

Supporting LGBTQ+ Students During Distance Learning

With Adaptations from HRC's "A Checklist to Support LGBTQ Students During Distance Learning", "Supporting LGBTQ Students During the Coronavirus Quarantine: A Tip-Sheet for School Counselors", and NASP's "Coping During COVID-19: How to Support LGBTQ+ Youth"

During the COVID-19 crisis, school counselors and educators across the country continue to provide essential services to students and are learning how to continue to provide a safe and affirming experience for LGBTQ+ students via distance learning. Social distancing requires a new set of strategies and provides new opportunities to support and affirm LGBTQ+ youth, especially when they live in unaffirming environments. **This document offers key considerations when working with LGBTQ+ students in virtual settings, and guidance to help mitigate some of the emerging challenges they face when social distancing practices are required.**

According to 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and HRC's 2018 LGBTQ+ Youth Report:

- **18.2%** of Florida High School students identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure of their sexual orientation, and **1.5%** of Florida High School students identified as transgender
- While some students are open about their LGBTQ+ identity at school, only **21%** are out at home
- **19.5%** of Florida LGBTQ+ students who were electronically bullied (counting being bullied through texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media)
- **67%** of LGBTQ+ students hear their families make negative comments about LGBTQ+ people
- Privacy and confidentiality are critically important for LGBTQ+ youth, especially for those who do not have supportive families. Extreme rejecting behaviors can have dire consequences
- **48%** of LGBTQ+ youth who are out to their parents say their families make them feel bad for being LGBTQ+
- Transgender youth are **2x more likely** to be taunted or mocked by their family for their identity than cisgender youth
- **Approximately 40% of the homeless youth population in the United States identify as LGBTQ+, most as a result of rejection by immediate family members**
- LGBTQ+ youth of color often face additional stress and adverse impacts on their health and well-being as a result of bias around their intersecting identities
- Only **11%** of LGBTQ+ youth of color believe their racial/ethnic group is regarded positively in the United States

Tips for Maintaining Inclusive and Affirming Virtual Spaces for LGBTQ+ Students

- **Ask or share pronouns to demonstrate LGBTQ+ inclusion.** If your meeting platform allows you to list your name, add your pronouns; for example, "Mrs. Garcia (pronouns: she/her)".
- **Use gender-inclusive language**, which not only models inclusivity, but also sends a strong message to LGBTQ+ students that you support LGBTQ+ people. If students can easily assess that you are an ally, they will be more likely to trust you and to seek the support they need.
- **Ask what self-care practices they have tried and what, if anything, is helping to alleviate stress.** Brainstorm new strategies together and check in with them to see which ones are working best.
- **Discuss with them and direct them to online and virtual resources.** With LGBTQ+ drop in centers mostly virtual and GSA's statewide navigating how to continue meeting online, it's important to share direct, online resources with your students that provide affirming support and connection for LGBTQ+ youth in virtual settings day or night – such as the Trevor Project, which offers 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year confidential and online support for LGBTQ+ youth.

- **Consider new risks when meeting virtually with an LGBTQ student** – unsupportive family members, or those who are unaware of their child’s LGBTQ+ identity could potentially listen in. For example, if a young trans boy is open with you about his trans status but not with his parents/guardians, think through how to best protect his safety and privacy.
- **Create an electronic form for meeting requests** that allows the student to include the name and pronouns they want you to use during virtual meetings. Their answers may depend on their ability to secure privacy during virtual sessions. Add a blurb about the confidentiality rights of students, and provide suggestions to improve privacy, such as using an earpiece, or identifying a private area of the home during scheduled meetings.
- **Address the greater risk for LGBTQ+ cyber-bullying** – as students overall spend more time online during this period of social isolation – by utilizing teachable moments to not only stop negative anti-LGBTQ+ language and behavior, but also to educate about LGBTQ+ terminology, history, and current events.
- **Often what young people really need is just to be heard—without judgement or questioning.** Here are some examples of what you can say to LGBTQ+ youth in a crisis:
 - I’m here for you.
 - How can I help you?
 - What supports do you need?
 - It sounds like things are really hard right now.
 - I support you.
 - I hear you.
 - It’s important to me that you are safe.

Additional Resources:

These resources offer further insights into the work school counselors and educators can do to ensure safety, inclusion, and well-being for LGBTQ+ students.

- **EQFL Florida LGBTQ+ Student Concerns** – This document delineates concerns that have been relayed via LGBTQ+ youth-serving nonprofits statewide from the Panhandle to South Florida that speak with LGBTQ+ students regularly.
- **EQFL Navigating and Supporting Family Affirmation of LGBTQ+ Children: COVID-19 and Beyond** – In this document, you will find resources for parents/caretakers of LGBTQ+ youth, as well as school support-person tips for helping their LGBTQ+ youth who may be in unsupportive and/or unaffirming households.
- **EQFL School Support Person Tips for Helping LGBTQ+ Students in Unaffirming and Unsupportive Households** – This document contains resources that will help school support persons understand their role in ensuring the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth in unaffirming homes through COVID-19 and beyond.
- **EQFL Relaxation & Mental Health Resources for LGBTQ+ Youth During COVID-19 and Post Pandemic** – We have compiled a list of resources focused on enjoyment, relaxation, and self-care to help mediate some of the pressures that LGBTQ+ students are facing.
- **Direct Online and Phone Support Services for LGBTQ Youth**: HRC has compiled a list of direct and online resources for LGBTQ+ youth that provide affirming support and safely connecting with LGBTQ+ peers in virtual settings any time of day or night. There are even virtual supports for parents and families who are in need of support themselves or who want to learn how they can better support their LGBTQ+ child.
- **Trans Lifeline** – Peer support service run by trans* persons. Crisis hotline with a policy against non-consensual rescue.

QUESTIONS? REACH OUT TO US AT:

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