



Key Points

What is it?

Culturally competent care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning youth (LGBTQ) is about providing the kind of care and support that is compassionate and reflects an understanding of their unique challenges, needs, and strengths.

Why is this issue important?

Providing culturally competent care to LGBTQ youth is very important because they have higher rates of suicide attempts than their straight peers. They generally have more risk factors, more severe risk factors, and fewer protective factors than heterosexual youth.

Culturally competent care requires an awareness and knowledge of the issues specific to LGBTQ youth as well as the ability to communicate in a way that expresses acceptance and compassion. If professionals in the behavioral health field can provide culturally competent care to this population, then LGBTQ youth are more likely to seek care when they need it, and the care they receive will be more appropriate and effective.

What are the challenges to implementation?

- Discrimination is linked to risk factors for suicide, including lack of access to culturally competent care.
- Resources for the LGBTQ population are limited.
- Behavioral health providers may not have received the training and resources necessary to adequately understand the unique needs and challenges of the LGBTQ population.

How can we overcome those challenges?

- Become more educated: Learn all you can about the strengths and issues unique to LGBTQ people, including identity, disclosure, discrimination, and challenges with accessing services.
- When planning services/programs that will include this population, involve LGBTQ people in the process to ensure that the services/programs will be responsive to and affirming of their unique needs.
- Assume clients or patients could be any sexual orientation or gender identity, and convey acceptance.
- Assess and respect an LGBTQ youth's decision about coming out to others.
- Use a strengths-based approach when working with LGBTQ clients to help them identify their own internal strengths as well as the supports in their environment.
- Ensure your behavioral health care office endorses inclusion and safety.
- Assess the cultural competency of the service providers you refer LGBTQ clients to, and share educational information with them on LGBTQ, if necessary.
- Provide information about LGBTQ suicide risk in all suicide prevention trainings alongside information about other at-risk groups.
- Include LGBTQ competency in graduate level education for behavioral health professionals.

"We want to bring the LGBTQ community in, so we are planning services with the community, not necessarily for the community."

Ashby Dodge, LCSW, Clinical Director,
The Trevor Project