies that shape LGBTQ youths' lives and opportunities to thrive. Every region also has different customs, economic resources, degrees of rural, urban, and suburban infrastructure, and every one of these differences color LGBTQ youths' lives.

Of the over 2 million LGBTQ youth ages 13 to 17 in the United States, and as shown in *Figure 2*, the largest percentage (38%) live in the South, followed by 24% in the West, 21% in the Midwest, and 17% in the Northeast.¹⁶ The distribution of transgender youth specifically is very similar, with the South and West still home to the largest shares (39% and 24%, respectively), followed by the Midwest (21%), and lastly the Northeast (16%).¹⁷

No matter where they live, research shows that LGBTQ youth need to be affirmed in their identities in order to thrive. The next section highlights experiences of LGBTQ youth in different areas of their lives, and the impacts that support can have on their wellbeing. As one LGBTQ youth recently put it:

"We know who we are... If we say 'I think I'm trans' or 'I think I'm gay' or 'I think I'm bi,' we mean it, and we deserve to be heard." – *Maggie (Illinois)*¹⁸

Figure 2: The South is Home to the Largest Share of LGBT Youth
% of LGBT youth living in each region



Source: The Williams Institute. Regions as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

SECTION 2: IN ALL AREAS OF LIFE, LGBTQ YOUTH CAN EXPERIENCE ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION

Like all youth, LGBTQ youths' lives are shaped by certain key areas: their home and family, their broader community, their experiences in school, and their access to health care, among others. Across all these areas, LGBTQ youth can experience both acceptance and rejection, with the impacts of both often rippling outward to shape experiences in other areas as well. For example, being supported and affirmed by parents at home contributes to better health and academic performance for youth, while being bullied or discriminated against at school can contribute to worse health or wellbeing.

Importantly, there is nothing inherent about being an LGBTQ person that leads to worse health or wellbeing, or the many other disparities that LGBTQ people face as documented by data and research shown throughout this report. Rather, these disparities are caused and intensified by experiences of rejection and discrimination due to homophobia and/or transphobia. In other words, it is not being LGBTQ that causes these outcomes, but rather a hostile and unsupportive environment that does so. This highlights the urgent need to create and cultivate accepting, supportive environments for all LGBTQ people, including youth.

KEY AREAS OF LGBTQ YOUTH LIFE



Home and Family



Education



Health Care



Community



In Their Own Words: What does it feel like to be in spaces where you get to fully be yourself?

"It feels like breathing for the first time after holding it in all day. Like I don't have to shrink or pretend. I can speak without editing myself, laugh without lowering my voice, and walk without tensing up. It's peace. It's power. It's where I finally remember I'm not broken — I'm brilliant. Spaces led by other queer and trans people of color — especially youth. GSAs [Gender & Sexuality Alliances], LGBTQ centers, Black trans-led orgs, or just group chats with my friends. Places where people ask my pronouns, respect them, and don't make a big deal out of it. Places where joy, survival, and resistance live together." — *Black Trans youth, 16*

"When I get to be fully myself, it's a truly relaxing feeling. I often feel like this around my friends and with certain adults who don't have a tendency to judge." — *Black Omnisexual youth, 17*



Parents of LGBTQ Youth

Some parents of LGBTQ youth have reflected on their journeys of acceptance, support, and learning and they share their stories for other families of LGBTQ youth to learn from. For example, the Strong Family Alliance, a PFLAG program, asked several parents to tell their story, and in response to the question, “What would you say to other parents learning the LGBTQ Identity of their child?” they had this to say:

- “It’s not easy, there are many challenges. It takes a very strong person to reveal such a private thing, your child is very extremely vulnerable at this point and worries more about disappointing you and being rejected by you! Take the time to listen and learn and grow together. It’s a journey I’m glad I started and still enjoying!”^{vi}
- “Love them unconditionally. Be the one they can tell things to without fear that you will think less of them. Overcome your own prejudices, because every child needs a safe place to be who they are.”^{vii}
- “You are not alone. Your child is so much stronger than you are or believe them to be. The world is not, usually, going to knock on your door with pitchforks because your child has revealed themselves to be their true selves.”^{viii}
- “Your child’s sexual orientation does not change the person you have always loved. It does not define them [.] they are exactly the same “child” you have loved since birth. Sadly society still has prejudices and you need to be there for them more than ever.”^{ix}

For more examples of parents of LGBTQ youth telling the stories of their paths to acceptance, see The Trevor Project’s YouTube Series: [Learn with Love](#).

^{vi} Strong Family Alliance. “Father Lets Child Speak His Fear and Asks ‘How Can I Help?’” Accessed April 14, 2025.

^{vii} Strong Family Alliance. “A Gay Friend’s Story from Years Ago Helps a Mother Respond Positively.” Accessed April 14, 2025.

^{viii} Strong Family Alliance. “Father of Young Trans Teen.” Accessed April 14, 2025.

^{ix} Strong Family Alliance. “We Just Found Out and Are Trying to Learn.” Accessed April 14, 2025.



Unhoused LGBTQ Youth

One of the pressing issues affecting many LGBTQ youth is their disproportionate experiences of homelessness. Research from the University of Chicago found that LGBTQ youth were more than twice as likely to be unhoused compared to heterosexual and cisgender youth.^x There are many factors that may contribute to homelessness for any given LGBTQ young person, including but not limited to poverty, experiences of violence, aging out of the foster care system, and discrimination in housing.

Providers of services for homeless youth confirm that LGBTQ youth are overrepresented among their clients, and especially so for LGBTQ youth of color.^{xi} They also report that LGBTQ youth needing their services have been unhoused for longer periods of time than unhoused heterosexual or cisgender youth.^{xii}

There are many state policies that intersect with LGBTQ youth homelessness, though the policies themselves are not necessarily LGBTQ-specific. Some of them include policies regarding homelessness prevention and early intervention, child welfare, juvenile justice, school discipline, and more. Advocates working to advance equity for and improve the lives of LGBTQ youth can increase their impact by incorporating policy advocacy in these areas to their portfolio. For much more detail on this issue and the supports that unhoused LGBTQ youth need, see the [State Index on Youth Homelessness](#) from True Colors United and the National Homelessness Law Center, and The Trevor Project’s report, [The Impact of Homelessness and Food Insecurity on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#).

^x Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018). *Missed opportunities: LGBTQ youth homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

^{xi} 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.

^{xii} *Ibid.*



LGBTQ Youth at Home: Family Acceptance Increases LGBTQ Youths' Wellbeing

A defining experience of being a young person is finding and being secure in one's place in the world. For many young people, their first sure place in the world is their family.

Just like other young people, LGBTQ youth do better with family acceptance. Families' support, affection, and acceptance of their LGBTQ children all improve these young people's health and well-being.¹⁹ For example, research from the Family Acceptance Project shows that the more safety, love, and support youth felt from their families with regard to their sexual orientation or gender identity, the more likely they were to have higher self-esteem, better mental health, and believe they would have a good life and become a happy adult.²⁰ These are the things we hope for all youth to be able to experience.

