



Why you should care about Suicide and Suicide Attempts among Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender (GLBT) Youth

Surgeon General Satchel's 2001 Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior:

"Sexual orientation is usually determined by adolescence, if not earlier (Bell et al, 1981), and there is no valid scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be changed (Haldeman, 1994; APA, 2000). Nonetheless, our culture often stigmatizes homosexual behavior, identity and relationships (Herek, 1993). These anti-homosexual attitudes are associated with psychological distress for homosexual persons and may have a negative impact on mental health, including a greater incidence of depression and suicide, lower self-acceptance and a greater likelihood of hiding sexual orientation (Gonsiorek, 1982; Ross, 1985; Ross, 1990; Greene, 1997; Remafedi, 1998). Although the research is limited, transgendered persons are reported to experience similar problems."¹

Suicide is the third leading cause of adolescent mortality in the United States, accounting for 13 percent of deaths between ages 15 and 24. In 2000, more teenagers and young adults died of suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia and influenza, and chronic lung disease combined.² According to studies by Fergusson, Garofalo, and Remafedi gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are up to three to five times more likely to attempt suicide.³

Statistics to consider:

- 33% - 42% of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth reported a suicide attempt in the past year.⁴
- Surveys conducted on GLBT young people in Kentucky found that those reporting higher frequencies of verbal harassment in their school and community were more likely to have attempted suicide.⁵
- 97% of students in public schools report regularly hearing homophobic remarks from peers, (words such as "faggot," "dyke", "that's so gay" or "queer").⁶
- 36% of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth report hearing homophobic remarks from faculty or school staff.⁷
- Two-thirds of guidance counselors harbor negative feelings toward gay and lesbian people, and less than 20% have received training on serving gay and lesbian students.⁷
- Lesbian, bisexual and gay youth who self-identify but have not disclosed this information to others are more likely to commit suicide⁸
- 26% of gay adolescent males were forced to leave home as a result of their sexual identity.⁹
- Lesbian, bisexual and gay youth have a 10-30% higher incidence of using tobacco, alcohol and other drugs.¹⁰

Resources:

APA Healthy Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students Project

<http://apa.org/ed/hlgb/>

Understanding Transgender Identity

www.hbgda.org/socv6.html

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG)

www.pflag.org

GLBTQ Youth Resources

www.youthresource.com www.nyacyouth.org

www.louisvilleyouthgroup.org

References

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<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/sexualhealth/caH.htm>
2. National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 50, No. 16, September 16, 2002 Found on the web:
http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/pdf/nvsr50_16t1.pdf.
3. Fergusson, David, et al. "Is Sexual Orientation Related to Mental Health Problems and Suicidality in Young People?" *Archives of General Psychiatry* 56 (10): 876-880, 1999.
3. Garofalo, Robert. & Wolf, Cameron. The Association Between Health Risk Behaviors and Sexual Orientation Among a School-based Sample of Adolescents. *Pediatrics*; v101 n5 p895-902, 1998.
3. Remafedi, Gary; French, Simone. The relationship between suicide risk and sexual orientation: Results of a population-based study. *American Journal of Public Health* 88 (1): 57-60, 1998.
4. Massachusetts Dept. of Education (1995); D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) American Journal of Community Psychology, 21, 421-448; Proctor and Groze (1994) Social Work, 39, 504-513; GLSEN (1999).
5. University of Kentucky YMSM Project with funding from National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, NIH grant #AA10747 to Rick Zimmerman, Principal Investigator, 2002.
6. Massachusetts Governor's Committee of Gay and Lesbian Youth (1993) *Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth*.
7. Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's climate report
<http://www.glsen.org/templates/news/record.html?section=20&record=1307>
8. D'Augelli, Hershberger, et al. (2001) on youth suicide predictors
9. Paul Gibson, "Gay Male and Lesbian Youth Suicide," Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide, 1989.
10. Massachusetts Dept. of Education (1995); Safe Schools Coalition of Washington (1999).