Glossary of Terms

Many Americans refrain from talking about sexual orientation and gender identity or expression because it feels taboo, or because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. This glossary was written to help give people the words and meanings to help make conversations easier and more comfortable. LGBTQ+ people use a variety of terms to identify themselves, not all of which are included in this glossary. Always listen for and respect a person's self identified terminology.

Ally | A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQ+ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies, as well as those within the LGBTQ+ community who support each other (e.g., a lesbian who is an ally to the bisexual community).

Asexual | Often called "ace" for short, asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.

Biphobia | The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to more than one gender.

Bisexual | A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with pansexual.

Cisgender | A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Coming Out | The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Gay | A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Gender binary | A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations.

Gender dysphoria | Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify.

Gender-expansive | A person with a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender expression and/or gender identity.

Gender expression | External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Gender-fluid | A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

Gender identity | One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender non-conforming | A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. While many also identify as transgender, not all gender non-conforming people do.

Genderqueer | Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

Homophobia | The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

Intersex | Intersex people are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of difference among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits.

Lesbian | A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

LGBTQ+ | An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer" with a "+" sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of our community.

Non-binary | An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.

Outing | Exposing someone's lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender or gender non-binary identity to others without their permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety or religious or family situations.

Pansexual | Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with bisexual.

Queer | A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ movement.

Questioning | A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Same-gender loving | A term some prefer to use instead of lesbian, gay or bisexual to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

Sex assigned at birth | The sex, male, female or intersex, that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy.

Sexual orientation | An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.

Transgender | An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Transitioning | A series of processes that some transgender people may undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. This typically includes social transition, such as changing name and pronouns, medical transition, which may include hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries, and legal transition, which may include changing legal name and sex on government identity documents. Transgender people may choose to undergo some, all or none of these processes.

The Human Rights Campaign reports on news, events and resources of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation that are of interest to the general public and further our common mission to support the LGBTQ+ community.

When a student comes out to you

Educators often worry about saying the right thing when confronted with conversations that they might not feel entirely comfortable engaging in with their students. A teacher once described to me how these moments made her feel like she was walking on squishy ground. A student coming out is one such moment that may create a heightened level of anxiety for you as an educator. While each such conversation is unique, there are some simple pointers that may help the ground feel less squishy and will ultimately help the student feel more supported.

Coming out can be very emotional for gender and sexually diverse people. It can be exciting or provide a tremendous sense of relief, but it also carries the risk of rejection, discrimination, harassment or even physical violence. A person who is coming out may experience a roller coaster combination of joy, fear, self-confidence, vulnerability, pride or anxiety.

When a student comes out to you and shares aspects of their sexual orientation or change in gender identity, your initial response is important. The student has likely spent time in advance thinking about whether or not to tell you, when and how to tell you and it's likely that they chose to tell you because they see you or already know you as a supportive ally - so congratulations and thank you for being that person in the first place! So, here are some things to remember when a student comes out to you…

- Offer support but don't assume a student needs any help.
- Be a role model of acceptance.
- Appreciate the student's courage.
- Listen, listen, listen.
- Listen (express your support),
- Listen (compartmentalize any discomfort),
- Listen (do your own research later).
- Assure and respect confidentiality.
- Honor that the student is the same student, but respect the changes they want to make.
- Be prepared to give a referral.

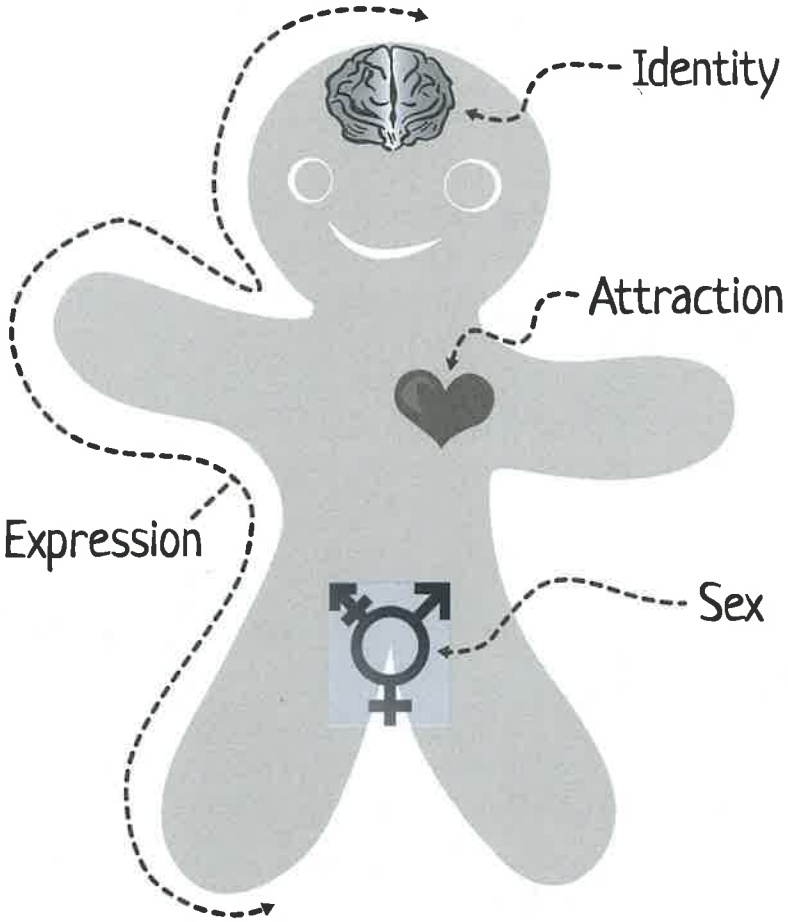
Of course, it's equally important to avoid saying things like: "I knew it," "Are you sure?" "You're just confused," "It's a phase – it will pass," "Shhh, don't tell anyone," or "You can't be gay/lesbian – you've had a girlfriend/boyfriend." These kinds of questions or statements are simply not appropriate and will not help the student feel supported. Instead, ask questions that demonstrate understanding, acceptance and compassion such as "have you been able to tell

anyone else?" "Do you need help of any kind?" or "Do you feel supported by the adults in your life?"