Family acceptance not only positively impacts the lives of LGBTQ young people, but it is protective against negative outcomes. For example, LGBTQ youth with supportive families are less likely to experience depression and suicidality, or to experiment with illicit drugs.²¹ With regard to suicidality in particular, research from The Trevor Project found LGBTQ youth whose parents accepted their sexual orientation were 43% less likely to report having attempted suicide in the past year compared to LGBTQ youth who were rejected by their parents.²² Similarly, transgender and nonbinary youth whose parents were accepting of their gender identity were 36% less likely to have attempted suicide in the last year.²³ The effect was even more pronounced among Black transgender and nonbinary youth, who had a 47% lower likelihood of having attempted suicide in the prior year compared to youth without accepting parents.²⁴

However, many LGBTQ youth continue to face family rejection. For example, a 2024 national survey of LGBTQ youth and mental health found that only 2 in 5 (40%) respondents found their home to be LGBTQ-affirming.²⁵ A separate 2023 study similarly shows that nearly 60% of LGBTQ youth reported experiencing at least one form of parental rejection, such as taunting, mocking, or speaking negatively about them being LGBTQ.²⁶

Thankfully, there are signs that family interest in affirming and advocating for their LGBTQ children is increasing.²⁷ For example, PFLAG—which works to equip families with resources and tools to understand,

support, and advocate on behalf of their LGBTQ loved ones—has seen a significant growth in its nearly 350 chapters around the country in recent years—growing by 25 chapters in 2024 alone.²⁸



LGBTQ Youth in Community: Affirming Community Spaces Help LGBTQ Youth Thrive

The communities that LGBTQ youth live in play a critical role in their wellbeing. This can include faith communities, neighbors, after school programs, online communities, and community organizations like LGBTQ community centers and other youth groups. Community spaces can also include the workplace if the youth are old enough to work in their state, and public spaces where people gather like libraries, parks, and privately owned businesses.

LGBTQ youth who are accepted by their broader community, including adults beyond their immediate family, are more likely to experience greater wellbeing.²⁹ For example, LGBTQ youth who report that the community they live in is very accepting of LGBTQ people were less than half as likely to have attempted suicide in the past year.³⁰ Like all young people, LGBTQ youth need to be able to let their guard down sometimes, connect with others, have fun, and just be kids. This is why it is critical that LGBTQ youth have places in their community where they feel safe to be their full, authentic selves.

Community spaces can be places where LGBTQ youth receive affirmation from supportive peers and adults, and from inclusive policies that show LGBTQ youth that they are welcome. For example, a diversity of **faith communities** model acceptance of LGBTQ people.³¹ This is of vital importance given that one in five (21%) LGBTQ youth report that spirituality is important or very important to them.³² Furthermore, the supportiveness of religious communities is often connected to the level of support LGBTQ youth feel at home: youth who report not hearing their parents use religion to say negative things about LGBTQ people have better mental health and are more likely to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity with their parents.³³

Public spaces like local libraries can show acceptance by displaying safe space signs, spotlighting LGBTQ affirming books and authors, offering community readings of such supportive books, and more. Those governing public spaces can ensure that all people have access to facilities that match their gender identity.

Private businesses can do the same, by being visibly welcoming to LGBTQ patrons.

Moreover, LGBTQ youth who have entered the **workforce** benefit from those spaces being welcoming. One report found that nearly half of LGBTQ young people (48%), defined in that study as ages 13-24, were employed.³⁴ Among these employed LGBTQ youth, 35% reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace.³⁵ However, another report found that more than one in three (36%) of working LGBTQ youth say that work is an affirming space for them.³⁶ There are models for workplaces to be more LGBTQ affirming, such as supporting staff in the creation of LGBTQ employee resource groups,³⁷ ensuring benefits programs are LGBTQ-inclusive, and updating policies so that language is not unnecessarily gendered and that dress codes are not discriminatory.³⁸

Community organizations also play an important role in ensuring LGBTQ young people feel safe, included, and surrounded by supportive people, so that they can feel free to be themselves. For example, there are hundreds of LGBTQ community centers across the country,³⁹ and the 2024 LGBTQ Community Center Survey found that 67% of participating centers offered programming for LGBTQ youth.⁴⁰ Other organizations, such as the YMCA, work to not only ensure that the young people who participate in their events and activities experience acceptance no matter who they are,⁴¹ but also help promote LGBTQ inclusive practices beyond their own programming.⁴² Whether community organizations are explicitly LGBTQ-focused or not, the spaces they create for LGBTQ young people can be an oasis where they are able to be themselves, connect with peers, develop life skills, advocate for the causes that matter to them, and more.

Another community space where LGBTQ youth may find acceptance and build friendships is **online**. These spaces are important for LGBTQ young people exploring their identities, as evidenced by research showing that LGBTQ youth are more likely to be out online than in person. A 2025 study found, for example, that 82% of youth respondents were out about their sexual orientation online, compared to 53% who were out in person; similarly, 80% were out about their gender identity online, compared to only 40% who were out in person.⁴³ This is likely due, at least in part, to the different environment and safety measures available online: the same 2025 study showed that LGBTQ youth overall rated online spaces as kinder, more supportive, and safer than in-person spaces.⁴⁴

Further, while there is a risk of experiencing bullying and harassment online, the ability to block digital harassers can reduce the impact of negative online experiences relative to in-person experiences.⁴⁵

Despite the many examples of welcoming spaces and community organizations for LGBTQ youth, many LGBTQ young people say they do not experience this kind of support. For example, only 9% of transgender youth say their communities are very accepting, and only 8% say that their faith communities are very accepting.⁴⁶ Across LGBTQ youth identities, research shows that only 16% of these youth say that the community where they live is very accepting.⁴⁷

But research also shows that having even just one supportive adult, such as a teacher or health care professional, can make a world of difference for LGBTQ youth. One study showed that LGBTQ youth who know even just one supportive adult are less likely to report having attempted suicide in the last year, compared to LGBTQ youth without any supportive adults in their lives.⁴⁸ This underscores the vital importance of inclusive community environments, to help youth find such supports.

LGBTQ youth are outspoken about the importance of affirming community spaces. Speaking about their experiences at LGBTQ community centers, for example, LGBTQ youth shared the following:

- “This is why coming to The Attic was the best thing that I have ever done. I love everyone’s encouragement and openness. The Attic helped me come out of a major depression, and feel as if my life had purpose. ...I consider The Attic my home, more so than the actual house that I live in.” – *Robert, The Attic Youth Center (Pennsylvania)*⁴⁹
- “Time Out Youth built up my self-esteem from a very low place of isolation and fear—of people finding out this ‘horrible secret’ that I had been ashamed of—and transformed it into something wonderful. I became a whole person through Time Out Youth.” – *Anonymous Youth, Time Out Youth Center (North Carolina)*⁵⁰
- “At The Center, I’m always reminded of who I am, why I am, and where I came from. The very first time I arrived at The Center, everyone was so inclusive and welcomed me with open arms.” – *Isaiah, The Center (New York)*⁵¹



Undocumented LGBTQ Youth

Among the broader population of LGBTQ youth in America are undocumented LGBTQ youth. While there are not specific data on the number of undocumented LGBTQ youth in the country, one study from the Williams Institute estimated that approximately 3% of immigrant adults are LGBTQ people, and roughly half of those (or approximately 1.5% total) are undocumented.^{xiii} Another study from the Pew Research Center found that there are roughly 850,000 undocumented youth in the U.S.^{xiv} While an imperfect measure, if we assume that the percentage of LGBTQ people among undocumented youth is roughly the same as the percentage of LGBTQ people among undocumented adults, it would mean that there are about 12,750 undocumented LGBTQ youth. As previously mentioned, young people are more likely to identify as LGBTQ than adults, so there are likely far more undocumented LGBTQ youth than that.

Undocumented LGBTQ youth are affected by the same policies and social environments as all LGBTQ youth, but they also have some unique needs and vulnerabilities as they are growing up and when they reach adulthood. For some of these youth, the risk of deportation means they may be sent back to countries where they are likely to be persecuted for their sexual orientation or gender identity.^{xv} And for transgender youth in particular, if they are held in immigration detention facilities, there is the additional risk that they are placed in sex-segregated detention that does not align with their gender, placing them at additional risk of harm.^{xvi} Beyond the risk of deportation, undocumented LGBTQ youth are also forced to cope with the mental stress of fear for themselves and their loved ones, and feeling unsafe attempting to access resources or move in public generally.

