

# Family and friends make great allies.

## Adolescence is when young people do the developmental work that prepares them for adulthood.

- Youth need caring adults; connections to their schools and communities; basics like food, shelter, and safety; and opportunities to test their values and make a difference.
- Mental health challenges can get in the way of this crucial healthy youth development.
- Rates of depression and anxiety are high among adolescents. Suicide is a leading cause of death in this age group: according to the CDC's most recent Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, approximately 9% of high school students have attempted suicide.<sup>1</sup>

## Bias-based bullying – at home or at school – worsens physical and mental health issues.

- Aggression that stigmatizes a person's identity (gender, race or ethnicity, sexuality, body size) severely affects physical and mental health and academic engagement.
- Having multiple marginalized identities increases an individual's chances of experiencing bias-based bullying.<sup>2</sup>
- Young people with multiple marginalized identities experience much less – a third to half as much – emotional distress if they do NOT experience bias-based bullying.<sup>3</sup>
- Being resilient isn't enough: experiencing bullying is linked to headaches and stomach aches, substance abuse, and poorer mental health, including suicidal ideation.

82%

As many as 82% of LGBTQ+ students reported feeling unsafe in school because of stigma based on at least one of their actual or assumed personal characteristics. These experiences are especially common among LGBTQ+ youth of color

## This is what it looks to feel safe around friends and families.

Trans or gender diverse teens who report having strong connections with their parents **experience much lower rates of emotional distress**. Having a network of caring adults can help decrease rates of depression, suicidality, and substance use.<sup>5</sup>

“My mom mentioned that, ‘Hey, we can get you to a gender doctor,’ when I was questioning my gender. Not everyone’s family is super supportive. I lucked out.”

“The first time I painted my nails, my friend’s mom gave me one of her bottles of nail polish for an extra color.”

“With my asexuality, my friends were just like, ‘I understand it. I can sympathize. I don’t know what you’re going through, but that’s cool.’”

“My parents always compliment me on my outfits, and my friends also give me platonic compliments, like ‘Oh, you’re so pretty’ and stuff like that.”

“It was scary coming out to my abuelita, but she was very accepting. She was like, this is a different generation, and I understand that, so I’m going to try to be accepting.”

“The people that I hang around with, they’re very respectful about my sexuality and my Dominican-Ecuadorian side.”

“I went into my 8-year-old brother’s room, and I’m like, ‘Yeah, I’m trans,’ and he was like, ‘Oh, you’re trans? What name do you want to go by?’”

## Act daily to stop bias-based bullying in your family and friend group.

Young people report experiencing bullying as a dehumanizing series of daily, negative interactions. Transphobia, in particular, is often expressed with other “isms.” Allies’ short, strong replies can shift power dynamics, humanize everyone involved, and reestablish a safe space:

**“I don’t tolerate hate speech of any kind in my home.”**

**“Quit throwing shade at my friend.”**

Follow up with your distressed friend or family member. Offer to share formal resources (GLSEN, a local support group or therapist) after you have reinforced your personal allyship.

**IT’S SIMPLE:  
BE PROACTIVELY,  
ASSERTIVELY KIND.**



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## Be clear that your home or friend group is a safe space. ~~~~~

“ My grandma advocates for me and she’s the person who told me about the Pride Festival, because I didn’t even know about it.

“ My dad had been calling me *mi hija*, like “daughter.” Now, he calls me *mi hijo*, which is a boy term. He’s been supportive like that.

“ When I first came out to him, my uncle said, OK. ‘I still love you either way. There’s nothing wrong with that.’

“ I knew that my friends would still love me exactly the same and treat me exactly the same when I came out to them. They were just so supportive.

## Call people by their chosen name and pronouns ~~~~~

“ My parents just told my extended family, ‘Hey, she’s going by he/him now and he’s going by [Name] now, so that’s what we’re going to call him.’

“ It was a little harder for my older brother to understand, because he is autistic, but once he got the memo, he always corrected my father. He was like, ‘Actually, [Name] is a boy.’

“ My aunt and uncle were very chill about it. We were playing a board game, tabletop game. They asked me what my name and pronouns were. They’re really accepting.



## Be loud in your allyship. ~~~~~

“ My friends check up on me when anti-queer bills are being proposed. Like, ‘Hey, are you good? Do you need anything from me?’ I greatly appreciate that. I don’t get a lot from the Asian American side, because of how white passing I am.

“ When people are passive, it makes it seem like there are equal numbers of people who are really hateful, and loudly hateful, and that’s frustrating: it gives the impression that there is less acceptance than there actually is.

“ There are not enough people who are really loud about their support.

## Be persistent. When you make a mistake, apologize. Do better next time. ~~~~~

“ My grandma tries her best to go with the names and pronouns. If she calls me by my dead name, she’ll say, ‘Oh, I’m sorry, that was the wrong name,’ and will fix it.

“ My mom told my grandma that I use they/them pronouns. My grandma said to me, “I’m old, and my brain moves slower. It’s not because of you or anything you’ve done. I just have to get used to it.” Honestly, she picked up my name and pronouns quicker than my mom and dad did.



### About the research

This research uses existing surveillance data from three adolescent health data sets: the Minnesota Student Survey, the California Healthy Kids Survey, and the LGBTQ National Teen Survey. Quotes come from interviews with 58 trans and gender minority youth of color. To learn more about identity-based aggression, visit [Health Environments and Stigmatized Youth](#).

1 YRBSS results. Cdc.gov. Published June 29, 2023. Accessed September 28, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbss/results/index.html>

2 Gower AL, Rider GN, del Río-González AM, Erickson P, Thomas D, Russell ST, Watson RJ, Eisenberg ME. Application of an intersectional lens to bias-based bullying among LGBTQ+ youth of color in the U.S. *Stigma & Health*. 8(3):363-371. 2023.

3 Eisenberg ME, Lawrence SE, Eadeh HM, Suresh M, Rider GN, Gower AL. Emotional distress disparities across multiple intersecting social positions: The role of bias-based bullying. *Pediatrics*. 2024;153(2):e2023061647. doi:10.1542/peds.2023-061647

4 GLSEN.org. Accessed April 25, 2024. [https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Executive\\_Summary-EN.pdf](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Executive_Summary-EN.pdf)

5 Gower AL, Rider GN, Brown C, McMorris BJ, Coleman E, Taliaferro LA, Eisenberg ME. Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth: Protection Against Emotional Distress and Substance Use. *Am J Prev Med*. 2018 Dec;55(6):787-794. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2018.06.030. Epub 2018 Oct 19. PMID: 30344037; PMCID: PMC6501838.

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