Above all, remember that when a student has made the decision to share aspects or their gender identity or sexual orientation with you, they've probably chosen to do so because they trust you. It is important to reassure the student of that trust by engaging in this moment with respect, dignity, and affirmation - as you do as a supportive ally!

The Genderbread Person v4

it's pronounced METRO♂sexual



⊘ means a lack of what's on the right side

Gender Identity

⊘ → Woman-ness

⊘ → Man-ness

Gender Expression

⊘ → Femininity

⊘ → Masculinity

Anatomical Sex

⊘ → Female-ness

⊘ → Male-ness

Identity ≠ Expression ≠ Sex

Gender ≠ Sexual Orientation

Sex Assigned At Birth

☐ Female ☐ Intersex ☐ Male

Sexually Attracted to... and/or (a/o)

⊘ → Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People

⊘ → Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

Romantically Attracted to...

⊘ → Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People

⊘ → Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

For a bigger bite, read more at www.genderbread.org

THE TREVOR PROJECT

NATIONAL SURVEY ON LGBTQ YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH 2019

INTRODUCTION

I'm proud to share The Trevor Project's inaugural **National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health.**

This is our first wide-ranging report from a cross-sectional national survey of LGBTQ youth across the United States. With over 34,000 respondents, it is the largest survey of LGBTQ youth mental health ever conducted and provides a critical understanding of the experiences impacting their lives.

This ground-breaking survey provides new insights into the challenges that LGBTQ youth across the country face every day, including suicide, feeling sad or hopeless, discrimination, physical threats and exposure to conversion therapy.

The data provides a sobering look at how far we still have to go to protect LGBTQ young lives. But the survey also reveals the resilience and diversity of LGBTQ youth and provides guidance on what can be done to enable them to survive and thrive.

Among some of the key findings of the report from LGBTQ youth in the survey:

- **39% of LGBTQ youth** seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months, with more than half of transgender and non-binary youth having seriously considered
- **71% of LGBTQ youth** reported feeling sad or hopeless for at least two weeks in the past year
- **Less than half of LGBTQ respondents** were out to an adult at school, with youth less likely to disclose their gender identity than sexual orientation
- **2 in 3 LGBTQ youth** reported that someone tried to convince them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, with youth who have undergone conversion therapy more than twice as likely to attempt suicide as those who did not
- **71% of LGBTQ youth** in our study reported discrimination due to either their sexual orientation or gender identity
- **58% of transgender and non-binary youth** reported being discouraged from using a bathroom that corresponds to their gender identity
- **76% of LGBTQ youth** felt that the recent political climate impacted their mental health or sense of self
- **87% of LGBTQ youth** said it was important to them to reach out to a crisis intervention organization that focuses on LGBTQ youth and **98%** said a safe space social networking site for LGBTQ youth would be valuable to them

The Trevor Project's National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health is part of our commitment to use research and data to continually improve our life-saving services for LGBTQ youth and expand the knowledge base for organizations around the globe.

This survey builds upon critical research done by many of our partner organizations over the years and we are particularly proud that it is inclusive of youth of more than 100 sexual orientations and more than 100 gender identities from all 50 states across the country.

We hope this report elevates the voices and experiences of LGBTQ youth, providing insights that can be used by the many organizations working alongside The Trevor Project to support LGBTQ young people around the world. We also hope this report shows LGBTQ youth that we hear them, that their lives have value, and that we are here to support them 24/7.

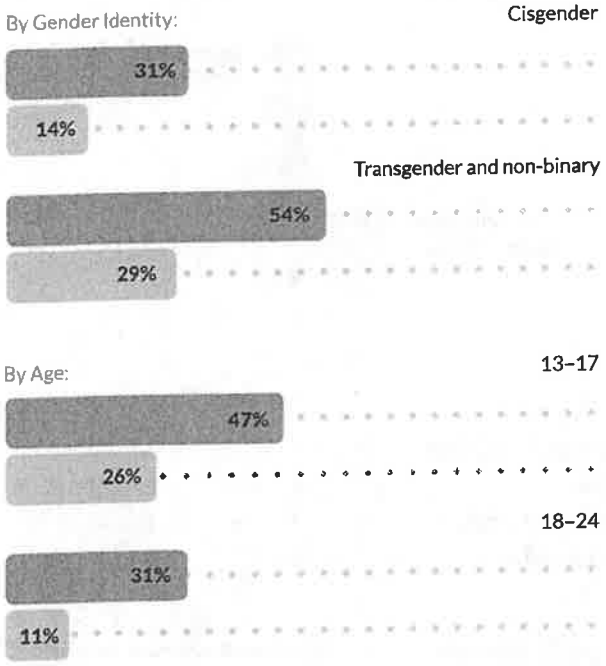
Amit Paley
CEO & Executive Director
The Trevor Project

SUICIDALITY & MENTAL HEALTH

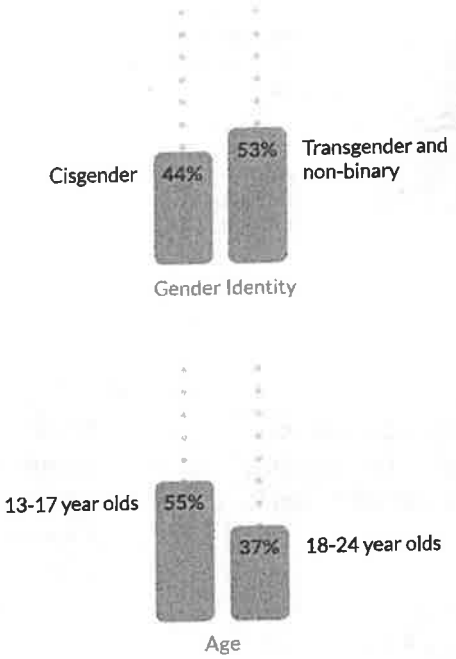
39 % of LGBTQ respondents seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months.

More than half of transgender and non-binary youth have seriously considered suicide.