In 2012, the U.S. government announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”) policy. If an immigrant has DACA status, the federal government may hold off on attempts to remove them from the country. The government can grant DACA status to undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. under the age of 16 among other criteria.^{xvii} Immigration Equality, a national LGBTQ and HIV-positive immigrant rights organization, reports that most LGBTQ DACA recipients, who were all youth when they came to the U.S., fear for their own safety if they are deported and that they are also afraid that their family members would be targeted.^{xviii} The DACA policy is still in place in the current presidential administration for those who already have DACA status,^{xix} but there are several ongoing lawsuits challenging the program, and DACA recipients are worried about whether their protections will be upheld.^{xx}

But even if these youth are not subjected to deportation proceedings, there are everyday challenges that they face as well. For example, undocumented LGBTQ people are ineligible for many public programs, such as financial aid or in-state tuition fees, which means that they may not have the means to pursue a higher education.^{xxi} To learn more about how policy change can improve the lives of young LGBTQ immigrants, see the work of [Immigration Equality](#) and [United We Dream](#).

^{xiii} Flores, A. R. & Sprague, L.D. “Impact of Mass Deportations on LGBT People.” Williams Institute. February 2025.

^{xiv} Passel, J. S. & Krogstad, J. M. [What We Know About Unauthorized Immigrants Living in the U.S.](#) Pew Research Center. July 22, 2024.

^{xv} See note xii.

^{xvi} See note xii.

^{xvii} Immigration Equality. “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).” September 19, 2023.

^{xviii} Aaron C. Morris. “Protecting Undocumented Immigrants and Dreamers is a Queer Rights Issue.” Immigration Equality. September 22, 2023.

^{xix} U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. “Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).” Accessed May 8, 2025.

^{xx} Nicole Acevedo. “DACA Recipients Worry About Being Ensnared in Trump’s Immigration Crackdown.” NBC News. February 12, 2025.

^{xxi} Funders for LGBTQ Issues. “Immigration.” Accessed May 8, 2025.



LGBTQ Youth in School: The Education Environment Can Be a Powerful Support for LGBTQ Students

Outside of their home environment, most youth—including LGBTQ youth—spend the majority of their time in school. As a result, their educational environments can have significant impacts on young people's overall health, including their sense of belonging and their mental well-being.⁵² LGBTQ youth who have spoken out about their school experiences have emphasized the outsized positive impact of supportive educators⁵³ and peers,⁵⁴ as well as access to LGBTQ-affirming student clubs like GSAs (Gender and Sexuality Alliances or Gay Straight Alliances).⁵⁵

The impact of a sense of school belonging is significant for all young people, including LGBTQ young people. Feeling a sense of belonging at school has positive impacts on all young people's mental health, as well as their academic outcomes. A stronger sense of belonging at school fosters "higher levels of happiness, psychological functioning, adjustment, self-esteem, and self-identity," for not only LGBTQ youth, but for youth of all backgrounds.⁵⁶ Research also shows a sense of school belonging can reduce youths' risk-taking behaviors, incidents of conflict in school, and emotional discomfort.⁵⁷ Academically, a greater sense of school belonging is related to higher grades, ability to understand course content, academic motivation, and likelihood of graduation.⁵⁸ It is also related to lower chances of missing school days and misbehaving in school.⁵⁹ Like all students, LGBTQ students have a greater opportunity to thrive when they feel safe and included in their school environments. In fact, for some LGBTQ youth, school can be a sanctuary, with more LGBTQ youth reporting that their schools are affirming spaces (52%) than report that their homes are affirming places (40%).⁶⁰

Importantly, state and federal policies play a key role in how supportive schools are—or are allowed to be—for LGBTQ students, and for all students broadly. While schools and districts can set their own policies, state and federal laws and agency rules greatly influence the school environment. These laws and rules can set the basic standards that schools must meet, as well as the limits on the types of support schools are allowed to offer. Some laws might support LGBTQ-friendly policies in schools, like nondiscrimination policies, anti-bullying rules, cultural competency training for educators, inclusive curricula, and mental

health supports—including suicide prevention policies. However, other policies can hurt LGBTQ students, such as laws that require school personnel disclose their students' LGBTQ identities to their parents regardless of the students' wishes or the risk of family rejection, and "Don't Say LGBTQ" laws that ban teachers from discussing LGBTQ topics, making it harder for students to reap the academic, health, and other benefits that are associated with access to such inclusive curricula.⁶¹

Research shows that when LGBTQ youth specifically are supported at school—by school policies protecting them from bullying and discrimination, inclusive curricula and resources in their classrooms and libraries, supportive school staff, and affirming student clubs like GSAs—the effects can be transformative. GLSEN's 2021 National School Climate Survey showed that students who experienced these core supports were less likely to experience bullying and harassment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, were less likely to hear anti-LGBTQ remarks at school or from classmates online, and were less likely to experience discrimination.⁶² These students were also more likely to report a greater sense of school belonging and psychological wellbeing.⁶³

Yet the data also show that far too few LGBTQ students are able to benefit from these kinds of supports. The same 2021 report from GLSEN showed that 68% of students in their survey sample felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, or a combination of these identities.⁶⁴

Schools don't have to be a difficult place for students, but they currently vary greatly depending on where they are and the key state and federal policies in place. This is why LGBTQ students themselves have spoken out about how important it is for them to be supported in their learning environments:

- "Sometimes it can be really hard as a queer student to know what teachers to trust, so being able to have teachers who are very vocal is important." – *Maggie (Illinois)*⁶⁵
- "When I was socially transitioning, all of my teachers were really supportive... That was integral not just for my mental health, but for my education. I would not have been able to learn if I hadn't been accepted." – *Zelda (Louisiana)*⁶⁶
- "My school's GSA saved my life. It gave me community. It gave me camaraderie. It made me feel like I could authentically be myself." – *Esme (Oregon)*⁶⁷



Incarcerated LGBTQ Youth

LGBTQ youth are incarcerated at a much higher rate than other young people. While they comprise an estimated 9.5% of all youth, they make up an estimated 20% of incarcerated youth.^{xxii} This lopsided representation, twice their percentage among the overall youth population, is even more dramatic when accounting for gender. Among girls who are incarcerated, LGBTQ girls make up somewhere between 40-50% of the population.^{xxiii} In terms of racial demographics, 85% of LGBTQ youth who are incarcerated are people of color, highlighting how youth of color are disproportionately policed.^{xxiv}

The reasons LGBTQ youth come into contact with the criminal legal system are varied and include family rejection that leads to housing insecurity, school bullying, and harsher punishment in schools, which may result in suspensions or expulsions.^{xxv} These impacts are amplified by structural racism and anti-LGBTQ stigma, which is likely a part of why, in addition to LGBTQ youth being overrepresented among incarcerated young people, LGBTQ youth of color are even more overrepresented in the juvenile system.^{xxvi} All of these factors put these youth into more contact with police than their peers. As a result of being placed in juvenile detention or correctional facilities, LGBTQ youth have to cope with a number of harmful failures of those systems to protect them.^{xxvii} These include:

- **Little oversight of facilities**, which results in variances in how well LGBTQ youth are treated depending on the rules in their state or county;
- **Inappropriate placement** of transgender and nonbinary youth placed in sex-segregated facilities based on their sex assigned at birth rather than their gender identity or expression, sometimes resulting in solitary confinement;
- **Abuse and mistreatment by staff**, including sexual misconduct and assault, or attempts at so-called “conversion therapy”;
- **Abuse by other youth or adults** with whom they are incarcerated;
- **Inadequate health care**, including not receiving appropriate health care if the youth in question are transgender;
- **Lack of supportive services**, including the educational programs that they are entitled to receive;
- **Challenges with family visitation**, such as the risk of being outed to visiting family members, or the inability to have visitation with chosen family; and
- **Inappropriate community supervision** after they leave secure facilities and enter into community-based programs that may be separated by sex, and not account for youths’ gender identity.

