

2SLGBTQIA+

2SLGBTQIA+ youth experience significant health inequities compared to their cisgender heterosexual peers. These inequities highlight the importance of understanding factors that influence their health. Families have a profound impact on the health of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. Research consistently shows that family reactions play a major role in their risk and well-being.²

IMPORTANT FACTS

Family rejection is strongly linked to negative health outcomes. 2SLGBTQIA+ youth who experience high levels of family rejection are at a significantly increased risk for:

- **Mental health problems**, including depression and suicidality. Highly rejected youth are more than eight times as likely to have attempted suicide and nearly **six times as likely to report high levels of depression**.
 - **Substance use**. They are more than **three times as likely to use illegal drugs**.
 - **Sexual risk behaviors**, including increased HIV risk.
 - **Homelessness** and entering the foster care system, as they may be forced to leave home.
 - **Lower self-esteem** and increased isolation.
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WHAT TO REMEMBER

Parental and family support is associated with better health outcomes. 2SLGBTQIA+ youth who perceive strong family support tend to have:

- Better mental health.
- Lower risk of substance abuse.
- Lower sexual risk behaviors.
- Higher self-esteem, greater life satisfaction and a stronger belief in a positive future as an LGBTQ adult.

The coming out process is often challenging for both youth and parents.

While it can be a significant stressor, parental acceptance is crucial. Parents may initially feel uncertain, stressed, confused or surprised, but their role as an anchor is key.

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PARENTING AND HEALTH

IMPORTANT FACTS

- Parenting practices, such as monitoring and communication, are complex for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. While generally protective for adolescents, their influence on 2SLGBTQIA+ youth's health outcomes can be mixed and requires parents to be aware of and tolerant of their child's identity and provide tailored health information. Open, mutual, and low-conflict communication is linked to better health outcomes.
- Many parents lack 2SLGBTQIA+-specific health information and skills to support their children, such as knowledge about safer sex or coping with bullying. They may also be unaware of the negative impact of seemingly well-intentioned rejecting behaviors.
- Misconceptions about sexual orientation and gender identity are common among parents. It is important for parents to understand that it is not "just a phase."
- There is no cure; it is not something that needs to be fixed.
- No one, including parents, can make someone gay.
- Support and education for parents are crucial. Families are motivated to learn when they understand the powerful impact of their actions on their child's well-being. Even a small decrease in family rejection and a small increase in support can significantly reduce health risks.
- Schools play a vital role in supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, but bullying is a significant problem. Parents should stay involved with schools, look for signs of bullying, advocate for inclusive policies like Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and push for inclusive sex education.
- More research and innovation are needed to understand family influences on 2SLGBTQIA+ youths' health and to develop effective interventions. Current research is limited, often focusing only on youth perspectives or accepting parents and there are no existing randomized controlled trials of family-based interventions specifically for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.
- Parents can take specific actions to support their 2SLGBTQIA+ children, even if they initially feel uncomfortable. These include expressing affection, talking about their child's identity, advocating for them, connecting them with resources and role models and welcoming their friends and partners. Organizations like Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) provide support to parents.¹²³

EDUCATION AND UNDERSTANDING

- Learn accurate facts about sexual orientation and gender identity to combat common misconceptions. Understand that their identity is not just a phase, there is no cure or fix, and no one can make someone gay.
- Recognize that gender identity develops at early ages (around 2-3). Avoid shaming or embarrassing gender-nonconforming behavior, as parental fear of societal harm can lead to seemingly well-intentioned but rejecting actions.

FOSTERING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND FUTURES

- Ensure they form healthy relationships as they begin dating. Be involved and engaged, and encourage healthy, age-appropriate dating to normalize LGBTQ relationships.
- Stay informed about their social media and phone application use, monitoring content and discussing it with them. Understand that youth may turn to these apps if they feel they lack guidance and support elsewhere, highlighting the importance of being available for your child.¹²³

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND ACCEPTANCE

- Let your child know they are loved unconditionally. Parental acceptance acts as their anchor, allowing them to handle external challenges. Simple phrases like, “I’m here for you. I love you, and I will support you no matter what” can be profoundly meaningful.
- Express affection when your child shares their 2SLGBTQA+ identity with you or when you learn about it.
- Support your child’s 2SLGBTQA+ identity even if you initially feel uncomfortable, stressed, confused or surprised. It’s vital not to withdraw when they need you most.
- Welcome your child’s 2SLGBTQA+ friends and partners into your home and family activities and events.
- Support your child’s gender expression.
- Believe that your child can have a happy and productive future as an 2SLGBTQA+ adult.

ADVOCACY AND PROTECTION

- Require that other family members respect your 2SLGBTQA+ child.
- Advocate for your child if they face mistreatment or discrimination due to their 2SLGBTQA+ identity.
- Stay actively involved with their school to help ensure a comfortable and safe environment.
- Be vigilant for signs of bullying, such as changes in behavior, discipline issues, declining grades, unexplained absences, shifts in friendships or engagement in out-of-character risky behaviors.
- Advocate for inclusive policies like Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), which have been shown to make schools safer and boost academic performance for 2SLGBTQA+ students.
- Maintain frequent contact with teachers and be prepared to escalate concerns to the principal or school board if necessary.
- Push for more inclusive sex education in schools, and be prepared to provide 2SLGBTQA+-specific health information yourself if the school’s curriculum is lacking.

SEEKING AND PROVIDING EXTERNAL SUPPORT

- Connect your child with 2SLGBTQA+ organizations or events so they can see other 2SLGBTQA+ individuals leading fulfilling lives and find peer and community support.
- Connect your child with an 2SLGBTQA+ adult role model to demonstrate positive future possibilities.
- Find or help establish a supportive faith community that welcomes your family and 2SLGBTQA+ child, especially if religion is important in your lives.
- If you, as a parent, are struggling, seek support from pediatricians, school counselors, close family members or community organizations like Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG).

COMMUNICATION AND DIALOGUE

- Encourage open, mutual and low-conflict communication with your child. Build trust by showing curiosity about their life, getting to know their friends and asking about their day.
- When discussing sensitive topics, consider less direct approaches, such as talking about friends or characters in age-appropriate media. Use these moments to initiate conversations, for example, by saying, “The character in this show is attracted to boys and girls. That’s OK with me. What do you think?”

RESOURCES TO HELP

- lgbthotline.org
- lgbtlifecenter.org/wellness/support-groups/
- pflagoklahomacity.org/resources

REFERENCES

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