LGBTQ youth that
■ considered and ■ attempted suicide:



Youth who attempted suicide among those who considered:



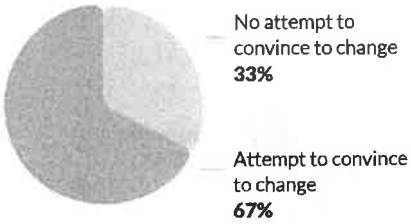
71% of respondents reported feeling sad or hopeless for at least two weeks in the past year

- **Over 18% of LGBTQ respondents** attempted suicide in the past twelve months
- **29% of transgender and non-binary youth respondents** have attempted suicide
- **76% of the sample** felt that recent politics impacted their mental health or sense of self
- **47% of the sample** received psychological or emotional counseling from a mental health professional

2 in 3 youth in our study

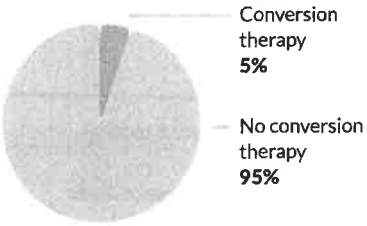
reported that someone tried to convince them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.

LGBTQ youth who reported someone attempted to convince them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity*:

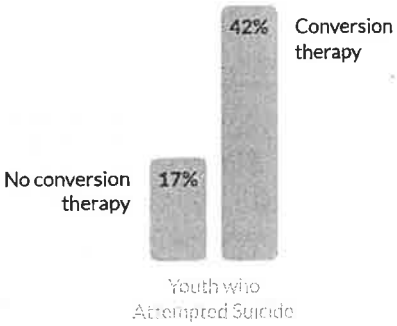


Youth who attempted suicide, comparison of those who experienced attempts to change their sexual orientation or gender identity to those who had not:

LGBTQ youth who reported undergoing conversion therapy*:



Youth who attempted suicide, comparison of those who experienced conversion therapy with those who had not:



57 % of transgender and non-binary youth who have undergone conversion therapy report a suicide attempt in the last year.

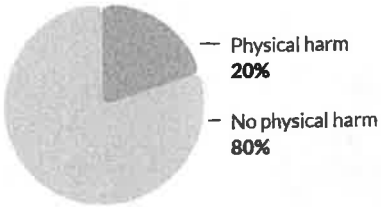
* Some LGBTQ youth who have undergone conversion therapy may not use that term to describe their experience. We asked youth separately whether someone attempted to convince them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity and whether they underwent conversion therapy in order to fully capture the ways youth experience efforts to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.

DISCRIMINATION & PHYSICAL HARM

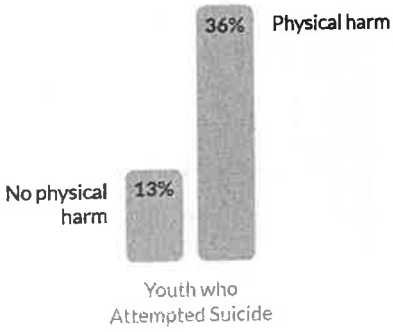
71% of LGBTQ youth in our study reported experiencing discrimination due to either their sexual orientation or gender identity.

78% of transgender and non-binary youth reported being the subject of discrimination due to their gender identity and **70% of LGBTQ youth** reported discrimination due to their sexual orientation.

LGBTQ youth who experienced physical harm due to either their sexual orientation or gender identity:

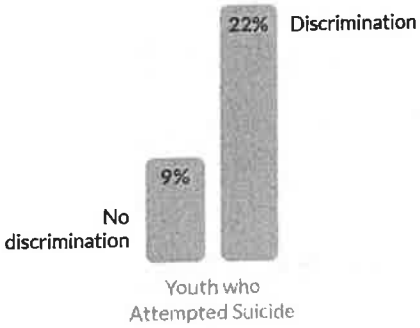


Youth who attempted suicide, comparison of those who experienced physical harm with those who had not:



LGBTQ youth who experienced discrimination due to either their sexual orientation or gender identity:

Youth who attempted suicide, comparison of those who experienced discrimination with those who had not:



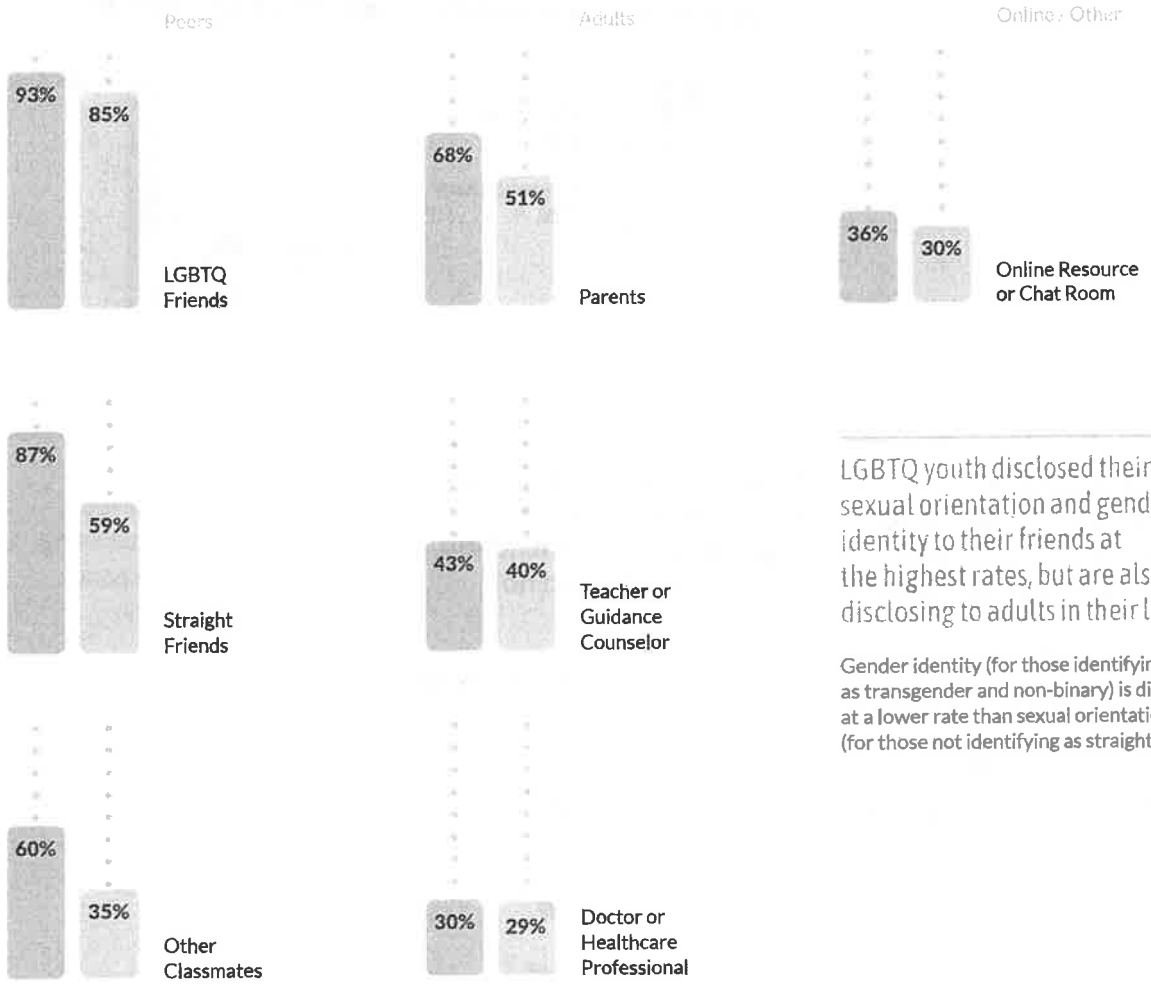
58% of transgender and non-binary youth reported being discouraged from using a bathroom that corresponds to their gender identity.