Contact with the criminal legal system puts LGBTQ youth in the precarious position of potentially struggling to get housing, a job, health care, and more when they are no longer within that system.^{xxviii} But there are many changes that could improve supports for youth who have had contact with the system, and even work to prevent LGBTQ youth from being placed in juvenile detention or correctional facilities altogether. These changes include creating community-based alternatives to incarceration for youth, improving the safety, resources, and health care available to LGBTQ youth in the criminal legal system, and reducing discrimination within the system by appropriately training all of the adults whose work connects to juvenile detention and correctional facilities, and much more.^{xxix} To learn more about this issue and other supports for LGBTQ youth, see the work of the [Coalition for Juvenile Justice](#), [Black and Pink](#), and [No Kids In Prison](#), among others.

^{xxii} The Williams Institute. [LGBT Youth Population in the United States](#). September 2020. No Kids in Prison. (2022). Supporting LGBTQ Youth in the Prison Abolition Movement.

^{xxiii} *Ibid.*

^{xxiv} *Ibid.*

^{xxv} True Colors United & the National LGBTQ Task Force. (2019). [At the Intersections: A Collaborative Resource on LGBTQ Youth Homelessness](#).

^{xxvi} Williams Institute. (2019). [LGBTQ Youth of Color Impacted by the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems: A Research Agenda](#).

^{xxvii} Movement Advancement Project, Center for American Progress, & No Kids in Prison (Formerly, Youth First). (2017). [Unjust: LGBTQ Youth Incarcerated in the Juvenile Justice System](#).

^{xxviii} See note xxii.

^{xxix} See note xxii.



LGBTQ Youth and Health Care: Competent and Affirming Health Care Can Make Life Better for LGBTQ Youth

Everyone hopes for good health, including being able to get physical and mental health care when they need it, not being mistreated when they are seeking health services, and ultimately having healthy minds and bodies. For LGBTQ youth, achieving these important parts of a healthy life must include being supported for who they are. Warm and knowledgeable medical service providers can help LGBTQ youth develop healthy minds and bodies, especially at critical developmental stages in their lives.

LGBTQ youth, like all youth, need medical care providers that can work with them from a place of knowledge, openness, and cultural competence about all aspects of their health. Affirming LGBTQ youth in medical settings can begin from the moment they enter into the space and should carry through to the end of their visit and beyond.⁶⁸ Safe space signage and intake forms that are inclusive of LGBTQ identities allow youth to develop a sense that they are in a space where they can speak freely about their medical concerns and potentially disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to a medical provider.⁶⁹ Further, while all youth need to be able to trust that their privacy will be protected in order to feel comfortable disclosing health concerns to medical staff, LGBTQ youth in particular may have additional concerns about people who do not know their sexual orientation or gender identity finding out because they shared it in a medical setting.⁷⁰ Providers can reassure these youth by sharing what precautions are taken to ensure keep their health information confidential.

As youth enter adolescence, conversations about sexual health become both developmentally appropriate and medically necessary. In many cases youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, are hesitant to begin conversations about sex with medical staff. Providers can support LGBTQ youth by starting these discussions from a base of knowledge that accounts for the different sexual and reproductive health needs that youth with various sexual orientations and gender identities may have, as opposed to leaning on approaches based on the presumption that their patients are straight and cisgender.⁷¹

Even though we know that LGBTQ youth, like all youth, need access to quality, affirming medical

care, care for transgender youth in particular has come under attack in recent years.⁷² Like all young people, transgender youth deserve to be able to access complete and competent health care, including gender-related care deemed medically necessary by their health providers. In addition, parents want to ensure the best care for their children, and medical providers want to be able to develop and tailor treatment plans to each patient, based on evidence, research, and the best interests of their patients. Major medical associations across the country—including the American Academy of Pediatrics,⁷³ the American Medical Association, American Psychological Association,⁷⁴ and so many more⁷⁵—have time and again endorsed the efficacy, safety, and necessity of this best-practice medical care for transgender young people. And yet, this evidence-based, necessary health care for transgender youth is under attack based on increasing political stigma, misunderstandings, and intentional disinformation about the science supporting access to care. As a result, many transgender youth across the country are now, suddenly, living in places that ban best practice medical care. Since 2021, the number of states banning best practice medical care has grown from zero to 27—more than half the country in just a few short years.⁷⁶

In response to these types of policies being passed, some states have enacted “shield” laws. These shield policies are intended to protect transgender patients and their families seeking medically necessary health care, as well as the health care professionals providing this care—particularly in the scenario where transgender patients and families travel from a state that has banned access to medically necessary care for transgender people to a different state to obtain that health care.⁷⁷

In addition to medical care for their physical health, access to mental health care is important for LGBTQ youth. For example, mental health care can make space for youth to better understand themselves and think through their identities. Similarly, such space can be vital for navigating the experiences of coming out or disclosing to family and friends that they are LGBTQ, how to ask for support at home or school, or to learn tools for dealing with bullying or discrimination. According to The Trevor Project’s 2024 National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People, LGBTQ youth overwhelmingly (84%) reported wanting emotional or psychological counseling, but half of those who desired care were not able to get it.⁷⁸ When asked what stopped

them from being able to get mental health care, some of the reasons that LGBTQ youth gave included being scared of talking about their mental health, the cost of care, and not wanting to have to get a parent's permission.⁷⁹ Nearly a quarter of LGBTQ+ youth cited fears of being outed or not having their identity understood as barriers to care.⁸⁰ In addition, youth who were transgender, nonbinary, or questioning their gender identity were more likely than their LGB peers to say that they were afraid they would not be taken seriously and that they were scared that the police would be called or that they would be involuntarily hospitalized.⁸¹ **To reiterate, the mental health disparities that some LGBTQ youth experience come from the externally imposed stressors of having a stigmatized identity, and should not be misunderstood as being directly due to the fact that they are LGBTQ people.**

For all of these reasons, it is so essential that LGBTQ youth have access to affirming, high-quality, culturally competent medical care. LGBTQ youth have said so themselves.

- "This health care has allowed me to be happy, healthy, and my true authentic self – the boy I know I am. I am terrified of what the health care ban will do and worry about how my mental health might deteriorate." – *Max (Louisiana)*⁸²
- "I don't want politicians trying to control my body, my life, and my family's lives." – *Anonymous LGBTQ youth (Idaho)*⁸³

In Their Own Words: What do you want people who don't know much about LGBTQ youth to know?

