



SUPPORTING AND CARING FOR OUR BISEXUAL YOUTH



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HRC.ORG/BI-YOUTH

Bisexual youth face a unique set of challenges that affect their ability to flourish in their families, schools and communities. Produced in partnership with BiNet USA, Bisexual Organizing Project and the Bisexual Resource Center, this new report *Supporting and Caring for our Bisexual Youth* helps paint a clearer picture of the lived experiences of bisexual youth. Learning more about these youth will allow parents, caregivers, social workers, teachers and other youth-serving professionals to more effectively nurture and guide them toward successful and happy futures.

This report draws on results from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's 2012 groundbreaking survey of more than 10,000 LGBT youth, ages 13 – 17, in the United States. This report focuses on the nearly 40 percent of survey participants who identified as bisexual.

Who Are Bisexuals?

Many bisexual adults have embraced the definition proposed by longtime bisexual leader, national speaker and award-winning activist Robyn Ochs:

"I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree."

–Robyn Ochs

A Look at the Bisexual Survey Participants

FEMALE



1 in 2 females in the sample identify as bisexual

MALE



1 in 5 males in the sample identify as bisexual

TRANSGENDER



1 in 4 transgender youth in the sample identify as bisexual

OTHER GENDER-EXPANSIVE



1 in 5 other gender-expansive youth identify as bisexual

Findings

"I WOULD LIKE THE PRESSURE TO

'PICK A SIDE'

TO STOP. IT'S VERY FRUSTRATING."

"I'VE HAD PEOPLE TELL ME THAT MY LIFE IS WORTHLESS BECAUSE I'M BISEXUAL, AND THAT I'M NOTHING."

EXCLUSION AND HARASSMENT



Nearly 1 in 4 bisexual youth (24 percent) reported frequently or often being excluded by their peers because they are different. **Thirty-two percent** of the pansexual youth reported the same – in fact, pansexual youth reported slightly higher levels of exclusion and harassment in several areas including exclusion by peers and being called names involving anti-gay slurs.



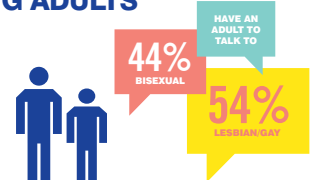
STRAIGHT 21% VERY HAPPY



BISEXUAL 5% VERY HAPPY

They reported much lower levels of happiness, and were less optimistic about their potential for achieving their ambitions including establishing life-long romantic relationships, attending college and having successful careers.

CARING ADULTS



Only **44 percent** of bisexual youth responded that there was an adult in their family they could turn to if they were sad compared to slightly more than half (**54 percent**) of lesbian and gay youth. Only **56 percent** of bisexual youth knew such a trusted adult outside of their families, much less than the **65 percent** of lesbian and gay youth who reported knowing a caring adult outside their families.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE **ANXIETY**
POVERTY SUICIDE
BISEXUAL ADULTS
POOR GENERAL HEALTH **SEXUAL ASSAULT**
DEPRESSION

These findings represent risk factors that put bisexual youth on a trajectory toward the issues that have been found to disproportionately affect bisexual adults.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Fifty-six percent of bisexual youth "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed that they have experimented with alcohol and drugs, a rate slightly higher than lesbian and gay youth (**50 percent**) and more than **twice as high as straight youth (22 percent)**.

2X

"I WISH THAT MORE PEOPLE INSIDE THE GAY COMMUNITY ITSELF WOULD SUPPORT MY DECISION TO CALL MYSELF BISEXUAL. I AM NOT BEING SELFISH. I AM NOT A LIAR. I AM NOT GAY. I AM NOT STRAIGHT. I AM BISEXUAL."

BECOMING AN ALLY



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So how can we do a better job of reaching these youth, supporting their identities, and meeting their unique needs?

For anyone who interacts with youth, the first step is to acknowledge and talk about bisexuality, particularly when you're talking about topics like dating, relationships or sex. It's also important to use the language used by youth. Go beyond talking about gay and lesbian relationships and use terms like bisexual, queer, questioning, and pansexual. Let youth talk to you and tell you the terms they use. Also be inclusive of terms related to gender identity, such as transgender, genderfluid and genderqueer. By hearing this language used, bisexual and other youth can hear that their identities are legitimate and respected.

Another way that everyone can be an ally to bisexual youth is by calling attention to myths and stereotypes about bisexual youth and adults. Be mindful of the many pervasive myths and stereotypes addressed in this report and dispel them whenever you hear them. Correct your friends, family and coworkers when they perpetuate those stereotypes in conversation. Let people know that it is not okay to make generalizations about anyone's sexual orientation.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

The first step for anyone wanting to be a better ally for bisexual youth is to educate yourself about bisexuality and the bisexual community. Learn about the kinds of issues listed in this report, and seek out the additional resources listed in this guide. Be aware of the prejudices that you might hold about bisexuality, and work toward changing your assumptions.

FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

As your child comes to understand their sexual orientation, you may develop concerns about their safety, or whether they will be accepted by their

“My family is very accepting. They love me for who I am and for what I am. They told me it didn't matter who I loved as long as I'm happy.”

peers or extended families.

Talk to your children about their sexual orientation and let them know that not only will you support them if they are gay or lesbian, but also if they are bisexual, queer, pansexual or questioning.

Insist that the people surrounding your child are respectful. Don't allow others who are uncomfortable with your child's sexual orientation to put them down. Set clear expectations with others about how you want your child to be treated and referred to.

If your child comes out to you as bisexual, read all that you can about bisexuality, and talk to other parents of bisexual children. If needed, you can **seek advice from support groups, advocacy organizations, conferences, or online forums** where you can talk to people who might have had similar questions and experiences with their own children.

FOR EDUCATORS

Since bisexual youth were much less likely than lesbian and gay youth to be out in school, and to their classmates and teachers, educators can play an important role in improving the well-being of bisexual youth. When teach-

ers and administrators talk to students about bullying and harassment, they should be sure to be as inclusive of bisexual youth as possible by modeling inclusive language.

FOR LGBT ADVOCATES

Those who already work or volunteer in capacities that support LGBT youth or adults must strive to be as inclusive as possible by **using terms like “LGBT” when referring to the community, rather than talking about “gay” rights.**

When organizing events, be intentional about including and identifying openly bisexual participants and leaders, and include content specifically related to bisexuality to give the bisexual community a voice. It is especially important to show bisexual youth examples of successful people who identify like they do.

Most importantly, we can hold ourselves and other members of the community accountable for biphobia, for addressing the disparate needs of the bisexual community and for making sure that bisexual youth and adults never feel marginalized, dismissed or stereotyped.

“I feel I am treated differently in my school because I'm female and bisexual... The teachers sometimes even preach hate against those that are not straight.”