DISCLOSURE

Less than half of LGBTQ respondents were out to an adult at school.

Youth are **less likely** to disclose their gender identity than sexual orientation.

With whom do LGBTQ youth share their *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*?



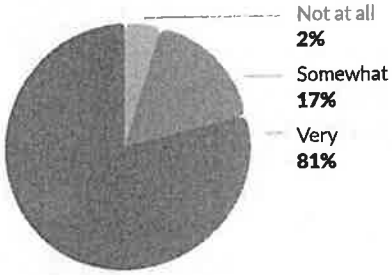
LGBTQ youth disclosed their sexual orientation and gender identity to their friends at the highest rates, but are also disclosing to adults in their lives

Gender identity (for those identifying as transgender and non-binary) is disclosed at a lower rate than sexual orientation (for those not identifying as straight).

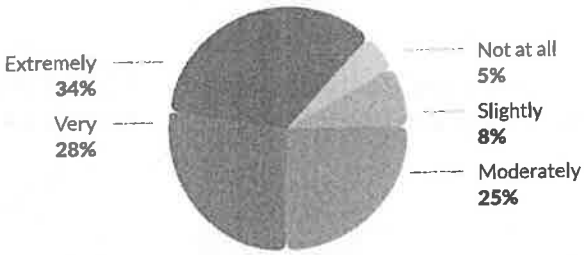
YOUTH SUPPORT PREFERENCES

76% of youth respondents indicated that they would be somewhat to extremely likely to reach out via text or chat in a crisis.

How valuable is an LGBTQ safe-space networking site?

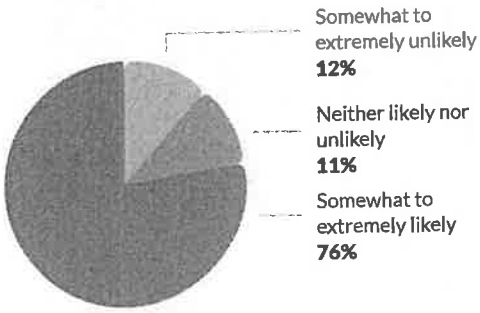


How important would it be to you to reach out to a crisis intervention organization focused on LGBTQ youth?



Youth indicated a strong digital preference for reaching out when in crisis.

If you needed to reach out to a crisis intervention organization for support, how likely are you to reach out via chat/instant message or text message?

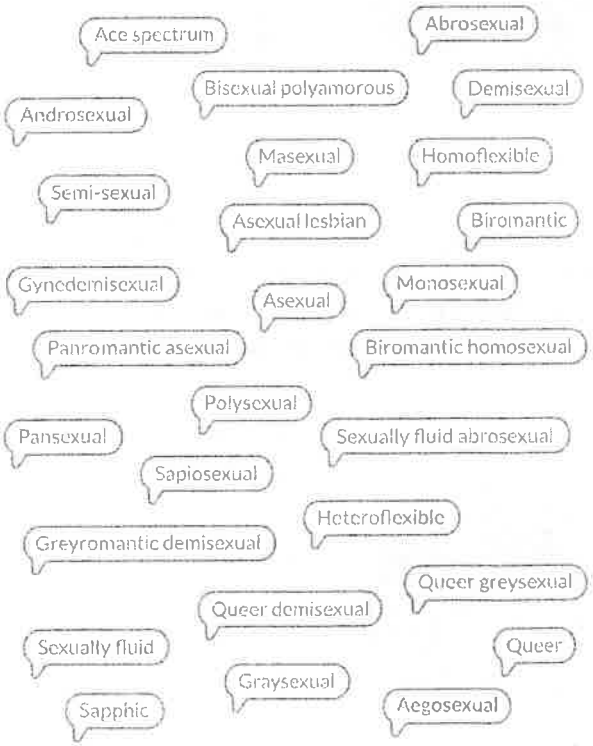


DIVERSITY OF LGBTQ YOUTH

LGBTQ youth are **in all parts and communities of America,** with a **large amount** identifying sexual orientation and gender identity in non-binary ways.

Respondents were from **all 50 states.** **39%** were religious.

LGBTQ youth in the survey identified with more than 100 sexual orientations



LGBTQ youth in the survey identified with more than 100 gender identities

RESEARCH

The mission of The Trevor Project's Research Department is to **produce and use innovative research** that brings new knowledge and clinical implications to the field of suicidology and LGBTQ mental health.

To address this mission we:

Advance Scientific Inquiry

Providing empirical data to better understand the lives of LGBTQ youth and suicidality including risk factors, protective factors, and outcomes.

- The Trevor Project will be a leading source of scientific information on the needs and strengths of LGBTQ youth
- The Trevor Project will collaborate with key national and international research teams and agencies to improve the lives of LGBTQ youth

Support The Trevor Project's Life-Saving Work

Using internal and external data and research findings to advance Trevor's crisis services and peer support programs as well as advocacy and education initiatives.