"We're not confused. We're not going through a 'phase.' We're growing, just like any other teen—and we deserve to do that without being shamed or punished for who we are. We deal with more than most adults realize—housing insecurity, mental health struggles, even violence—but we're still here, surviving and thriving. Don't talk about us. Talk with us." – *Black Trans youth, 16*

"I want people to know that we are the same as anyone else. If you spoke to me on the street, you wouldn't be 'able to tell'—even if I were trans or my appearance had been altered. The extremely large and harmful stereotype of LGBTQ youth has been so prevalent to everyone's preconception of us, but in the end, you wouldn't be able to tell for a significant amount of youth in the LGBTQ community." – *Asian American Pacific Islander Pansexual Sapphic youth, 17*

"We have always existed, we're just being more vocal now. It's not just a trend." – *Black Omnisexual youth, 17*

SECTION 3: LGBTQ YOUTH & POLITICS

LGBTQ people, including many youth, have long participated in advocacy to secure their equality. In this current moment, LGBTQ youth – especially transgender youth – are contending with an increasingly challenging political climate. There is an intense focus on their lives, their health care, and their education in the media. There are also political attacks on their needs through legislation and other policymaking. This atmosphere has significant effects on these youth, whether they are civically engaged or not. Moreover, those who are civically engaged take on additional challenges by speaking up for themselves publicly. The communities surrounding LGBTQ youth must engage with how politics are affecting their wellbeing, offer supports to bolster their mental health, and collaborate with these youth in their efforts to advocate for themselves.

A Snapshot of the Policy Landscape Affecting LGBTQ Youth

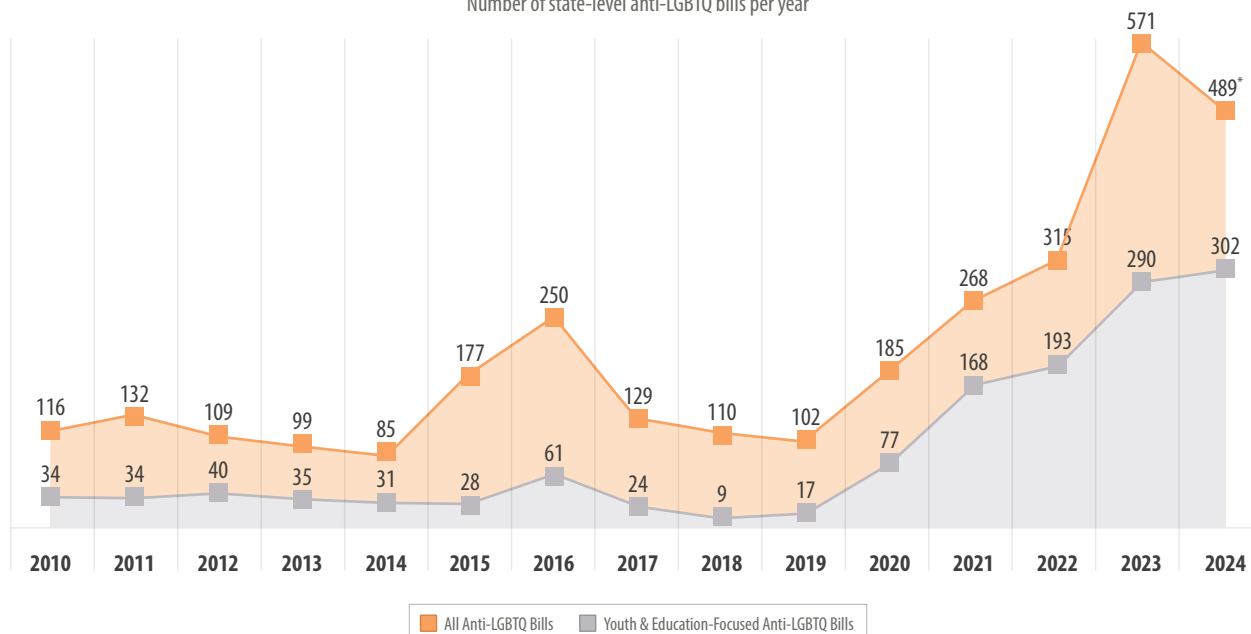
LGBTQ youth are greatly impacted by the policy landscape that they live in. These laws determine things like what kind of health care they can access, how affirming their schools can be towards them, and how state funded entities like child welfare agencies can treat them with regard to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

State laws vary widely—and this means that LGBTQ youth experience significantly different protections from one state to the next.

Since 2020, there has been an escalating wave of anti-LGBTQ bills introduced in many state legislatures, with many of these bills targeting LGBTQ youth specifically. Data from HRC and the Equality Federation show that, for each year after 2020, at least half of all anti-LGBTQ bills have been focused on youth and education, as shown in **Figure 3** below.⁸⁴ Figure 3 also shows that the total number of bills that would make life harder for LGBTQ youth at home, in school, in health care, and beyond has more than tripled, from 77 such bills introduced in 2020 to 302 bills of this type in 2024.⁸⁵ In 2025, a different source strongly suggests this trend continued: the ACLU reported nearly 600 anti-LGBTQ bills introduced—exceeding any previous record shown in Figure 3—with more than half categorized as “restricting student and educator rights” and “health care restrictions,” categories that primarily impact youth.⁸⁶

These trends indicate that opponents of LGBTQ equality have decided that they will have the most success by playing on society’s collective anxieties about the wellbeing of youth. But in doing so, these bad faith actors have exacerbated a destructive wave of stigmatization for an already vulnerable population of young people.⁸⁷

Figure 3: Since 2021, The Majority of Anti-LGBTQ Bills Have Targeted Youth and Education Specifically
Number of state-level anti-LGBTQ bills per year



Source: HRC and Equality Federation's State Equality Index

Note: Texas, Montana, North Dakota, and Nevada were not in session in 2024.

In the companion to this report, *LGBTQ Policy Tally: Mapping Equality for LGBTQ Youth*, MAP has conducted an in-depth analysis of over a dozen types of policies that affect the lives of LGBTQ youth. These policies include some of the most pressing issues LGBTQ youth face today, including “Don’t Say LGBTQ” and other curriculum censorship laws, bans on best practice medical care for transgender youth, and restrictions on sports participation for transgender youth in schools. The analysis also covers policies that can positively impact LGBTQ youths’ lives, such as child welfare nondiscrimination protections, conversion therapy bans, and more. In this analysis, each state, U.S. territory, and the District of Columbia receive a policy score based on how supportive or harmful its enacted laws are towards LGBTQ youth.

