



2018

Gender-Expansive YOUTH REPORT



Visit www.hrc.org/explore/topic/transgender-children-youth to find resources that transgender children, families and other youth-serving professionals need to support one another in their journeys.



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Understanding This Report

Background

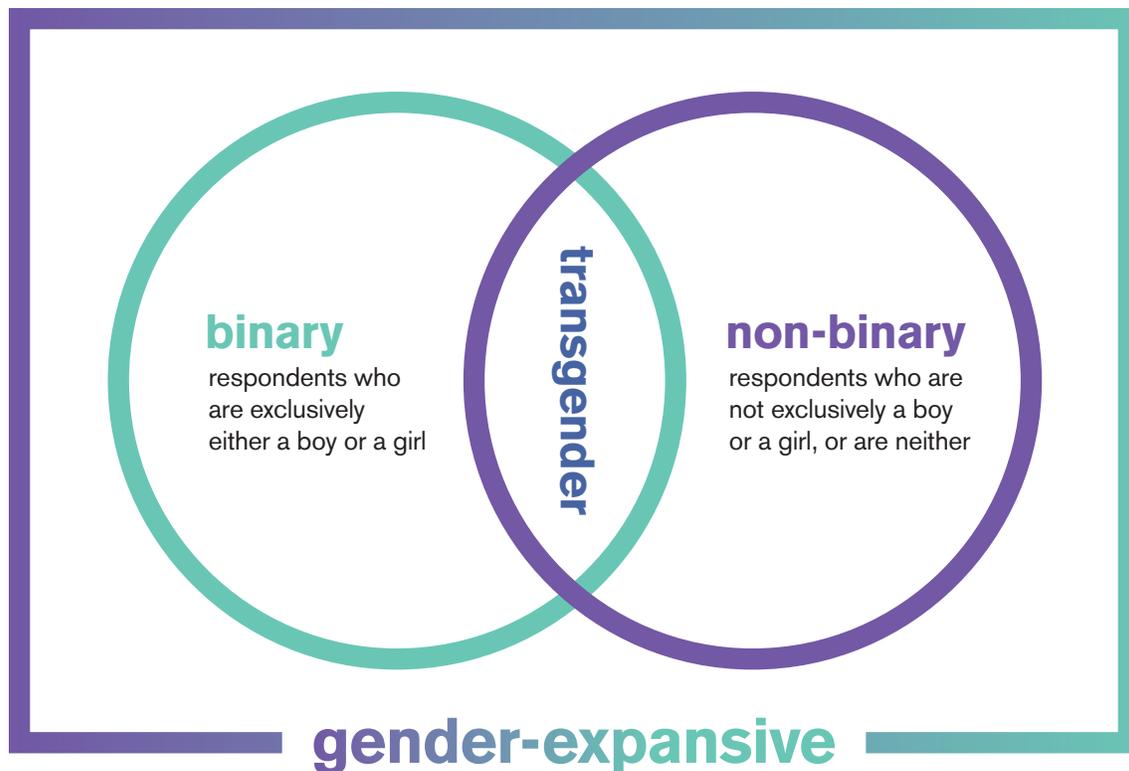
In 2017, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation partnered with researchers at the University of Connecticut to conduct a groundbreaking survey of more than 12,000 LGBTQ youth and capture their experiences in their families, schools, social circles and communities.

More than 5,600 gender-expansive youth – including those who are transgender and non-binary – responded to the survey. This resource presents data collected from these youth, shedding light on the challenges and triumphs encountered through their journeys of self-expression and identification.

All of the data in this report comes from respondents who articulated that their gender identities differ from the expectations and identities consistent with their sex assigned at birth. Throughout the report, the experiences of these respondents are sometimes broken down between youth reporting binary gender identities and those reporting non-binary or fluid gender identities. The label “binary” refers to respondents who are exclusively either a boy or a girl. The label “non-binary” refers to respondents who are not exclusively a boy or a girl, or are neither.

Throughout this report, we include data breakdowns by youth who report binary and non-binary identities not to create false dichotomies and invite direct comparison – no experience should be viewed as better or worse than any other – but rather to show the diversity of experiences among gender-expansive young people.

Regardless of an individual’s gender identity and their expression within or outside of a cultural binary, all gender-expansive people are all targeted by a system that polices and assigns gender identities and expression to neatly fit into one of two boxes: men or women. This discrimination is exacerbated by racism, sexism, classism, ableism and other forces that have historically restricted and invalidated the experiences of gender-expansive people.



We use **gender-expansive**, rather than transgender, to describe all non-cisgender respondents because every person defines their identity differently. For example, some non-binary people identify as transgender, but not all do. It is imperative that we expand our understanding of terms and definitions to accommodate everyone's individual experience and self-identification process.

Cisgender

A term used to describe a person whose gender identity, expression, or lived experience aligns with what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.



Supporting Gender-Expansive Youth

More and more Americans are coming out as transgender, non-binary and gender-expansive.

In 2017, the Williams Institute reported that approximately 150,000 youth ages 13-17 identified as transgender in the United States alone. The increased visibility of gender-expansive role models in media, film, television and sports,

along with trans-inclusive Obama-era policies and legislation, have helped to create more inclusive spaces where it is safer for young people to come out and live authentically.

**In 2017, approx.
150,000 youth
ages 13-17
identified as
transgender in
the United States**

Despite these gains, gender-expansive people's right to live openly and authentically is under direct threat from the Trump-Pence administration. At stake are their right to access public spaces and services, to be protected from institutional discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and to have their existence acknowledged.

This hostile political climate can have a devastating impact on gender-expansive youth. In the midst of this challenging environment, supportive parents, school administrators, teachers, counselors and other youth-serving professionals play an essential role in demonstrating affirmation and inclusion. Their support is especially important when gender-expansive youth struggle in the absence of affirmation from their families and communities regarding their gender identity.

Yet, despite these challenges and risks, gender-expansive youth continue to be their own powerful forces of change; their stories of empowerment, resilience, activism and advocacy are pronounced in these findings. Across the country, they are advocating for inclusivity and equality. They need us to do the same.

We *must* support gender-expansive youth in their pursuit of equality and justice.