- The Trevor Project's advocacy and training activities will be supported by data collected directly by The Trevor Project as well as evidence gathered from the broader research literature
- The Trevor Project will embody an evidence-informed culture in which all staff are supported and recognized in the use of research evidence

Inform Public Knowledge

Ensuring our research and evaluation findings are applicable and widely communicated to the broader public including LGBTQ-youth-serving agencies and mental health organizations.

- The Trevor Project will serve as a national model on how to integrate the best research evidence into its practices, programs, and policies
- The Trevor Project will be a leading resource on terminology related to LGBTQ youth

Recommended Citation
The Trevor Project. (2019).
National Survey on LGBTQ Mental Health.
New York, New York: The Trevor Project.

For additional information please contact:
Research@TheTrevorProject.org

METHODOLOGY

The content and methodology for **The Trevor Project's 2019 National Survey on LGBTQ Mental Health** were approved by an independent Institutional Review Board.

A quantitative cross-sectional design was used to collect data using an online survey platform between February 2, 2018 and September 30, 2018.

A sample of individuals ages 13–24 who resided in the United States were recruited via targeted ads on social media. No recruitment was conducted via The Trevor Project website or TrevorSpace. Respondents were defined as being LGBTQ if they identified with a sexual orientation other than straight/heterosexual, a gender identity other than cisgender, or both. In order to ensure representativeness of the sample, targeted recruitment was conducted to ensure adequate sample sizes with respect to geography, gender identity, and race/ethnicity. Qualified respondents completed a secure online questionnaire that included a maximum of 110 questions.

Questions on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) were aligned with the best practices identified in SOGI measurement. Questions on depressed mood and suicidality in the past twelve months were taken from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey to allow for direct comparisons to their nationally representative sample.

Each question related to mental health and suicidality was preceded by a message stating:

"If at any time you need to talk to someone about your mental health or thoughts of suicide, please call The Trevor Project at 1-866-488-7386."

Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and no names or personal details were included ensuring confidentiality.

A total of 34,808 youth consented to complete the online survey. Youth who indicated that they lived outside of the U.S. (n=475) received a message that they were ineligible to participate in the survey. Youth who indicated that they were both cisgender and straight (n=294) were excluded from the sample. A filter was applied to indicate youth who either a) completed less than half of the survey items or b) reached the end of the survey within three minutes (n=8,091).

Additionally, a mischievous responders analysis identified and removed 52 youth who either provided highly unlikely answers (e.g., selecting all possible religious affiliations and race/ethnicity categories) and/or who provided obvious hate speech about LGBTQ populations in any of the free response options.

The final analytic sample was comprised of 25,896 LGBTQ youth in the United States.

Preliminary analyses were conducted to identify any potential problems with redundancy (e.g., multicollinearity) among similar variables such as experiences of discrimination and victimization. All variables contributed uniquely to indicators related to suicidality.

This report uses "transgender and non-binary" as an umbrella term to encompass non-cisgender youth, which includes young people who identify as transgender or non-binary as well as gender expansive, differently gendered, gender creative, gender variant, genderqueer, agender, gender fluid, gender neutral, bigender, androgynous, or gender diverse.

METHODOLOGY

COMPARABILITY

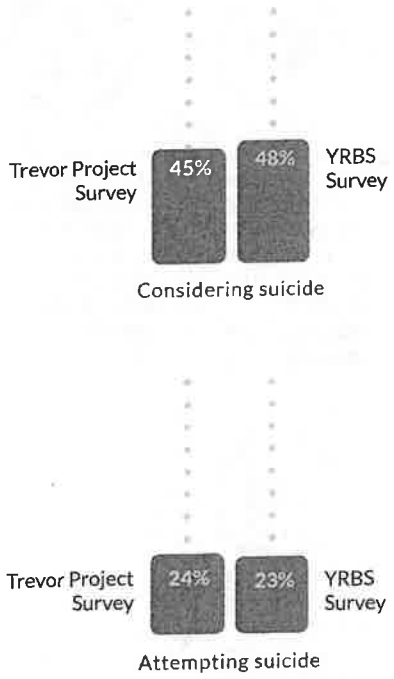
In order to better understand how our sample compares to a national probabilistic sample, we included questions regarding suicidality that were identical to those used by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in their Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS).

Analyses were conducted to compare rates of seriously considering suicide and attempting suicide in the past 12 months among youth ages 13–18 in our sample to the 2017 YRBS sample of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth.

YRBS prevalence rates among LGB youth for seriously considering suicide (48%) were comparable to rates among the same age range in our sample (45%).

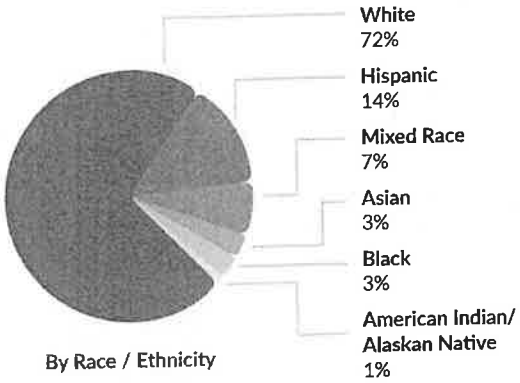
Similarly 23% of LGB youth in the 2017 YRBS reported a suicide attempt in the past 12 months compared to 24% in our sample.

Comparability metrics: Trevor Project Survey and YRBS Survey

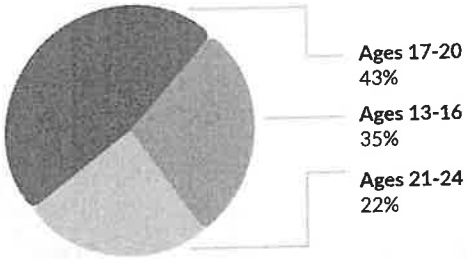


PARTICIPANTS

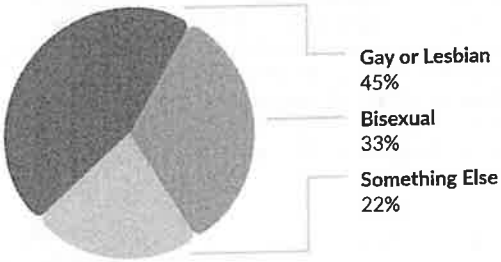
Youth participants in the survey were recruited broadly and represented a wide-range of the LGBTQ community.