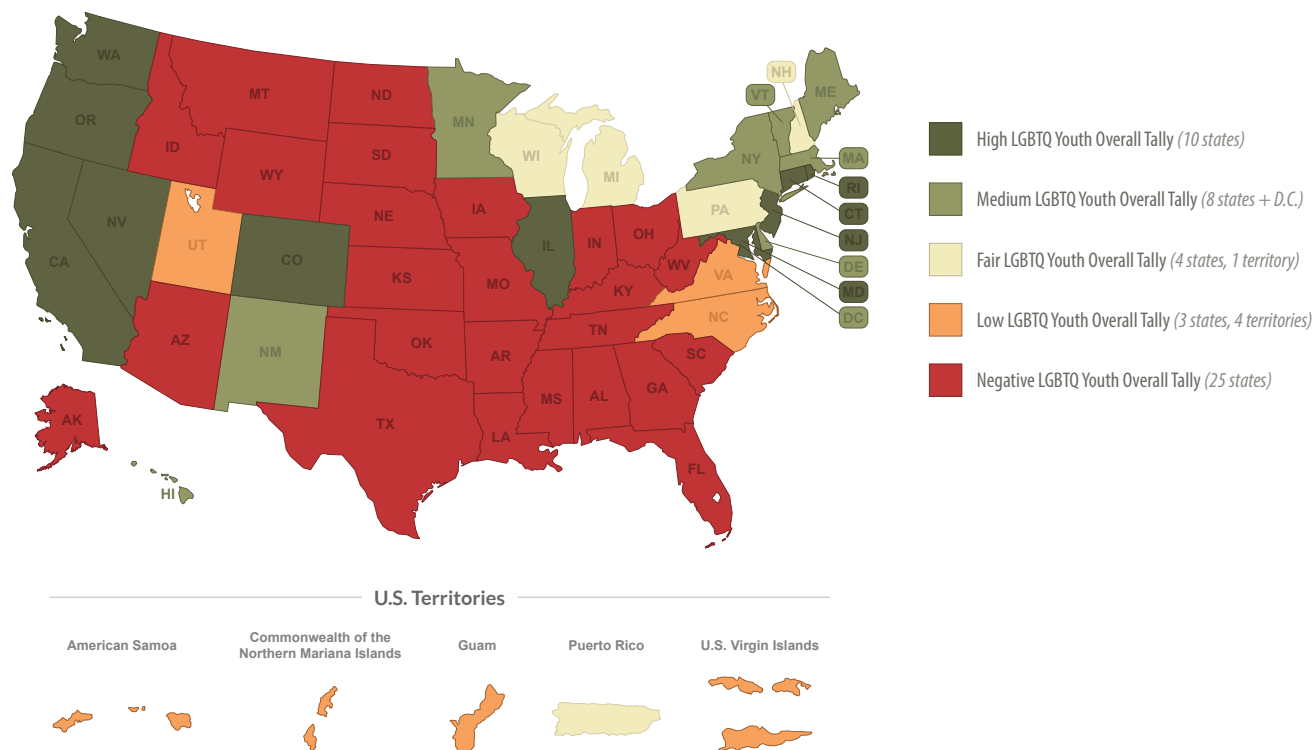
As shown in *Figure 4* below, only 18 states and D.C. have high or medium scores. By contrast **more than half of all states and all of the territories but Puerto Rico have either low or negative scores.**

While this snapshot shows the current landscape of policy for LGBTQ youth across the country, it doesn’t illustrate how rapidly this snapshot has changed in recent years. Although an average of 92% of anti-LGBTQ bills are defeated each year,⁸⁸ in recent years many states have managed to pass harmful laws targeting LGBTQ youth, especially transgender youth. For example, since 2020 alone:

- 29 states have enacted bans on transgender youths’ participation in sports, whether through legislation or agency policies;⁸⁹
- 27 states and one territory passed bans or restrictions on best practice medical care for transgender youth;⁹⁰
- 15 states have passed laws or state regulations that require school staff to out transgender youth to their parents in various circumstances;⁹¹ and
- 12 states have enacted “Don’t Say LGBTQ” curriculum censorship laws.⁹²

Figure 4: Half of States Have a “Negative” LGBTQ Youth Policy Score, Reflecting an Especially Hostile Policy Environment

Policy score categories for each state, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories

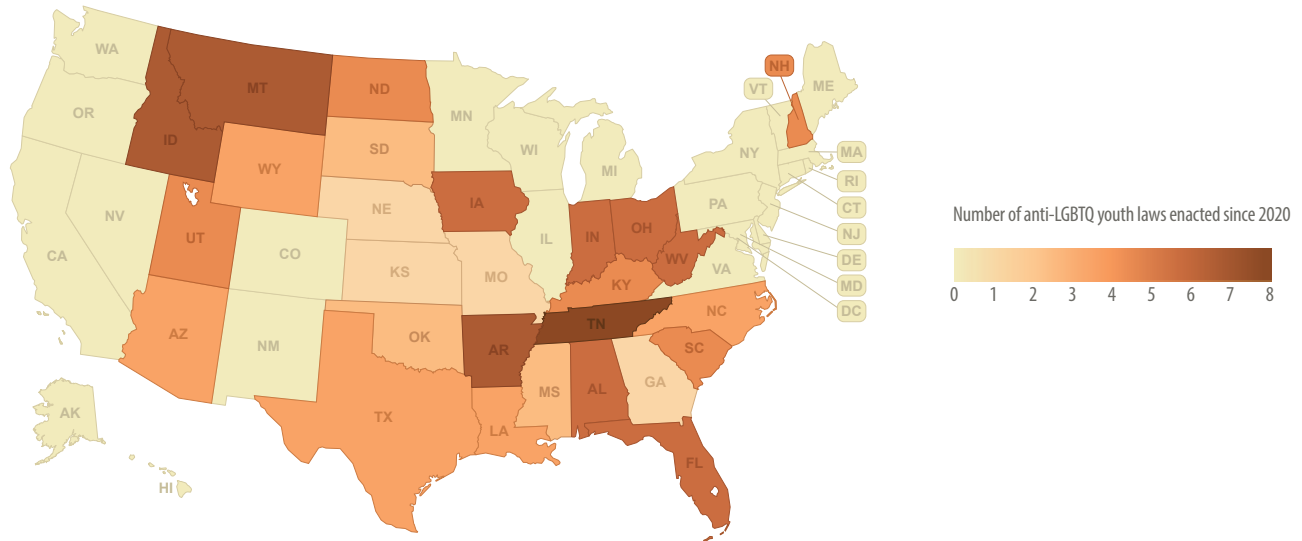


Policies as of August 1, 2025.

Map reflects 16 LGBTQ-youth-related laws and policies. See our companion report, *Mapping Equality for LGBTQ Youth*, for more details.

Figure 5: More than Half of States (27) Have Enacted at Least One Anti-LGBTQ Youth-Specific Law Since 2020

of anti-LGBTQ youth laws enacted since 2020



Source: MAP • As of August 1, 2025.

This map reflects legislation only and does not include agency policy or executive orders. See our companion report, *Mapping Equality for LGBTQ Youth*, for more details.

LGBTQ Youth Relocating to Different States

LGBTQ youth and their families are facing difficult decisions about whether they ought to stay where they live or relocate due to the shifting policy landscape around their rights. Research from the Trevor Project and MAP showed that among LGBTQ youth almost half of transgender youth (45%) considered moving states and one in four cisgender LGBTQ youth (26%) considered moving states in response to local LGBTQ politics and laws.^{xxx} Further, the research showed that the more anti-LGBTQ policies a given state had enacted, the more likely both transgender and cisgender youth from those states were to report considering relocation.^{xxxi}

The same report found that 4% of transgender youth and 3% of cisgender youth had actually moved to a different state.^{xxxii} The report inferred from these findings that as many as 266,000 LGBTQ youth and their families have relocated nationwide.^{xxxiii}

Furthermore, LGBTQ youth who have not yet decided or been able to relocate to a friendlier state reported that that they had to cross state lines in order to access health care (12% of transgender youth and 4% of cisgender youth).^{xxxiv} For more on how transgender people in particular are working through decisions to travel and relocate, see “The Impact of Anti-Transgender Policy and Public Opinion on Travel and Relocation” by the Williams Institute.

^{xxx} The Trevor Project. (2025). How State Policy Affects the Well-Being and Relocation of LGBTQ Young People.

^{xxxi} *Ibid.*

^{xxxii} *Ibid.*

^{xxxiii} *Ibid.*

^{xxxiv} *Ibid.*

Overall, almost half (48%) of all LGBTQ youth live in places that have passed at least one anti-LGBTQ law targeting youth in the last five years, as shown in *Figure 5* on the previous page.^{93, d} These are swift and significant changes that shape the policy landscape that LGBTQ youth must navigate today.

For more detail on the policy landscape shaping LGBTQ youth's lives, see MAP's companion to this report: *LGBTQ Policy Tally: Mapping Equality for LGBTQ Youth*.