For youth-serving professionals

This resource draws on a subset of data presented in the [2018 HRC LGBTQ Youth Report](#) to highlight the experiences of gender-expansive youth. We hope this information helps to encourage youth-serving professionals to think critically about gender identity in their work.



The Importance of Family

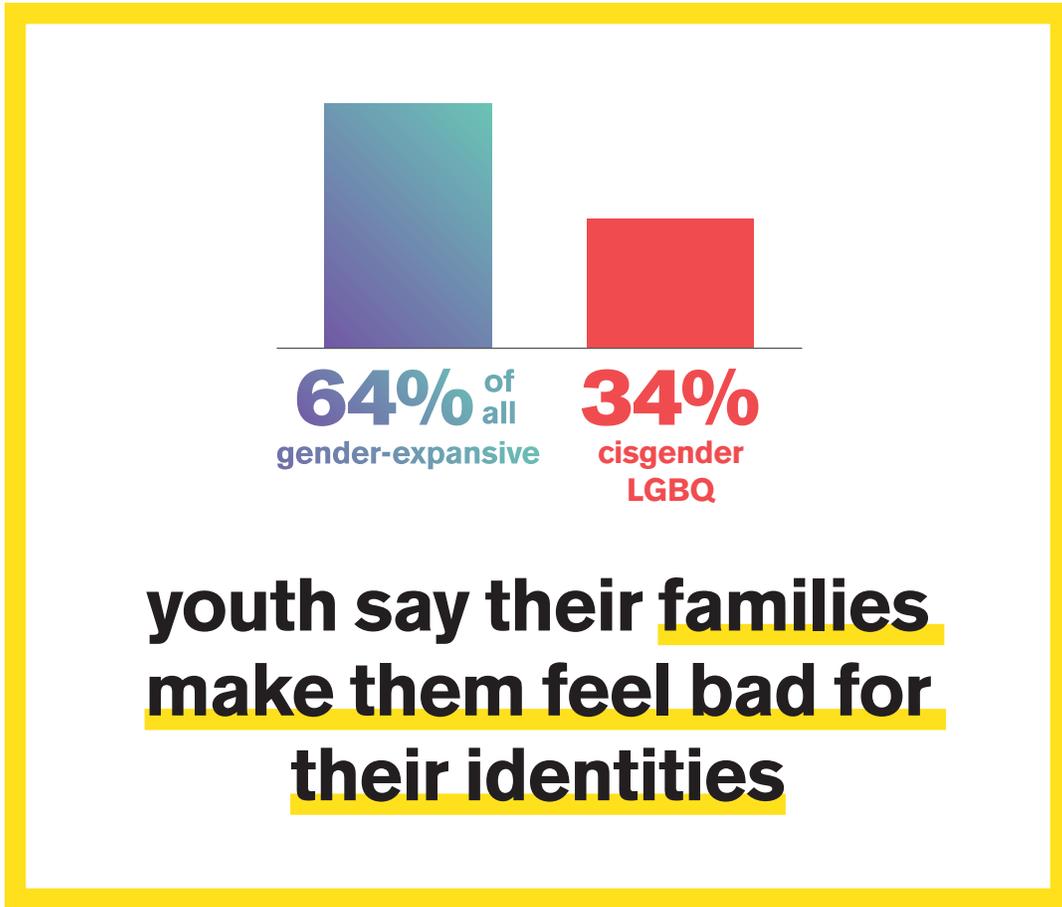
Parents and families have a critical role to play in affecting the self-esteem, mental health and overall well-being of gender-expansive youth.

Youth whose families provide supportive, safe and affirming homes are more likely to experience positive health outcomes across several dimensions, including: greater self-esteem and resilience; a lowered risk of depression, distress and feelings of hopelessness; and a reduced risk of substance use.



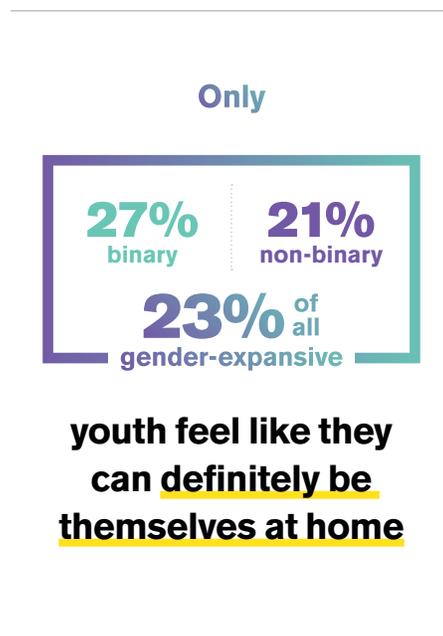
Only
36% of all
gender-expansive

**youth have families
who show support
for them by getting
involved in the larger
LGBTQ and ally
community**



Moreover, supportive and affirming families can act as a buffer against the discrimination, harassment and bullying that gender-expansive youth might experience in their schools and communities.

However, the gender-expansive youth in our survey report that sharing their gender identities with their families is incredibly stressful. These youth surveyed say that their real and perceived fears of rejection are compounded by negative comments they hear about the LGBTQ community from parents and family members.



“I am very lucky in the fact that my parents have been supportive of me. . . my mom has always made it not a taboo subject. She has always made it known that I can talk to her if I need to.”

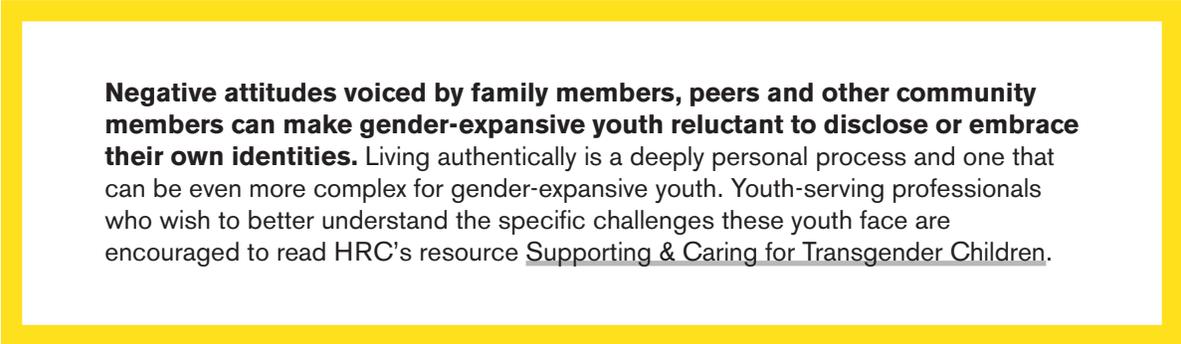
“I have been taught to believe my whole life by my parents that being LGBTQA+ is a sin and should be hidden. I wouldn't want to discuss such matters with the fear of having my parents find out anything.”