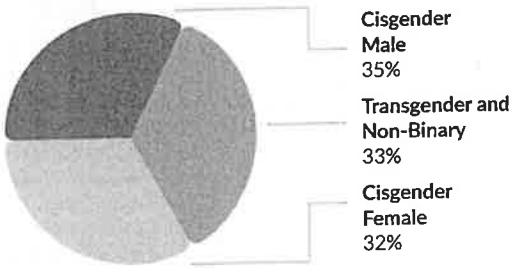
By Race / Ethnicity



By Age



By Sexual Orientation



By Gender Identity

THE TREVOR PROJECT

The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ youth.

Need Help?
We are here for you 24/7

For over 20 years, we have worked to save young lives by providing support through Trevor's free and confidential crisis services programs, including TrevorLifeline, TrevorChat, and TrevorText. We also run TrevorSpace, the world's largest safe space social networking site for LGBTQ youth, and operate innovative advocacy, research, and education programs across the country.

www.TheTrevorProject.org

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TrevorLifeline
The only nation-wide, 24/7 crisis and suicide prevention lifeline offering free and confidential counseling for LGBTQ youth.

TrevorText
A free, confidential, secure service for LGBTQ youth to text a trained Trevor counselor for support and crisis intervention.

TrevorChat
A free, confidential and secure instant messaging service that provides live help for LGBTQ youth by trained counselors.

TrevorSpace
The world's largest safe space social networking community for LGBTQ youth, their friends, and allies.

Trevor Research
Our programmatic evaluations ensure we significantly reduce suicidality with our services, and we also publish external research to help peers support LGBTQ youth.

Trevor Advocacy
Our advocacy work at the federal, state, and local levels includes publicly advocating for/against particular bills and filing/joining amicus briefs in major cases.

Trevor Education
Our online education programs include information about school policies and training programs for teachers and guidance counselors.

What's in a Pronoun?: Resources and Activities on Third-Person, Gender-Neutral Pronouns

This resource includes a guide to pronouns and gender-neutral pronouns, with an emphasis on addressing questions about using "they" as a singular pronoun. The fill-in-the-blank activity gives people a chance to experience how gender-neutral pronouns work in action. The speed chevruta activity provides an opportunity to practice pronouns as part of introductions and elicits empathy through the sharing of experiences of isolation and/or discrimination.

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By Keshet

What's in a Pronoun?: Resources and Activities on Third-Person, Gender- Neutral Pronouns

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WHAT'S A PRONOUN?

Pronouns are words used to talk about a person instead of using that person's name. For example, instead of saying, "Moishe's challah is amazing because Moishe uses Moishe's own special recipe," we could use pronouns instead. If Moishe uses he/him/his pronouns, this sentence could be: "Moishe's challah is amazing because *he* uses *his* own special recipe." Many people use the pronoun sets he/him/his or she/her/hers. Other people may use the neutral pronoun set they/them/theirs or other neutral pronoun sets, such as ze/hir/hirs.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "NEUTRAL"?

The pronouns he/him/his and she/her/hers indicate gender: man/woman or boy/girl. Often, however, we don't know the gender of the person that we are talking about. For example, if you find a wallet on the ground, you might say, "I should find the owner of this wallet. They must be looking for it." In this case, the person we're talking about could be of any gender, so the pronoun *they* is used. You are probably already familiar with using neutral pronouns. However, they/them/theirs pronouns are not just used to talk about a hypothetical or unknown person. Some people use they/them/theirs in the same way others use she/her/hers or he/him/his. For example, if Ari uses they/them/theirs pronouns, we might say, "Ari

hosted an amazing Shabbat dinner last night! They made all their favorite dishes and even made the chocolate babka themself." Many people who are genderqueer, nonbinary, agender, or trans use they/them/theirs pronouns.

Find out more info on neutral pronouns at https://www.mypronouns.org/they-them

HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO KNOW WHAT PRONOUNS PEOPLE USE?

You're not a mind-reader, so you really can't know what pronouns someone uses unless you ask. A wonderful way to do this is to share your pronouns first, which in turn indicates that you're open to hearing others' pronouns. It's an easy technique to incorporate in meetings or other gatherings where people introduce themselves. You can say, "My name is Rachel, and I use she/her/hers pronouns." It only takes a second and is an important step toward the inclusion of people of all genders in the space. It also combats gender stereotypes generally by breaking down the assumption that someone must look a particular way in order to be read as a certain gender. Also, make sure you check in with the person about who knows these pronouns as we wouldn't want to unintentionally out somebody.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

On the most basic level, using people's correct pronouns is about *kavod* (respect). In the same way we ask people's names so we can refer to them correctly, using people's pronouns is about honoring them as a person. As Jews, we are tasked with loving our neighbors *and* strangers, as we were once strangers in Egypt. In a work or learning environment, people can't be productive and fully present if they feel ignored, invisible, and disrespected. Sharing, asking, and using correct pronouns helps maintain *shalom bayit* (peace in the home) by contributing to an environment where everyone can be comfortable and safe.

WHAT IF I MESS UP AND USE THE WRONG PRONOUN FOR SOMEONE?

For many people, using they/them/theirs pronouns is a new concept, and mistakes happen. When we make a mistake, we can remember our duty of *tshuva* (repentance). Unlike Yom Kippur, however, your apology doesn't have to be hours-long! In fact, a short apology is better because it doesn't dwell on the mistake. When you apologize for getting a pronoun wrong, try to avoid making the apology about your own discomfort.

Statements like, "I'm sorry, but this is just so hard for me," make the conversation about *you*, as opposed to the person who was [probably unintentionally] hurt, misgendered and/or misunderstood. Instead, try: "As he said—sorry, I mean, as *they* said—latkes are superior to hamentashen, and I agree with them."

Find more advice on correcting mistakes at https://www.mypronouns.org/mistakes

BUT ISN'T "THEY" PLURAL?

One of the most common pushbacks to using "they" as a gender-neutral pronoun for an individual is a question of grammar. Most of us learned that "they" is a plural pronoun for groups of people only. Therefore, it's grammatically incorrect to use "they" for a single person. We can get stuck in this grammar vortex until we realize that using "they" as a singular pronoun has been happening for centuries in the English language!

