



A guide for parents and caregivers to support youth

Coping During COVID: LGBTQIA+

For many folks in the LGBTQIA + community, the stress, pressure and isolation of the pandemic have been uniquely challenging.

Caring for your mental health has never been more important. Here are some tips that can help.



Blue Shield of California and the Child Mind Institute are teaming up to provide resources and share the latest research on youth mental health as part of Blue Shield of California's BlueSky youth mental health initiative.

IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS, HELP IS AVAILABLE RIGHT AWAY. If you're concerned that you or a friend is unsafe, may be in danger of self-harm, or may be suicidal or overdosing, Call 911. Tell responders as many details as possible so they can be prepared when they arrive.

24/7 SUPPORT LINES

Trevor Lifeline (LGBTQ youth specific):
1-866-488-7386

Crisis Text Line:
text UROK to 741741

Essential Community Services:
Dial 211

START WITH SELF-CARE AND SUPPORT

Create a (supportive) support network:

Whether you're agreeing to have a daily FaceTime check-in with folks who help you feel supported and loved, meeting a friend for a physically distant walk in the park, or just having a phone call with family or friends, it's important to stay connected. That said, this may be a good time to practice setting boundaries with friends or family who bring stress or drama, are unsupportive, or need more than you're able to give right now.

Be intentional about making healthy choices

The added anxiety and lack of structure right now can make it easy to slip into habits that feel good in the moment but can be detrimental in the long term. This doesn't mean you need to pressure yourself to get into tip-top shape or avoid eating ice cream or not binge your favorite shows. It does mean being thoughtful and intentional about how you're treating yourself and your body. That could be anything from taking an online yoga class to creating art that feeds you creatively, to participating in activism. Or you could create a simple mindfulness practice by doing things like deep breathing, being present, finding space to meditate, and just taking time to notice how your body is feeling in the moment.

Be thoughtful about coping strategies

Research tells us that LGBTQIA+ communities can be at greater risk for drug and alcohol addiction and abuse, something that's even more serious for those who are struggling with mental health issues. If you find yourself using substances to manage struggles, it's time to get some help. Getting high or drunk can feel like a good way to cope in the moment, but it can exacerbate mental health issues you may already be experiencing — or spin out of control and become a problem of its own.

Find safe spaces online:

The internet can be an amazing resource during this time of isolation. Seek out spaces where you feel welcomed, safe and seen. Maybe that's an account celebrating people of color across the gender spectrum, or a trans-positive space in a gaming community.

Just remember to be conscious and intentional when choosing who and what you're following. It can be easy to get sucked into unhealthy environments online: accounts that trade in FOMO, spaces that have the potential to be toxic (or where you're likely to encounter trolls or hate speech). The unfollow button exists for a reason!

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GET HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

Caring for yourself means knowing when to ask for help. For LGBTQIA+ folks with mental health issues, the added pressures of the pandemic can exacerbate longstanding mental health issues. Or you may be experiencing mental health struggles for the first time. No matter what the situation, you do not have to do this alone.

Know the signs

Sometimes you know when your mental health needs attention, but other times serious mental health issues seem to sneak in, becoming the “new normal” without your awareness.

This is especially common now, when everyone seems to be struggling. For example, most people are feeling worried. But if you find you’re having intrusive thoughts about terrible things happening to you or people you love, or feel so anxious you’re having panic attacks, or can’t get out of bed....then it’s definitely time to talk to someone.

Checking in with yourself, especially if you know you’re prone to mental health issues, can help you spot struggles and realize when it’s time to ask for help. Some check-in questions could be:

✓ **How often do you feel anxious/angry /sad/stressed?**

✓ **Are you feeling hopeless or crying more than usual?**

✓ **Are your feelings making it hard to get through the day?**

✓ **Are you able to enjoy things that usually make you happy?**

Know what kind of help is available

If you are struggling, don’t wait. Reaching out is the first step to find the help and support you need.

🗨️ **Talk to someone**

This can be anyone you trust and feel comfortable sharing with: a teacher, friend, your primary care doctor, coach, someone in your community — any person you can rely on to listen and provide a safe space to share what you’re going through.

🔍 **Find a therapist or other mental health provider**

If you already have someone you’ve seen in the past, reach out and see if it’s possible to schedule a telehealth appointment. If you’re just beginning therapy, ask parents, your local LGBTQIA+ center or caregivers for help finding someone, look online, or ask friends or community members for suggestions.

👤 **Feeling safe and understood is a big part of building a successful therapeutic relationship**

Look for a provider who makes you feel comfortable and seen.

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Online resources

There are also excellent online resources for LGBTQIA+ folks experiencing mental health issues. Here are some places:

- ✓ **The Trevor Project**
- ✓ **The Trans Lifeline Hotline**
- ✓ **Validation Station**
- ✓ **The Born This Way Foundation**
- ✓ **The National Center for Transgender Equality**
- ✓ **The LGBT National Help Center**

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