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Know! How Gender-Affirming Care Impacts Mental Health

In the [last Know! Tip](#), we discussed Ohio House Bill 68, which includes a provision that would prohibit a physician from performing or assisting any gender reassignment surgery, prescribing cross-sex hormones, or puberty-blocking prescriptions for gender transitions to minors. We defined gender-affirming care and other important terminology for understanding the impacts of HB 68. In this tip, we'll talk about the mental health risk factors facing transgender and non-binary youth, the effects of gender-affirming care on their mental health, and how caring adults can show up for the transgender and non-binary youth in their lives.

What mental health risks are transgender and non-binary youth facing?

Research has established that transgender and nonbinary youth are more likely to experience adverse mental health outcomes -- including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicide -- than their cisgender peers [\(1\)](#).

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth ages 15-24. Research suggests that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) youth are two to seven times more likely to die by suicide than their heterosexual and cisgender peers [\(2\)](#). In their 2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People, The Trevor Project found that half of transgender and non-binary youth seriously considered suicide and nearly 1 in 5 transgender and non-binary youth attempted suicide in the past year [\(3\)](#).

It is important to note that this high risk for adverse mental health outcomes is attributed to a variety of factors, including discrimination, stigma, limited availability of mental health services, social rejection from family and peers, and low access to healthcare providers with expertise in caring for transgender and non-binary youth. Transgender and non-binary youth are not inherently prone to mental health challenges and suicide risk because of their gender identity [\(1\)](#).

How does gender-affirming care impact mental health?

Because it includes the healthcare and social support needs of transgender and nonbinary people, gender-affirming care positively affects mental health outcomes. Research demonstrates that access to gender-affirming care is protective for transgender and nonbinary youth, resulting in lower rates of negative mental health outcomes, increased self-esteem, and improved quality of life overall [\(4\)](#). Several studies have found that gender-affirming care reduces the rates of depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, and other negative behavioral health outcomes in transgender and non-binary youth [\(4,5,6\)](#). In addition to gender-affirming care, affirmation from families has been shown to protect against suicide, depression, and substance use.⁵ Given the high risk for negative mental health outcomes, gender-affirming care is a critical component to improving mental health and well-being among transgender and non-binary youth [\(5,6\)](#).

What can adults who care about transgender and non-binary youth do?

Even if you do not personally know any transgender or non-binary youth, you can still take steps to learn about their experiences and act with care and respect towards the transgender and non-binary community.

Respect the gender identities of young people in your life.

When young people share their gender identity with you, believe them and affirm their identity by using the correct name and pronouns. We know that affirmation and acceptance from adults are protective for transgender and non-binary youth's mental health (7). Consider that cisgender youth are trusted to know and understand their gender identities, and transgender and non-binary youth deserve that same trust from adults. As a caring adult, you are responsible for actively affirming and respecting the young people's identities in your life (5).

Stand up for transgender and non-binary youth.

If members of your family or friend group mistreat or mock transgender and non-binary youth because of their gender identity, stand up for them. Emphasize that transgender and non-binary youth deserve respect, even if others believe that being transgender or non-binary is wrong.

Advocate on behalf of the transgender and non-binary youth in your life.

Young people are aware of the state and national conversations about banning access to gender-affirming care. The proposal and implementation of anti-transgender policies erode community acceptance – a protective factor against suicide for transgender and non-binary youth (7). You can advance community acceptance by advocating against policies that harm transgender and non-binary youth and for policies that protect their health and well-being.

Continue to grow your knowledge and understanding.

There is a lot of misinformation and disinformation spread about gender-affirming care and transgender and non-binary individuals. Stay up to date with evidence-based research and use your best judgment to evaluate the quality of information that you consume. Read books written by transgender and non-binary authors to understand their experiences better. Utilize the resources listed below to learn more about transgender and non-binary identities. Doing so can help you become a better ally to the transgender and non-binary youth in your life (5).

Resources

[LGBTQ Local and National Resources | Ohio State University \(osu.edu\)](#)

[Community Resources | www.lgbtcleveland.org](#)

[LGBTQ Resource Roundup | Ohio University](#)

[Coming Out | Resources for LGBTQ+ teens in Stark County \(starkhelpcentral.com\)](#)

[LGBTQ Support Organizations - Cincinnati Pride](#)

[LGBTQ crisis and support resources | AFSP](#)

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline - Call, Text, Chat. \(988lifeline.org\)](#)

[Transgender and nonbinary youth mental health.pdf \(preventionactionalliance.org\)](#)

[Numbered sources are hyperlinked at the start of this document](#)

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