"THEY" IN LITERATURE

Using the singular "they" or one of its other forms has long been used in literature as a way of referring to a single person. The practice dates as far back as the 16th Century (and maybe even longer) in some of the most revered works of English literature.

Going all the way back to the year 1400, Geoffrey Chaucer used "they" in *The Canterbury Tales*:

> "And whoso fyndeth hym out of swich blame,
> *They* wol come up [...]"
> Translation: "And whoever finds him out of such blame, *they* will come up..."

Shakespeare, whose effect on the English language can't be overstated, used the singular "they" in multiple works:

> There's not a man I meet but doth salute me
> As if I were *their* well-acquainted friend (*Comedy of Errors*, Act IV Scene 3) And every one to rest *themselves* betake (*Rape of Lucrece*)

One of the most renowned English novelists of all time, Jane Austen, employed "they," "them," and "their" throughout her works. An example, found in *Mansfield Park*:

> "I would have every body marry if *they* can do it properly..."

The beloved American poet Emily Dickinson shows many uses of the singular "they" in this excerpt from a letter in 1181:

> "Almost anyone under the circumstances would have doubted if [the letter] were *theirs*, or indeed if *they* were *themselves*."

All this to say, there's a history that we can look to in order to understand the use of "they" singular and see it isn't anything new. The English language has been grappling with the confines of gender from the beginning.

LANGUAGE IS EVOLVING!

It also must be said that language is constantly evolving, and English is a particularly malleable one (did you know that "you" was originally a plural pronoun?). "They" as a singular pronoun has caught on so widely that even elite dictionaries and style guides have recognized its usage and importance as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun.

Oxford Dictionaries and Merriam-Webster both include the singular usage and its longstanding usage in their definitions of "they." Read more about their perspectives at *https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/they* and *https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/they.*

Along with dictionaries, grammar and style experts have also made their case for a singular "they." It was the American Dialect Society's 2015 Word of the Year:

https://www.americandialect.org/2015-word-of-the-year-is-singular-they

The most reputable and widely used style guides have also legitimized the singular "they," including the *Washington Post Style Guide*, *Associated Press Stylebook*, and the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

https://blog.ap.org/products-and-services/making-a-case-for-a-singular-they

The Chicago Manual of Style, one of the most widely used, says, "A writer (or speaker) may also use they to refer to a specific, known person who does not identify with a gender-specific pronoun such as *he* or *she*... *CMOS 17* will advise that 'a person's stated preference for a specific pronoun should be respected.'" This usage is still not widespread either in speech or in writing, but *Chicago* accepts it even in formal writing.

It's a real challenge to reframe our understanding of one of the building blocks of communicating. Thankfully, there are plenty of sources explaining how grammar is already making the singular "they" work.

CAN'T PEOPLE COME UP WITH NEW PRONOUNS INSTEAD?

Yes, and in fact people have! Many sets of alternative gender-neutral singular pronouns have been developed. For some people, these new pronouns are empowering and authentically express how they relate to their gender. New pronouns can also help avoid the confusion that some people have around using "they" for a single person.

Here's a chart of third-person pronouns with many options for referring to an individual. This isn't an exhaustive list; there are more out there that people have developed. You may be wondering why there are so many options. Awareness about pronouns is still relatively new. People are figuring out what works best for them. It's a huge challenge to make language usage inclusive, but people are working really hard to do so.

_____ laughed.	Ask_____!	That's_____ pen.	That pen is _____.	Did Alex enjoy ___?
He	him	his	his	himself
She	her	her	hers	herself
They	them	their	theirs	themself
Xie	hir*	hir	hirs	hirself
Yo	yo	yos	yos	yoself
Ze	zir*	zir	zirs	zirself

**Note: hir and zir and their variants are pronounced with a long e, like the word "here."*

The newness of some of these words may be a lot to take in and can feel overwhelming. What it really comes down to is listening to the person you're talking with. They will tell you the best way to respect them, as we all deserve. It may be hard, and you'll probably make mistakes. That's okay. That's how we learn.

PRONOUN FILL-IN THE BLANK ACTIVITY

Feeling uneasy about putting into use 'They/They/Their(s)' pronouns? No problem; we understand and have your back! Below is a Fill in the Blank activity for you to practice using these words in different scenarios. The answers follow. The first set is using the 'They' series in ways we do every day even though we may not be thinking about it.

Word Choices: They, Them, Their, Theirs, Themself (and grammatical variations such as 'they've' and 'they're')

Pick the correct word from the Word Choices to complete the following sentences.

1. Someone left phone in the conference room! We should return it back to_____. _____ background is of cute puppies!

2 "What time does your friend's flight get in?" "Oh _____ land at 1:40pm and I'm going to pick _____ up at the airport. I hope _____ don't have too much luggage. I can't carry it for_____and I don't know if there's room in my car!"

3 "Dr. Rosen, you have one patient left in the waiting room" "Can you please tell me about_?" "Sure. _____have a stomach ache,_____have an ear ache and_____complaining of a sore ankle;_____rolled it while_____were carrying the Torah during services!" "Okay, can you please let_____know that I'll be with_____shortly._____should take some pain relievers in the meantime and make sure_____foot is elevated. The pain relievers should help_____feel better soon." "Thank you, Dr. Rosen. I'll let_____know."

4 Joey is excited to attend_first ever Shabbaton!_____been thinking about what it will feel like to be in a safe space where_____can be both Jewish AND _____ hoping to walk away from the weekend with lots of new friends._____are also excited to be away from home for a whole weekend!_____parents are very proud of_____for putting_____out there to meet other teens. It's not always easy to be vulnerable but_____parents recognize the importance of the this journey and exploration!

5 When Bloom was younger_loved going to summer camp!_____loved the nature, the arts and the freedom that was available to_____!_____made a lot of friends, a lot of s'mores and a lot of After camp ended each summer,_____made sure to keep in touch with all of _____ friends. _____quickly realized that camp was an awesome space to be _____ and to make lifelong friends. As_____grew older,_____decided to dedicate ___ life to creating these safe spaces for all! Now_____direct a Jewish overnight camp and _____ love it!_____pour_____heart, soul and all of_____energy into creating a magical, safe and fun space for campers to be themselves!