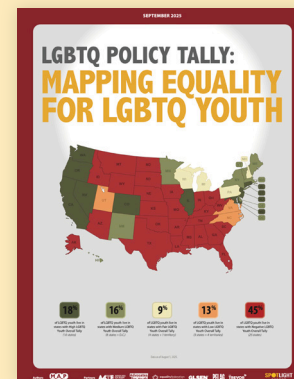
LGBTQ youth are paying attention to what politicians and other anti-LGBTQ opponents are saying about them and trying to put into the laws where they live.⁹⁴ A 2023 survey found that as many as 85% of LGBTQ youth reported paying somewhat or a lot of attention to media reports about rights for LGBTQ people.⁹⁵ And a survey in 2024 found that 90% of LGBTQ youth reported that recent politics have negatively impacted their wellbeing.⁹⁶ The effects of some of these bills becoming laws has caused direct harm to LGBTQ youth, with as many as 71% saying that state laws restricting their rights have negatively impacted their mental health.⁹⁷ Further, 86% of transgender and nonbinary youth reported that whether or not the bills passed, just the debates around those policies negatively affected their mental health.⁹⁸

When asked what they want anti-LGBTQ politicians and their allies to know, LGBTQ youth have made it clear:

- "It's very difficult to live your life as a young person when you don't even have your basic needs met. Some of the sports bans also [could] subject trans youth to a massive invasion of privacy. It is not ok to put us through physical exams that we don't consent to, especially when it's as simple as playing ball? We just want to have fun." – Ky⁹⁹
- "We should have access to healthcare. We should be able to use the restroom. There shouldn't be limits and I feel that oftentimes for marginalized people, there are limits. It's like, *so we have these small wins, that's great, everything else is trash, but we have this*. That's not cool, and it's not enough. For trans people, we should be able to have it all. I don't think this is radical." – Imani¹⁰⁰
- "I will never understand how our government can look at trans people's joy and try to keep that from them just because they don't understand who we are. That will never ever, ever, ever make sense to me because when I see someone living their life, that is beautiful to me. – Amayas¹⁰¹

To learn more about the policy landscape shaping LGBTQ youth's lives, read MAP's companion to this report.

<https://www.mapresearch.org/2025-lgbtq-youth-report>



A 2024 survey found that
90% of LGBTQ youth
said recent politics have negatively
impacted their wellbeing.

– *The Trevor Project*

LGBTQ Youth Organizing and Advocacy

LGBTQ organizing has a long, proud history and has contributed to the significant gains toward equality and inclusion that LGBTQ people have made in America. LGBTQ youth continue this tradition, as they are very active in pushing for a world that is more affirming of who they are, carrying both the torch and progress forward. From the local to the national level, these young people are organizing with their peers and supportive adults to make changes for greater social acceptance, LGBTQ equality in government policies, and advocating around other issues they care about.¹⁰²

At the local level, this work can look like joining GSAs, LGBTQ community centers, and other local community groups that are primarily places of social and material support, but which sometimes also engage in advocacy activities. Beyond functioning as safe spaces that foster social connection, these groups empower young people to make change in the places where they live. For example, through local groups, LGBTQ youth are working on campaigns to make their

^d This map is based on legislation only, and does not include agency policy or executive orders. Some states, such as Alaska and Virginia, have enacted anti-LGBTQ youth-related policies since 2020, but not via legislation. The map includes anti-LGBTQ youth-specific legislation only about policies included in MAP's companion report, such as curriculum censorship laws, school bathroom bans, bans on transgender youth's access to medical care, and others. However, it is important to note that there are many additional policies that may shape LGBTQ youth's lives, and so this is only a minimum estimate of the number of harmful policies passed in recent years. Please read the companion report for more detail.

school policies more inclusive,¹⁰³ they are participating in civic engagement activities, like voter registration drives,¹⁰⁴ and they are contributing to mutual aid efforts to meet the needs of the communities around them.¹⁰⁵ At the state level, many LGBTQ youth have bravely testified before their state legislatures about bills that affect them.¹⁰⁶ They have organized protests to oppose legislation that would make life harder for them to simply be themselves.¹⁰⁷ And on the national level, LGBTQ young people have partnered with nonprofit organizations to get leadership training, skill-building, and education on different subjects to help youth to take the lead in building the world they want to live in.¹⁰⁸

Research shows that a majority of LGBTQ youth (58%) engage in one or more civic activities, including contacting their elected officials, attending political meetings, participating in protests or school walkouts relating to politics, and participating in volunteer and community service projects.¹⁰⁹ When asked, these youth say that they feel like they have to do this work to advocate for themselves in the face of government actions to silence them.¹¹⁰ They do so, even though stepping into the public spotlight can feel scary because they are having to open up about their lives, oftentimes to people with a lot more power than they have.¹¹¹ It is also worth noting that they are often thrust into the spotlight of political debates and subjected to harmful things like social media attacks and even doxxing. The mental health picture around civic advocacy for LGBTQ youth is complex, because for some youth it helps to feel involved in this work, but for others the evidence suggests that drawing from the well of courage that it takes to push for needed change may take its own toll: one study showed that LGBTQ youth who had engaged in these advocacy activities reported slightly higher rates of mental health distress than LGBTQ youth who had not been doing that work.¹¹² This is a part of why it is important for supportive adults to join these advocacy efforts that could lessen the mental health load for these young people.

Advocacy requires LGBTQ youth to be vulnerable and resilient, yet they will continue to step up to the plate to advocate for what they believe in, as they themselves have said time and again:

- “If I can have the courage to stand up and talk for other people who aren’t willing, or aren’t able, to fight for themselves, then I can make a difference, and I think I just realized that this year. I decided to do my best, even if it’s not the most, to speak out about things I care about, ya know?” – *Naomi (Iowa)*¹¹³

- “We’re still fighting for our place to be seen in the world [and] to live authentically and peacefully... But what is most motivating and what has galvanized me to be this activist and leader that represents my community is that through all those hardships, we’re still expanding our horizons.” – *Javier (Florida)*¹¹⁴
- “We will not be quiet. We will always exist. Even if the law goes into effect, we will apply for an appeal ... We will continue to be gay, loud and prideful.” – *CJ (Florida)*¹¹⁵

In Their Own Words: What would be the most helpful things adults could do to support you as an LGBTQ young person?

“Believe us. Protect us. Invest in us. Don’t wait until we’re hurting to care. Use your power to make sure our schools are safe, that we have bathrooms we can use, teachers who support us, and mental health resources that actually understand us. Stop trying to “fix” us—just show up, listen, and fight for a world where we don’t have to keep explaining why we deserve to exist.” – *Black Trans youth, 16*

“The most helpful thing that you could do without even requiring any effort is letting the LGBTQ person know that you’re there for them before they even require help. It can be something as simple as having a sticker on a lanyard that shows that you’re an ally or being open to talking whenever the LGBTQ person might need it. The thing I found most helpful is knowing that if I ever needed anything, I have people that will support me and that aren’t just listening to me because they have to. Availability is key and willingness to talk and be educated even if you think you’re ignorant about the topic and unable to help means more than anyone could ever think.” – *Asian American Pacific Islander Pansexual Sapphic youth, 17*

“The most helpful things adults could do to support LGBTQ youth is to listen. I know that many people grow up with their own biases that can cloud their judgments, so just listening to young people who are trying to figure themselves out for the first time is incredibly helpful. Though the goal is understanding, I think listening is the most important first step.” – *Black Omnisexual youth, 17*

SECTION 4: RECOMMENDATIONS: HOW TO SHOW UP FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

No one is in a better position to identify the supports that LGBTQ youth need to thrive than these youth themselves. In numerous studies, interviews, and policy platforms that they have authored, these young people have shared some things that it would be helpful for their loved ones and broader community to know, as well as actions to take.

