LGBTQ Students: Suicide Risk and Resilience

Resources

The Buffalo State Counseling Center is a safe, inclusive space for LGBTQ students. If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health emergency on campus, contact The Counseling Center at 716-878-4436 or visit it on the second floor of the Weigel Health Center.

Remember, the University Police Department is also available for any emergency 24 hours a day on campus at x6333 or you can call 911.

Immediate help from a mental health counselor is also available 24/7 by calling any of the following hotlines:

- Locally, Crisis Services of Buffalo & Erie County at 716-834-3131.
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).
- The Trevor Helpline, a crisis hotline specifically for LGBTQ youth at 1-866-488-7386.

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The Trevor Project also operates a crisis chat during certain hours. See their website at http://www.trevorproject.org for more information.

Other resources for non-crisis support for LGBTQ students include the campus PRIDE Alliance, which can be contacted via their campus mailbox located at Campbell Student Union 402, and Gay and Lesbian Youth Services of Western New York (GLYS). To learn more about GLYS services, including their drop-in center, visit their website at: http://glyswny.org or call 716-855-0221.

The Buffalo State Cares Initiative

In 2011, Buffalo State was awarded a grant on suicide prevention from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in order to help our campus effectively respond to student depression and suicide risks. Grant funding is being utilized to create a comprehensive campus suicide prevention program, Buffalo State Cares.

This is a joint project between The Counseling Center and the Research Foundation for SUNY / Center for Development of Human Services, with funding until 2014.

Students are strongly encouraged to participate in program planning, training, and educational efforts. For more information, contact the Buffalo State Cares Outreach Worker at 716-878-4847.

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**Introduction**

Research has indicated that the mental health of college students is often compromised as they juggle the demands of academics, family life, work, and social relationships. Approximately 15% of all college students experience depression, and a smaller number will attempt or complete suicide.\(^1\) While rates of depression and suicide vary by cultural groups, suicide is a concern for students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning. In a number of surveys across the country, lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents and adults have two to six times higher rates of reported suicide attempts than their straight counterparts because of the ways they are treated by their families, schools, communities, and religious institutions.\(^2\),\(^3\) Furthermore, surveys of transgender individuals reveal markedly high rates of suicide attempts.\(^2\) Hard data on completed suicides is often difficult to determine, since not all LGBTQ individuals identify as such to their family and community and information on sexual orientation is generally not gathered when there is a suicide. It is important to emphasize that research has also shown that suicide attempts for LGBTQ youth are also highly correlated to external factors such as family rejection and unsafe school environments.\(^3\)

**Warning Signs**

Suicide is preventable. The following are warning signs of emotional crisis, including suicide:

- Hopelessness
- Rage, anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped—like there’s no way out
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, or society
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide
- Anxiety, agitation, inability to sleep, or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood changes
- Feeling that there is no reason for living; having no sense of purpose in life

Specific factors that increase the risk of emotional crisis, including suicide, for LGBTQ youth are:

- Low perceived social support and stigma
- Discrimination
- Higher rates of bullying and harassment than other youth
- Higher rates of homelessness and dropping out of school
- Higher rates of substance abuse and psychiatric illness
- Greater likelihood of friends and family attempting or committing suicide
- Stress related to the disclosure or discovery of being LGBTQ\(^4\)

**Resiliency**

We cannot speak of the vulnerability of LGBTQ students to stress and suicide without also speaking about resiliency. Protective factors against suicide that have been identified among LGBTQ youth include the following:

- Peer support
- Family support and acceptance, particularly when disclosing sexual or gender identity
- Connection to other adult role models
- Safety in a school\(^4\)

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\(^1\) American College Health Association, 2004.