As a youth-serving professional, family member or community member, you can provide life-changing support to gender-expansive youth who may not receive it from their parents or immediate family. Where possible, you may also be able to play a role in educating families in your community.

57% of all
gender-expansive
youth have been
**mocked or taunted by
their families because
of their identities**



72% of all
gender-expansive
youth **hear
their families
make negative
comments about
LGBTQ people**



Negative attitudes voiced by family members, peers and other community members can make gender-expansive youth reluctant to disclose or embrace their own identities. Living authentically is a deeply personal process and one that can be even more complex for gender-expansive youth. Youth-serving professionals who wish to better understand the specific challenges these youth face are encouraged to read HRC's resource [Supporting & Caring for Transgender Children](#).

“I often feel judged or that I’ve disappointed my family because I’m LGBTQ, so it’s hard to talk about issues at home.”

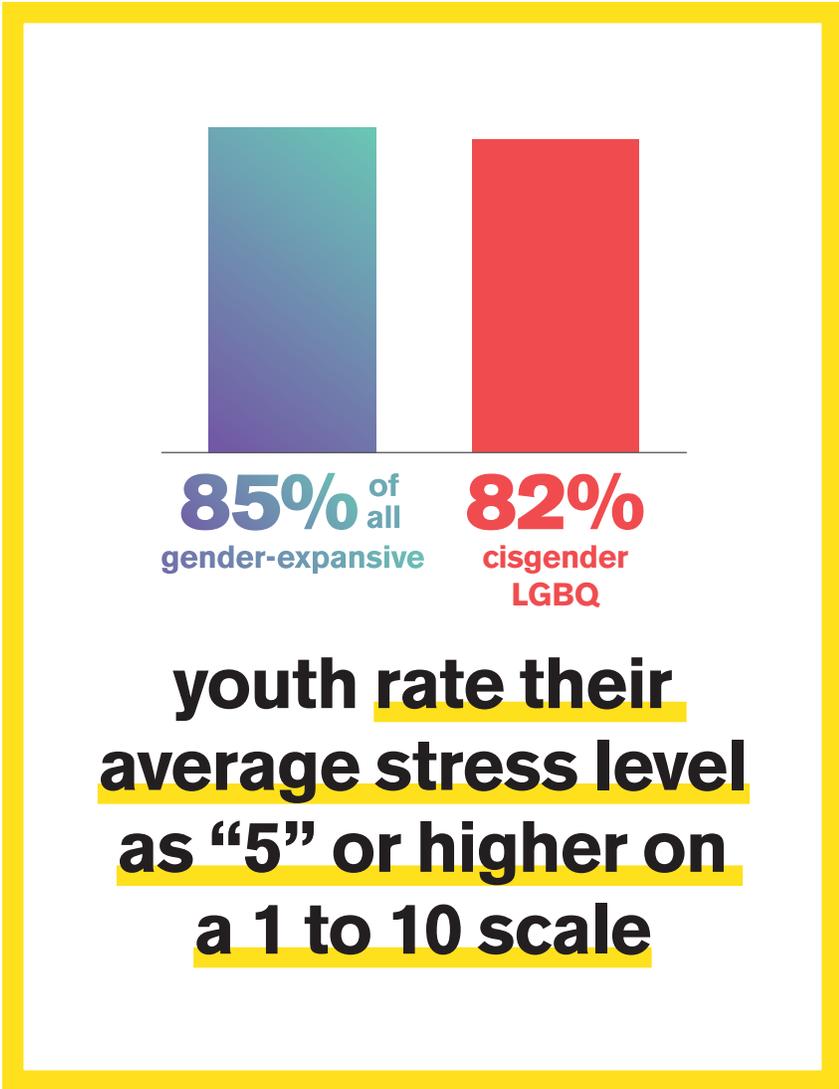


The Burden of Rejection

In addition to the fear of familial rejection, gender-expansive youth face a variety of stressors – harassment, peer rejection, bullying and isolation – that have a major impact on their overall well-being.

Gender-expansive youth have a high risk of negative health and mental health outcomes. Too many young people feel pressure from their families, schools or communities to conform to societal expectations of gender. Gender-expansive youth who do not receive gender-affirming support or are forced to hide their gender identities risk experiencing elevated mental health risks including depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide. Equally alarming are the disproportionate rates of reported sexual assault and sexual harassment among gender-expansive youth compared to their cisgender peers.

97% of all
gender-expansive
youth **have**
trouble sleeping
at night



88% of all gender-expansive

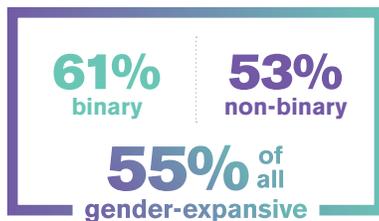
youth felt down in the last week

Compared to **72%** of cisgender LGBTQ youth

84% of all gender-expansive

youth felt hopeless or worthless in the last week

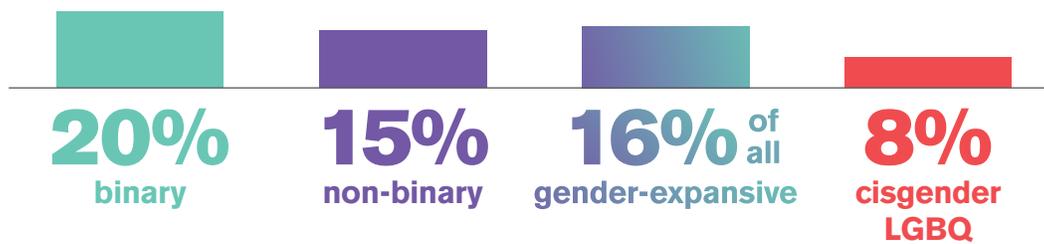
Compared to **66%** of cisgender LGBTQ youth



youth received psychological or emotional counseling in the last 12 months

“My counselor has always been very supportive of me and has cared a lot about my mental health issues, and always made me feel like a priority. I felt comfortable talking to her because she was very open and understanding and never ever judged me.”