6 Every day Dubbs is excited to work for love the work_____get to do and the different communities____get to work with._____love the impact____make and _____ coworkers, too! Not only is Keshet doing important work for other organizations, it also gave Dubbs a chance to explore__identity in a safe way! So far during_____time at Keshet, explored different pronouns, different ways to identify and have become more confident and connected to work because _____ finally feel 100% _____ and confident in who _____ are. Thank you, Keshet, for giving_____this incredible opportunity to be _____ in the most authentic way possible!

The Answers!

1 Someone left their phone in the conference room! We should return it back to them. Their background is of cute puppies!

2 "What time does your friend's flight get in?" "Oh they land at 1:40pm and I'm going to pick them up at the airport. I hope they don't have too much luggage. I can't carry it for them and I don't know if there's room in my car!"

3 "Dr. Rosen, you have one patient left in the waiting room" "Can you please tell me about them?" "Sure. They have a stomach ache, they have an ear ache and they're complaining of a sore ankle; They rolled it while they were carrying the Torah during services!" "Okay, can you please let them know that I'll be with them shortly. They should take some pain relievers in the meantime and make sure their foot is elevated. The pain relievers should help them feel better soon." "Thank you, Dr. Rosen. I'll let them know."

4 Joey is excited to attend their first ever Shabbaton! They've been thinking about what it will feel like to be in a safe space where they can be both Jewish AND They're hoping to walk away from the weekend with lots of new friends. They are also excited to be away from home for a whole weekend! Their parents are very proud of them for putting themself out there to meet other teens. It's not always easy to be vulnerable but their parents recognize the importance of the this journey and exploration!

5 When Bloom was younger they loved going to summer camp! They loved the nature, the arts and the freedom that was available to them! They made a lot of friends, a lot of s'mores and a lot of crafts.

After camp ended each summer, they made sure to keep in touch with all of their They quickly realized that camp was an awesome space to be themself and to make lifelong friends. As they grew older, they decided to dedicate their life to creating these safe spaces for all! Now they direct a Jewish overnight camp and they love it! They pour their heart, soul and all of their energy into creating a magical, safe and fun space for campers to be themselves!

6 Every day Dubbs is excited to work for Keshet. They love the work they get to do and the different communities they get to work with. They love the impact they make and their coworkers, too! Not only is Keshet doing important work for other organizations, it also gave Dubbs a chance to explore their identity in a safe way! So far during their time at Keshet, they explored different pronouns, different ways to identify and have become more confident and connected to their work because they finally feel 100% themself and confident in who they Thank you, Keshet, for giving them this incredible opportunity to be themself in the most authentic way possible!

SPEED CHEVRUTA ACTIVITY

Goals: (1) to practice and normalize sharing and asking pronouns and (2) to build empathy based on personal experiences of isolation/discrimination

Setup: Two rows of chairs facing each other (with or without table between)

Framing: "For many of us, sharing our pronouns and asking others' pronouns is a new convention. This activity will help us practice, as well as helping us reflect on our own experiences."

Directions: Ask participants to find a partner they don't know (or don't know well) and sit across from them. The beginning of each round will start with both partners introducing themselves with name, pronouns, and role/institution. (Remind folks that they should do this at the beginning of each round, even if they know the person across from them, since we're practicing using pronouns.) After the introductions, read aloud one of the following prompts (if possible, project prompt on presentation screen). Both partners should answer the question. After 2 minutes, yell "rotate" and have everyone move one chair to their right and repeat the process.

- Talk about a time you have felt like an outsider?
- When is a time you couldn't be your full self in a space/situation?
- Have you ever had to keep part of yourself a secret for fear of rejection/violence?
- Have you ever felt like there were structural barriers in place to keep you from succeeding?
- Have you ever felt unsafe in public because of an identity?
- Have you ever been barred from a space/activity/opportunity because of an identity?

Debrief: Remind folks to just share from their experiences and not their partners', since sometimes we are comfortable sharing a story with one person but not the entire room.

- How did it feel to share your pronouns when you introduced yourself?
- What question(s) really stuck out to you and why?
- Was it difficult to think of answers to some of these questions? Which ones?
- Did anything come up that you hadn't thought about before?

Closing: "Most people can relate to the feeling of being different or other at some point in their lives, but some people feel this otherness more than others. For transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people, this is something they face every day."

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Allyship Beyond the Basics:
Personal Pronouns and Why They Matter

Why should you include your pronouns when you introduce yourself?

1. It's a quick and easy way to **vocalize inclusion** as well as to support, celebrate, and affirm our transgender and nonbinary colleagues.
2. It communicates **where our values lie** and that we envision a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are respected, valued, and affirmed inclusive of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
3. It can be **a conversation starter** that allows us to lead with our allyship and educate new and potential allies about gender identity, gender expression, and the gender spectrum.

Pronoun		Nominative	Oblique	Possessive	Possessive	Reflexive
Binary	He	He is laughing	I called him	His eyes gleam	That is his	He likes himself
	She	She is laughing	I called her	Her eyes gleam	That is hers	She likes herself
Non-binary	They (most common)	They are laughing	I called them	Their eyes gleam	That is theirs	They like themselves
	Xe "zee"	Xe is laughing	I called xem	Xyr eyes gleam	That is xyrs	Xe likes xemself
	Ze "zee"	Ze his laughing	I called zir	Zir eyes gleam	That is zirs	Ze likes zirself

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What do I use?

- **She/her/hers:** Typically used for people who identify as female, regardless of how they were assigned at birth. *Example: She is the woman who is the CEO of the corporation.*
- **He/him/his:** Typically used for people who identify as male, regardless of what they were assigned at birth. *Example: He is a man who likes cats.*
- **They/them/theirs:** Typically seen as a gender-neutral or gender-fluid designation, often used by people who were assigned a binary sex with which they do not identify. *Example: Jamie went to the store and they bought soda.*
- **Xe/Ze and Xyr/Zir:** These terms are most often used with individuals who identify as nonbinary in their gender identity. These words are often associated with (but certainly not limited to) more activist and academic spaces. *Example: Ze is really good at trigonometry.*

HELLO, I'M

SUBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	POSSESSIVE	REFLEXIVE
He	Him	His	Himself
She	Her	Hers	Herself
They	Them	Theirs	Themself
Ze	Zir	Zirs	Zirself
Sie	Hir	Hirs	Hirself