For example, in The Trevor Project's recent national survey of LGBTQ youth, the majority of LGBTQ youth said that people can best show their support and acceptance by:¹¹⁶

- Trusting that LGBTQ youth know who they are
- Standing up for LGBTQ youth
- Not supporting politicians who advocate for anti-LGBTQ legislation
- Looking up things about LGBTQ identities on their own to better understand
- Respecting LGBTQ youth's pronouns
- Showing support for how LGBTQ youth express their gender
- Asking questions about LGBTQ identities
- Accepting their partners

In addition to what LGBTQ youth have shared, advocates who work with LGBTQ youth and their families have identified supports that would have positive impacts on the wellbeing of these young people.

For parents of LGBTQ youth, PFLAG, an organization that works to create a safer, more equitable world for LGBTQ people by fostering family connections, recommends that:¹¹⁷

- Parents lead with love so that no matter what they may initially feel about their child sharing their sexual orientation or gender identity, their child comes away from the conversation knowing that their parent loves them
- Parents listen intentionally so that an LGBTQ child feels that they have the space to talk about their thoughts and feelings in an open dialogue
- Parents show signs of support, even if at first the support parents can offer is more subtle

- Parents learn the terminology related to LGBTQ identities so that they can have more robust conversations with their LGBTQ children
- Parents remember that they are not alone in the process of learning that their child is LGBTQ, that their feelings are valid, that they are on a journey in processing this new information and their own reaction to it, and that self-care is important. There are supportive allies, groups, and other helpful resources that parents of LGBTQ youth can lean on

In **school settings**, GLSEN, an organization that works on LGBTQ issues in K-12 settings, recommends:¹¹⁸

- Supporting student clubs like GSAs
- Providing training for school staff to improve their rates of intervening on bullied LGBTQ students' behalf
- Increasing all students' access to inclusive and accurate classroom content about LGBTQ people, history, and events
- Ensuring that transgender and nonbinary students have equal access to facilities and activities, like sports, that correspond to their gender
- Ensuring that school policies and practices are not discriminatory towards LGBTQ youth
- Implementing comprehensive anti-bullying and harassment policies that specifically include protections for sexual orientation and gender identity alongside the other protected identity categories included in such policies

In supporting LGBTQ youth activism, Advocates for Youth, an organization that works to empower LGBTQ youths' advocacy efforts, recommends:¹¹⁹

- Communicating openly about the level of involvement that is expected from everyone—LGBTQ youth and their allies alike
- Being honest about the expectations of the project goals
- Establishing clear and tangible goals; understanding where young people are coming from
- Acknowledging each individual's voice and not assuming that every young person shares the same opinion

- Supporting and connecting young people with opportunities and resources to take care of their wellbeing
- Seeking out resources and training on working with young people
- Being flexible in understanding that LGBTQ youth have a lot going on and their schedule and emotional capacity to show up may fluctuate
- Creating a safe and welcoming space for everyone in the activism space

All of these actions can make a big difference in promoting LGBTQ youth's health, well-being, feelings of belonging, joy, and creating space for LGBTQ young people to just be themselves.

CONCLUSION

LGBTQ youth are just like any other young people in America. They are precious. They are creative, curious, people trying to grow into confident, fulfilled adults. They want to just be themselves, have some fun, and to be free to learn who they are and work towards their dreams. Doing this without feeling loved, safe, or like they belong in their communities is a challenge they should not have to face. But they are taking action to make the world into a place where they and those who follow in their footsteps get to just be kids.

This report shows a slice of what life is like for LGBTQ youth today. Despite the everyday adversities that are a normal part of growing up, and a policy landscape that is uniquely hostile to them, these young people are finding joy and building community. There is more to life for LGBTQ youth than the laws where they live, but they need support from family, friends, and advocates in navigating this moment. That support must be grounded in taking LGBTQ youth at their word when they share who they are and what they need to thrive. The fact of the matter is that LGBTQ youth have always been here and always will, or as one wise young person put it recently:

"The Queer community has a long history of resilience, what makes them think we will stop now?"
- Jameson¹²⁰

APPENDIX: DEMOGRAPHICS OF LGBTQ YOUTH ACROSS DIFFERENT RECENT SURVEYS

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Table 1: Sexual Orientation of LGBTQ Youth Across Different Recent Surveys

Survey	CDC's YRBSS*	GLSEN	HRC	The Trevor Project
Year of data	2023	2021	2023	2023
Respondent ages	13-17	13-21	13-18	13-24
Sample size	4,346 non-heterosexual youth; out of 17,365 youth total	22,298 LGBTQ young people	12,615 LGBTQ young people	18,663 LGBTQ young people
Sexual orientation of LGBTQ young people				
Gay	17%	29%	30%	13%
Lesbian				16%
Bisexual	47%	30%	28%	28%
Pansexual	-	18%	15%	16%
Queer	-	11%	10%	12%
Asexual	-	6%	10%	10%
Questioning	36%	3%	3%	1%
Other		3%	4%	-
Straight or heterosexual**	-	-	-	4%

* The CDC's YRBSS refers to "sexual identity," which we refer to in this report as sexual orientation. The CDC's offered categories are "heterosexual (straight)," "gay or lesbian" (combined), "bisexual," and "other/questioning" (combined). In the 2023 national YRBSS, 4% of all youth selected "gay or lesbian," 11.4% selected bisexual, and 8.7% selected "other/questioning" —comprising a total of 24.1% of all respondents. To compare these numbers to surveys of only LGBTQ youth (rather than all youth), we recalculated the CDC numbers relative to the total share of non-heterosexual youth. For example, we divided 11.4 (the percent of all youth identifying as bisexual) by 24.1 (the percent of all youth identifying as something other than heterosexual); this equates to 47% of all non-heterosexual youth identifying as bisexual, in the CDC's 2023 YRBSS.

** The Trevor Project's survey of LGBTQ youth reported that 4% of youth in the sample were heterosexual. Transgender people may be of any sexual orientation, including heterosexual. GLSEN and HRC's surveys did not report any information about heterosexual youth in their sample, though these may be captured in their "other" categories.

Table 2: Race and Ethnicity of All Youth vs. LGBTQ Youth Across Different Recent Surveys

Survey	CDC's YRBSS (All Youth)	GLSEN (LGBTQ)	HRC (LGBTQ)	The Trevor Project (LGBTQ)
Year of data	2023	2021	2023	2023
Respondent ages	13-17	13-21	13-18	13-24
Sample size	17,365 youth (including non- LGBTQ youth)	22,298 LGBTQ young people	12,615 LGBTQ young people	18,663 LGBTQ young people
Race and ethnicity of young people				
White	48%	67%	64%	61%
Black	13%	3%	5%	8%
Hispanic/Latinx	27%	16%	18%	12%
Asian/Pacific Islander	-	3.5%	4%	6%
Native/Indigenous	-	0.5%	1%	1%
Middle Eastern/North African	-	1%	-	<1%
Multiracial	-	8%	8%	12%
Other	11%	<1%	1%	-

Table 3: Geographic Region of LGBTQ Youth Across Different Recent Surveys

Survey	American Community Survey (All Youth)	GLSEN (LGBTQ)	HRC (LGBTQ)	The Trevor Project (LGBTQ)
Year of data	2023	2021	2023	2023
Respondent ages	<18	13-21	13-18	13-24
Sample size	See details here	22,298 LGBTQ young people	12,615 LGBTQ young people	18,663 LGBTQ young people
Geographic region of young people				
Midwest	21%	25%	24%	23%
Northeast	16%	20%	19%	16%
South	40%	32%	33%	35%
West	23%	23%	24%	26%
Territories	-	1%	-	-

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