“I have very severe anxiety, so voicing my opinion/views makes me highly uncomfortable no matter who I’m talking to... I simply am not comfortable with coming out because I am scared I will be persecuted for it.”



youth have been sexually attacked or raped because of their actual or assumed identity

69% of all gender-expansive

youth have received unwanted sexual comments, jokes and gestures in the past year

These troubling mental health outcomes are preventable. Research has shown that when gender-expansive youth have access to gender-affirming services, competent care and affirmation, their risk of depression, anxiety and other negative mental health outcomes is greatly reduced.¹

Many learning opportunities are available to professional counselors and therapists who work with LGBTQ youth and wish to improve their skills, knowledge and competence in working with gender-expansive youth.

¹ Olson, K.R., Durwood, L., DeMeules, M & McLaughlin, K.A., 2016. Mental Health of Transgender Children Who Are Supported in their Identities. *Pediatrics*. 137 (3): 1-10.



When Schools Fall Short

While some schools offer safe and affirming spaces that enable gender-expansive youth to flourish, many young people still experience negative, hostile and unsafe school environments.

Without non-discrimination laws and state-wide policies to protect gender-expansive students or comprehensive inclusion training, the majority of these youth remain vulnerable to discrimination, harassment and bullying from peers, teachers and administrators. More than half of gender-expansive youth surveyed have been bullied on school property within the past year.



Only
16% of all
gender-expansive
youth always
feel safe in the
classroom

Compared to **32%** of
cisgender LGBTQ youth

84% of all
gender-expansive

youth have experienced verbal threats because of their actual or perceived LGBTQ identity

16% of all
gender-expansive

youth were bullied because someone thought they were LGBTQ

48% binary
40% non-binary
42% of all
gender-expansive

youth have received physical threats due to their LGBTQ identity

Compared to **25%** of cisgender LGBTQ youth

58% binary
51% non-binary
53% of all
gender-expansive

youth have been bullied on school property in the past 12 months

Compared to **38%** of cisgender LGBTQ youth

“I went to a Christian school where everyone signed a contract saying they aren’t LGBTQIA+, and I’d be expelled if I came forward.”

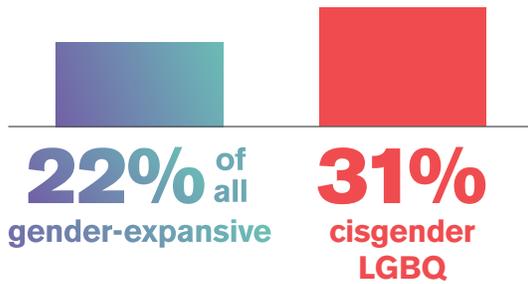
Only
16% of all
gender-expansive
youth **hear positive**
messages about being
LGBTQ in school

Only
10% of all
gender-expansive
youth have
received
information
about safer sex
that is relevant
to their identity

In addition to these overt forms of discrimination, gender-expansive students also commonly report being barred from using locker rooms or bathroom facilities that match their gender identities and not being addressed by gender affirming pronouns or their true names.

Youth-serving professionals, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of gender-expansive youth and create gender-inclusive learning environments that allow all students, regardless of their gender identities, to learn and to thrive.

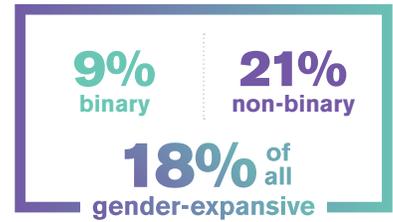
Educators who wish to learn how to make gender inclusivity a priority in their classrooms and schools are encouraged to read these resources.



**youth can definitely
be themselves
in school**

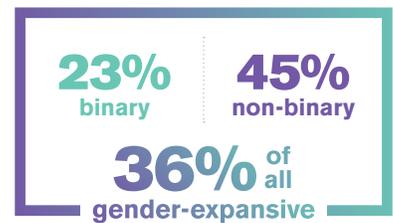


Only



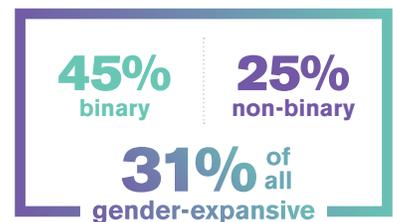
**youth are always
called their correct
pronouns at school**

Only



**youth say that they are
always called by their
true name at school**

Only



**youth can dress and
express themselves
to match their gender
identity in school**

“I wish school staff were more open about their opinions on LGBTQ issues. I visited a school last week and some teachers had signs on their door that welcomed LGBTQ students.”

