

# LGBTQIA+

## A COMMUNITY AT RISK

7.1% of U.S. adults and 9.5% of youths ages 13-17 identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex or asexual (LGBTQIA+). More and more LGBTQIA+ people are growing up in families and communities that celebrate their sexual orientations and gender identities. Sadly, it's still common for LGBTQIA+ teens to be rejected by their families and harassed by their peers. Often, anxiety and loneliness due to negative stigma and discrimination can lead to drug use, addiction and death.



## RESOURCES

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

[www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline)

Youth Pride Association

[www.ypapride.org](http://www.ypapride.org)

The Trevor Project

[www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/)

The Strong Family Alliance

[www.strongfamilyalliance.org](http://www.strongfamilyalliance.org)

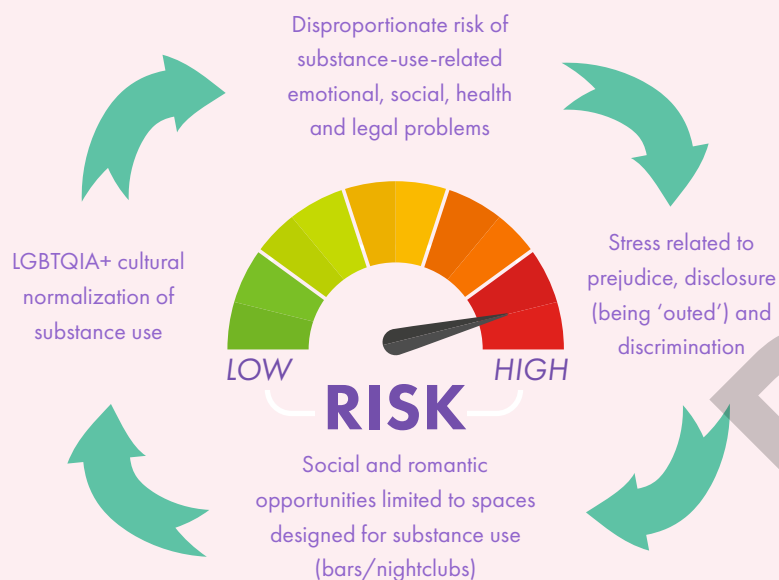
>INFOCUS

# LGBTQIA+

## SUBSTANCE USE

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

## WHY ARE LGBTQIA+ PEOPLE AT MORE RISK?



LGBTQIA+ teens are significantly more likely to be bullied, excluded or assaulted at school. Studies have found that LGBTQIA+ individuals who are victimized have higher rates of drug and alcohol use.

Family conflict and rejection can play a huge role in the stress of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Studies show that parents and caregivers are the most important influence on young people's choices about drug and alcohol use. Unfortunately, for some LGBTQIA+ youth, conflict over their sexual orientation or gender identity can put a strain on these relationships and lead to stress. Stress is a key risk factor that can eventually lead to substance use.

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# LGBTQIA+ TEENS IN CRISIS

Among LGBTQIA+ teens, just 49% felt they could turn to an adult in their family for help, compared to 79% of non-LGBTQIA+ teens. The way parents and other adults react to a teen’s LGBTQIA+ identity heavily impacts their risk for substance use. Studies show that a young person’s risk of problems with drugs and alcohol decreases as their family’s acceptance of their LGBTQIA+ identity increases.

However, young adults are more likely to use drugs and alcohol if their parents or other adults react negatively toward their identity. In some cases, tension is so strong that LGBTQIA+ young people run away from home or are kicked out. Up to 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQIA+. Once homeless, the risk for substance use is extreme.

Even though society has grown more accepting, many LGBTQIA+ individuals have dealt with challenges in the fight for equality. Many will turn to drugs and alcohol as an escape or to feel more comfortable being who they are.



*“I use alcohol in an attempt to briefly forget the self-consciousness that I feel as a part of the gay community. It loosens me up a bit so I am not so worried about things like my appearance or what other people think of me.”*

— anonymous

## Help is Out There

There are many resources available if you or someone you know is suffering from substance addiction. Substance use is never the answer and can only end in harm. However, it is never too late, and organizations such as **The Trevor Project** are here for you. The Trevor Project is the world’s largest crisis intervention organization for LGBTQIA+ young people and the link to their website can be found in the resources of this pamphlet. If help is needed, reach out.

If you are a parent, caretaker or simply know a LGBTQIA+ individual, it is important to support them in their choices. Resources such as the **Strong Family Alliance** can help you by providing insight and more information. Their website can be found on the back of this pamphlet.



## Substance Use Is Never the Right Choice

The brain develops rapidly throughout the teenage years and continues to do so until around the age of 25. Substance use affects the parts of the brain responsible for critical thinking skills and decision-making. Substance use can lead to memory problems, lack of motivation and stunted emotional development. Studies show gender minority populations are more likely to turn to substance use. The more one uses, the more likely they are to suffer from many behavioral health issues, and some even turn to self-harm or suicide.



Addiction has disastrous effects on families and communities throughout the country, and due to social issues, members of the LGBTQIA+ community are navigating this with even fewer tools than their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts.

## Help Is Available

Being LGBTQIA+ does not cause substance use. Instead, it is specific stress factors that compound on people that lead to drug use, and anyone can suffer from addiction, no matter their sexual orientation. However, the LGBTQIA+ community’s rate of addiction is concerning, as are the various challenges and obstacles these individuals face daily that can contribute to a substance use problem.

No matter the circumstances, choosing to use drugs will never make one’s life better. There are always consequences to every action, and when it comes to drugs, the consequences are severe.

Know when to get help. The resources provided can help you or someone you know to receive the care and attention needed to recover and be who they are.

## Safe Spaces

Over time, the LGBTQIA+ community has relied on bars and nightclubs to find acceptance and support. The unfortunate truth to this is that in these settings, many begin to experiment and get addicted to dangerous substances as a way to self-medicate.

Lack of support and gaps in care systems have led to the struggle with addiction in the LGBTQIA+ community. A solution to this problem is to increase support and acceptance for all. Counseling programs and group recovery can also provide help to those who need it in order to lead better lives. If you or someone you know is experiencing addiction, help is out there, and it is never too late to turn to someone who can help.



**Be who you are.**  
**Be drug-free.**