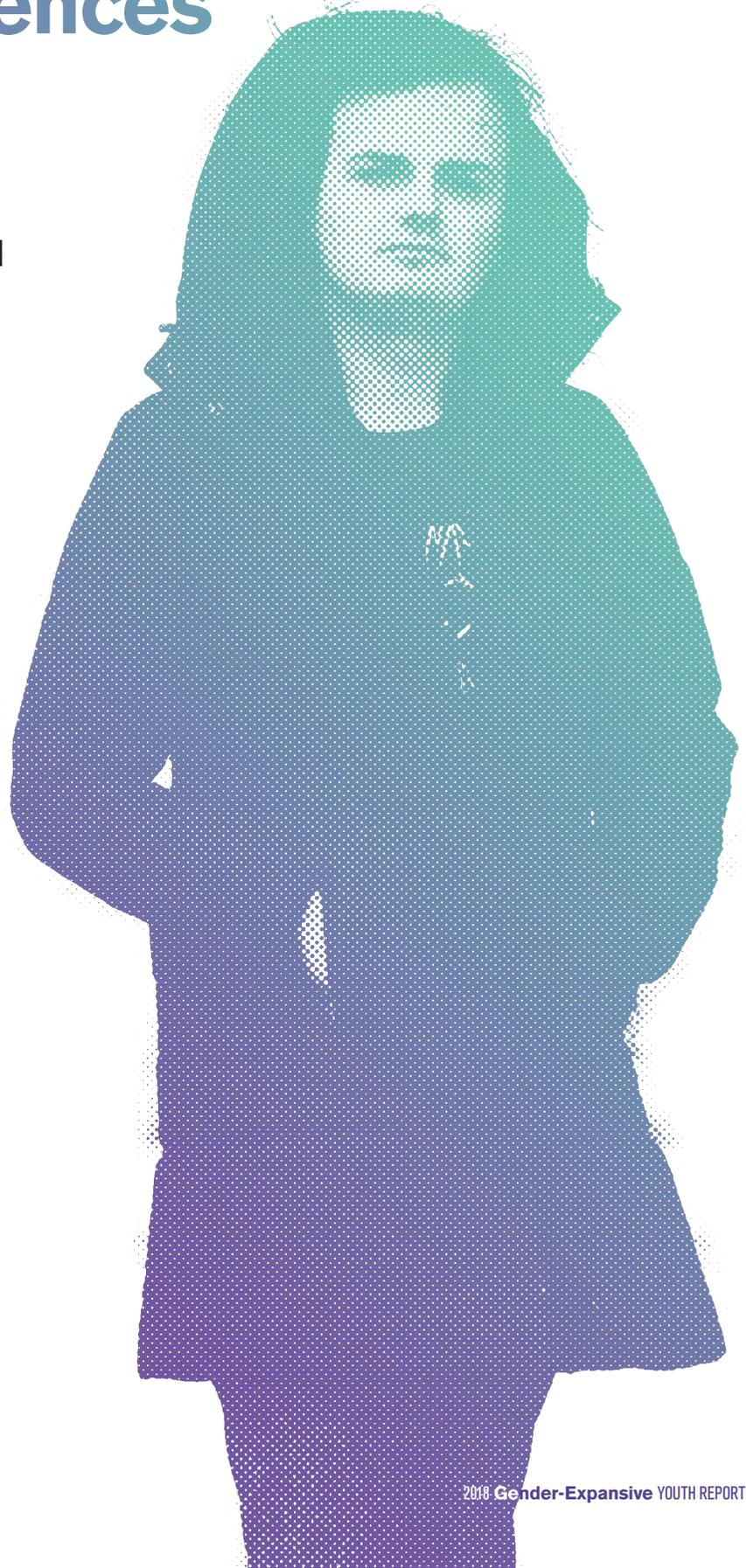
“My school counselor is the sole reason I am here today. She is the most wonderful, most accepting being I could ever think of.”

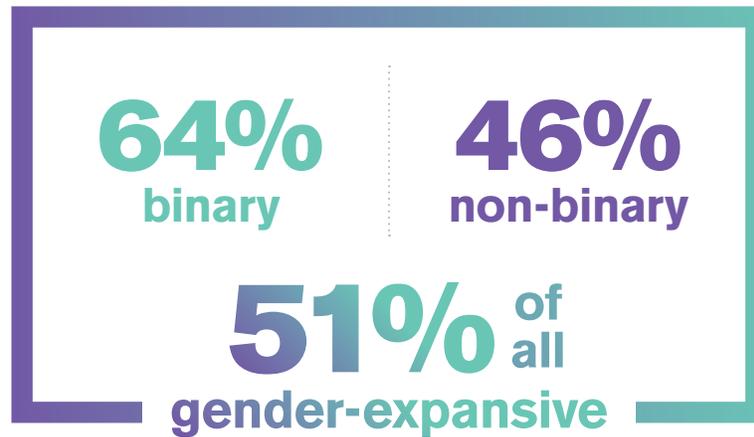


Public Accommodations and Experiences

In order to be able to participate fully in society, gender-expansive people must be able to access and engage with public spaces and systems that reflect their gender identities.

This right continues to be contested and debated at the community, state and federal levels. For the gender-expansive youth in our survey, this “debate” has very real consequences on their feelings of safety, comfort and well-being.





youth never use the restroom at school that aligns with their identity

59%^{of all}
gender-expansive

youth say they don't feel safe using them

46%^{of all}
gender-expansive

youth don't know if they're allowed to use them

“When I was younger, my counselor told me that I wouldn’t be allowed to use the boys’ bathroom in my school until it was cleared with all my teachers, the principal and the superintendent. It seemed really unnecessary to me, and she always seemed to pity me, so her whole attitude made me uncomfortable.”

“I remember the first time I went to my counselor to talk about my gender identity. I told her that I wanted to change my name and pronouns and go to the boys locker room and bathroom, and everything that I was ready to move forward with. She didn’t really know what to do.”

In order to support a gender-expansive young person's well-being, we must first ensure their right to exist in public spaces. Unfortunately, anti-equality legislative efforts and exclusionary policies attack authentic, courageous gender-expansive young people simply for existing as they are.

In recent years, many states and public officials have proposed harmful policies and procedures, including:

- Legislation that prevents gender-expansive people from accessing public spaces consistent with their gender identities
- Rescinding of Title IX protections for gender-expansive students
- Rejection of the Obama administration's position that nondiscrimination laws require schools to allow students to use restrooms that best align with their gender identities.

These actions are not just hateful and misinformed, they put gender-expansive young people in harm's way. Being forced to use incorrect names, pronouns and facilities, has a devastating effect on their mental health and personal safety. We must all commit to creating spaces and procedures that support and affirm the identities of all young people.

**When
gender-expansive
youth can't use
the restroom that
aligns with their
gender identity:**

66%

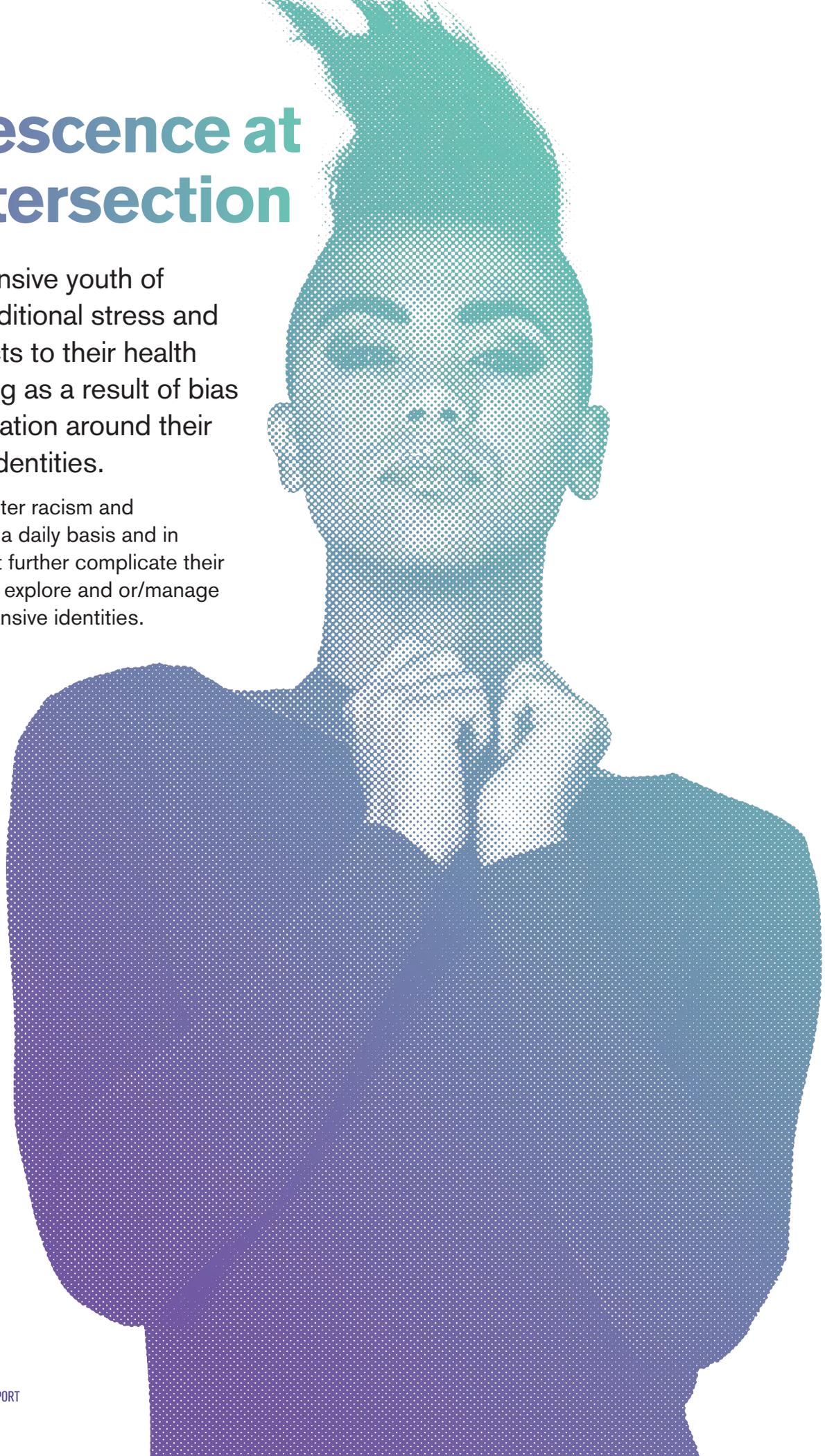
**avoid using the
restroom at
school altogether**



Adolescence at an Intersection

Gender-expansive youth of color face additional stress and adverse effects to their health and well-being as a result of bias and discrimination around their intersecting identities.

They may encounter racism and discrimination on a daily basis and in various forms that further complicate their ability to express, explore and or/manage their gender-expansive identities.



80% of all
gender-expansive

**youth of color have
experienced racism**

92% of all
gender-expansive

**youth of color say racism
affects people in their same
racial or ethnic group**

80% binary
86% non-binary

85% of all
gender-expansive

**youth of color say their
families and friends are
negatively affected by racism**

“What’s made me more comfortable was the fact that my counselor is gay, so since he’s part of the LGBTQ community, it makes me feel a lot better. But what makes me uncomfortable is the fact that I’m Black and he’s white, and he’s subtly pointed that out several times. Whether it was conscious or not, I’m not sure, but it’s uncomfortable. I don’t think he did it out of any ill will.”



youth of color think about racism every day

For these youth, difficulty in finding LGBTQ counselors of color or programs that relate directly to their experiences with gender and race-based discrimination often leads to feelings of isolation and a lack of sense of belonging. It is imperative that youth-serving professionals understand the intersection of race and LGBTQ identities, and the ways in which white supremacy polices the identities, expressions and existences of gender-expansive people of color.

To address these disparities, programs are needed that address the specific needs and experiences of gender-expansive youth of color, including anti-racism and gender-affirming specific programs. Youth-serving professionals also require training that addresses gender-expansive youths' multiple and intersecting identities.



Coming Out

Gender-expansive youth typically begin to disclose their gender identities during adolescence. The decision to come out is a deeply personal journey that is shaped by each individual's unique experiences and circumstances. For many youth, the decision to come out varies widely depending on who they can come out to and in which contexts they feel the most safe disclosing their gender identities.

Studies show that outness usually brings more positive outcomes, including better academic performance, higher self-esteem, and lower anxiety and depression.² Alternatively, gender-expansive youth can experience greater stress and negative outcomes when they're out to some people and not to others. And, for too many youth, the very real threats to their safety prevent them from fully disclosing their identities.

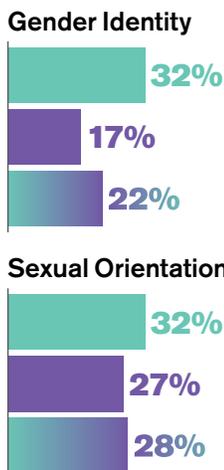
As parents, allies, educators and youth-serving professionals, we have a responsibility to ensure that all youth, regardless of their gender identities or expressions, are able to live authentically and thrive.

² Russell, S. & Fish, J.N., (2016) Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth. Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 12, 465-487.

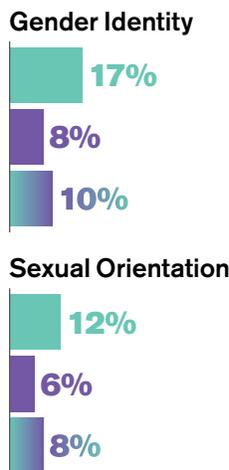
Percentage of respondents who are out to all of their



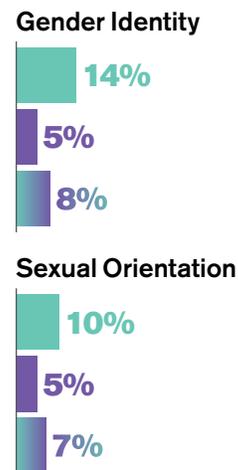
parents regarding their:



teachers and adults at school regarding their:

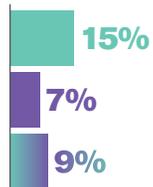


athletic coaches regarding their:

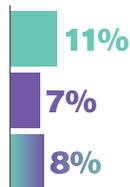


doctors and healthcare providers regarding their:

Gender Identity

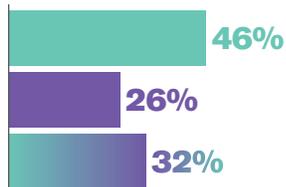


Sexual Orientation

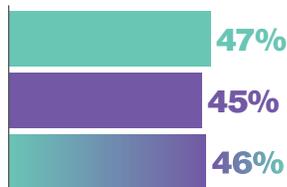


siblings regarding their:

Gender Identity

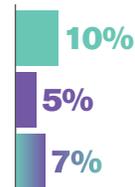


Sexual Orientation

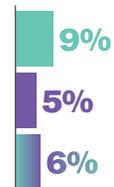


grandparents and extended family regarding their:

Gender Identity

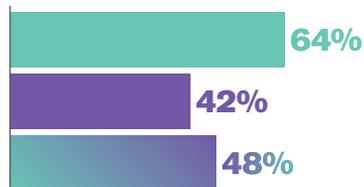


Sexual Orientation



LGBTQ friends regarding their:

Gender Identity

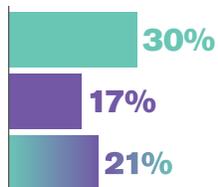


Sexual Orientation

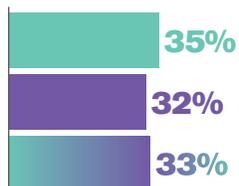


non-LGBTQ friends regarding their:

Gender Identity

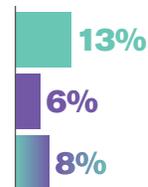


Sexual Orientation

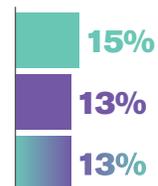


classmates at school regarding their:

Gender Identity

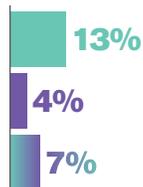


Sexual Orientation

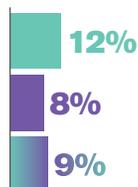


coworkers regarding their:

Gender Identity



Sexual Orientation

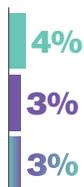


religious community regarding their:

Gender Identity

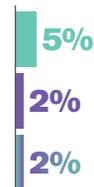


Sexual Orientation

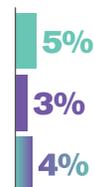


strangers/new acquaintances regarding their:

Gender Identity



Sexual Orientation



“My anxiety probably makes a difference in how comfortable or uncomfortable I am. I’ve also never discussed my gender identity with anyone, and I’ve talked about my sexuality/romantic identity with a mental health therapist only a few times. I live in the Southern U.S., and a majority of family is Christian, Republican and most likely homophobic/transphobic.”



What You Can Do

Every adult can play a role in changing the landscape for gender-expansive youth. Often, small but impactful actions can reinforce inclusive, supportive and loving environments in homes, schools and communities. We must also confront the very real and present discriminatory policies, institutional obstacles and biases that hinder too many gender-expansive youth from fully thriving as who they are. Doing so involves calling out bias and discrimination, supporting inclusive policies, and working to educate yourself and your community on ways to best support gender-expansive young people.

When supporting gender-expansive youth, it's imperative to address the anti-LGBTQ attitudes, racism and other systems of oppression that present undue challenges to their well-being. Youth-serving professionals, parents, school staff, policy-makers and community members can find general tips [here](#) that, as always, should be viewed through an intersectional and gender affirming lens.





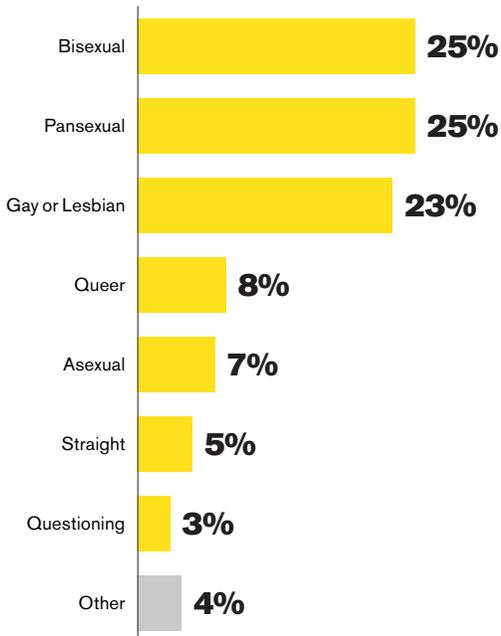
Respondent Profile

Gender Identity (select all that apply)

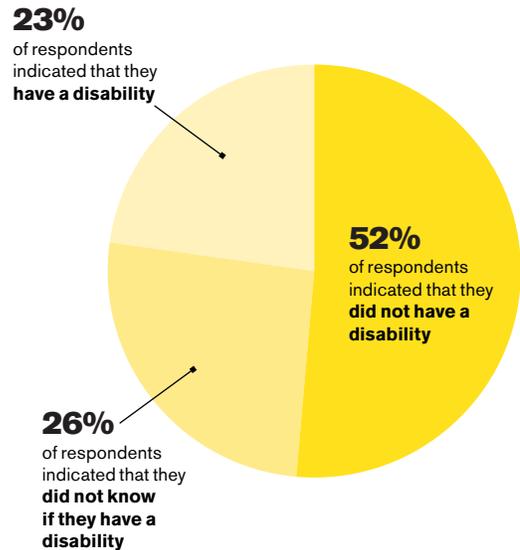
	N Values
Boy	1,404
Girl	185
Non-binary	1,941
Genderqueer or gender non-conforming	1,501
Something else	734

← Includes write-ins such as: agender, androgynous, bigender, confused/don't know, demigender, genderfluid/flux, questioning, not listed and more.

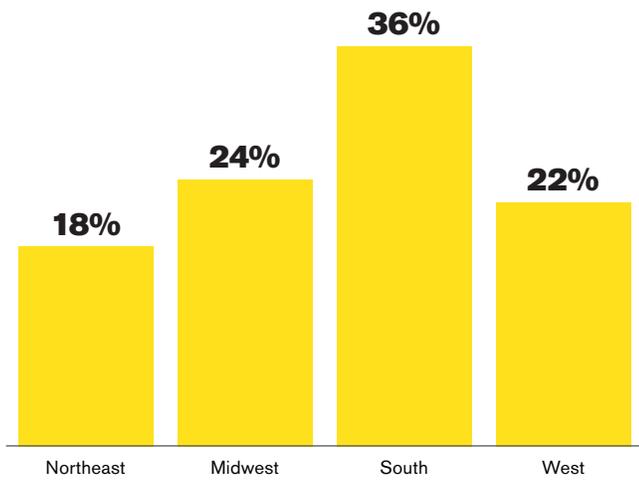
Sexual Orientation



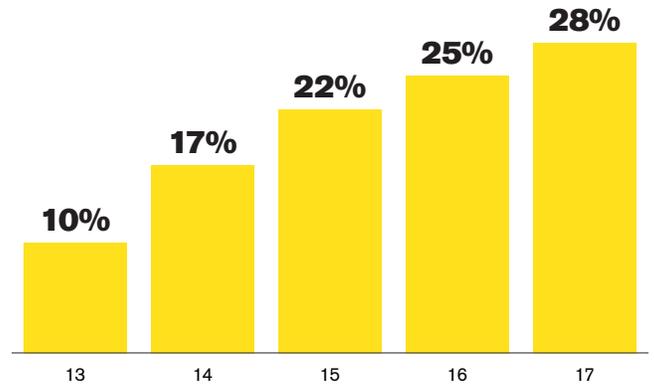
Ability



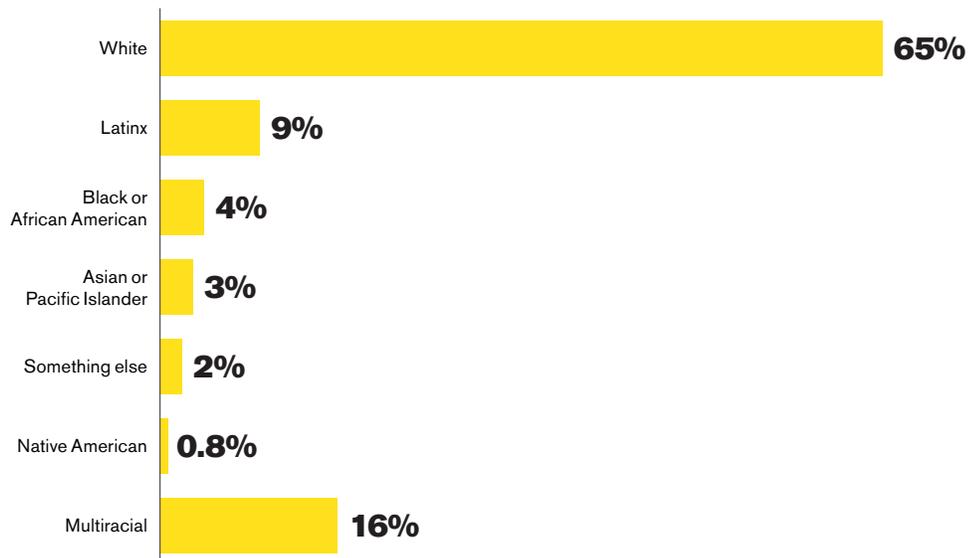
Location



Age



Ethnoracial Identity



Percentages may add up to over 100 due to rounding



Acknowledgements

The HRC Foundation's Public Education & Research Program

The HRC Foundation's Public Education & Research Program spearheads a wide variety of LGBTQ advocacy and outreach campaigns, working to ensure that the HRC Foundation's resources and programs are timely, impactful and inclusive. In addition to publishing resource guides, informational materials and reports, the team conducts original quantitative and qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQ people. The program also collaborates with academic researchers and provides guidance to other HRC initiatives in support of efforts to advance LGBTQ equality and well-being. Special thanks to Senior Research Manager **Liam Miranda**, Senior Content Manager **Mark Lee** and Public Education & Research Intern **Charlie Whittington** for their leadership and work on this resource.

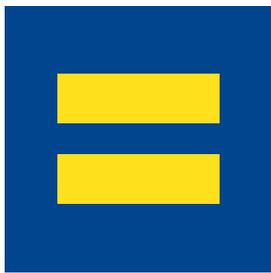
Children, Youth & Families Program

Becoming a parent, sending your 5-year-old to kindergarten, watching your teenager graduate from high school – these are life's biggest moments. For LGBTQ parents and LGBTQ children, they can also be some of life's most challenging moments. That's where HRC's Children, Youth and Families Program comes in. Through innovative training and direct consultation with schools, child welfare agencies and other service providers, HRC's Children, Youth and Families Program creates welcoming, affirming and supportive environments for LGBTQ prospective parents, LGBTQ-led families and LGBTQ youth. Special thanks to **Ellen Kahn** and **Jay Brown** for their leadership and guidance on this and similar resources related to the well-being of LGBTQ youth.

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As the largest civil rights organization working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Americans, the Human Rights Campaign represents a force of more than 3 million members and supporters nationwide – all committed to making HRC's vision a reality.

HRC envisions a world where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are embraced as full members of society at home, at work and in every community.