

LGBTQ+ Young Adult Mental Health: *Connecting in Precarious Times*

Emmanuel Lutheran Church
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Reconciling in Christ
Congregation

Jesus met those on the margins

Matthew 25: 38, 40 ³⁸ *And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you...? 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'*

Aims as a RIC ELCA Congregation

- Educate and advocate for inclusion and family acceptance
- Welcome and enhance church inclusion
- Nurture faith identity of LGBT+ individuals
- How to overcome biases re: LGBTQ (mental health, suicide)? Walk toward, not away.



Who am I? What am I? – Core beliefs

“This idea that God is mindful of the individual, is tremendously important in dealing with fear. In this world the socially disadvantaged man is constantly given a negative answer to the most important personal questions:

“Who am I?” and “What am I?”

—Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, written in 1949



VIDEO - LGBTQ YOUTH: VOICES OF TRAUMA, LIVES OF PROMISE – NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK: FAMILY ACCEPTANCE PROJECT

- Trauma
- Identity
- Loneliness, rejection
- Discrimination
- Self-worth – feeling ‘less than’
- Mental health care
- Politics and public health concerns
- Homelessness

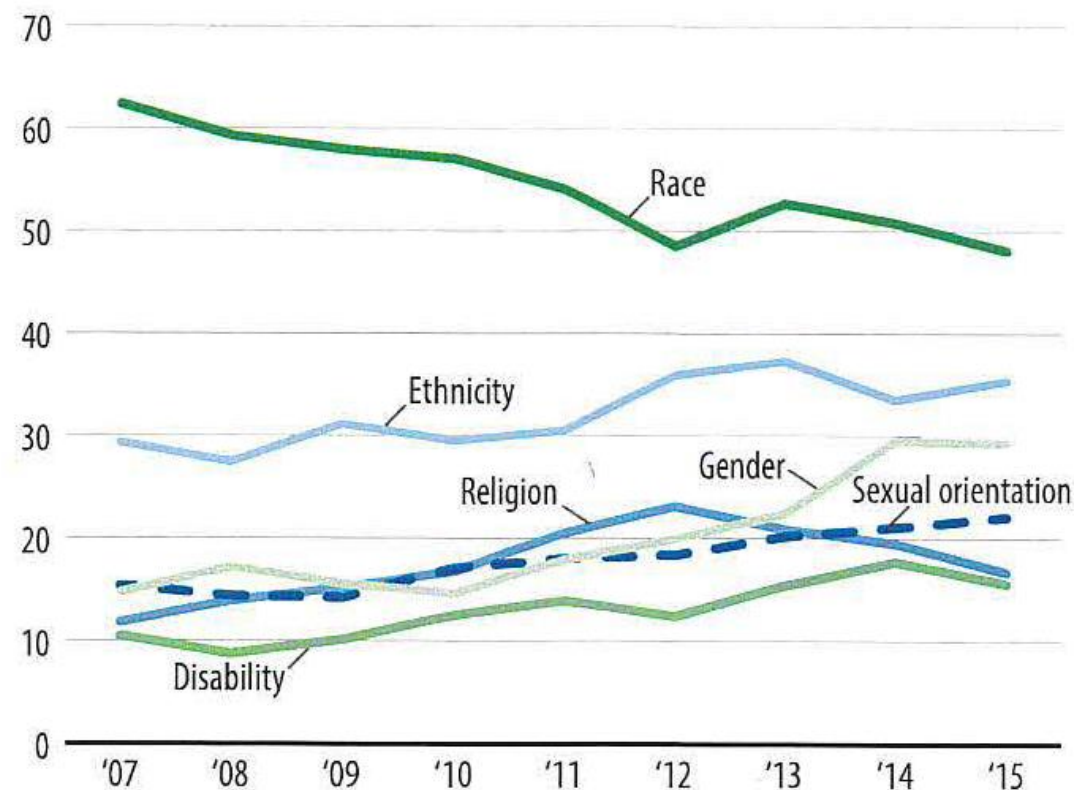


U.S. Department of Justice
Hate Crime Victimization, 2004-2015
June, 2017 Special Report
(% of hate crimes perceived by victim to be based upon bias – hate language, hate symbols, police confirmation)

<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/hcv0415.pdf>

FIGURE 3

Victims' perception of bias in hate crime victimizations, 2007–2015



Note: Hate crime includes incidents confirmed by police as bias-motivated and incidents perceived by victims to be bias-motivated because the offender used hate language or left behind hate symbols. Estimates based on 5-year rolling averages, centered on the most recent year. Detail may not sum to total due to victims reporting more than one type of bias motivating the hate-related victimizations. See appendix table 4 for estimates and standard errors.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2007–2015.

Sympathetic Nervous System

Limbic System –

“Emotional brain”

Accelerates – fight or flight defenses

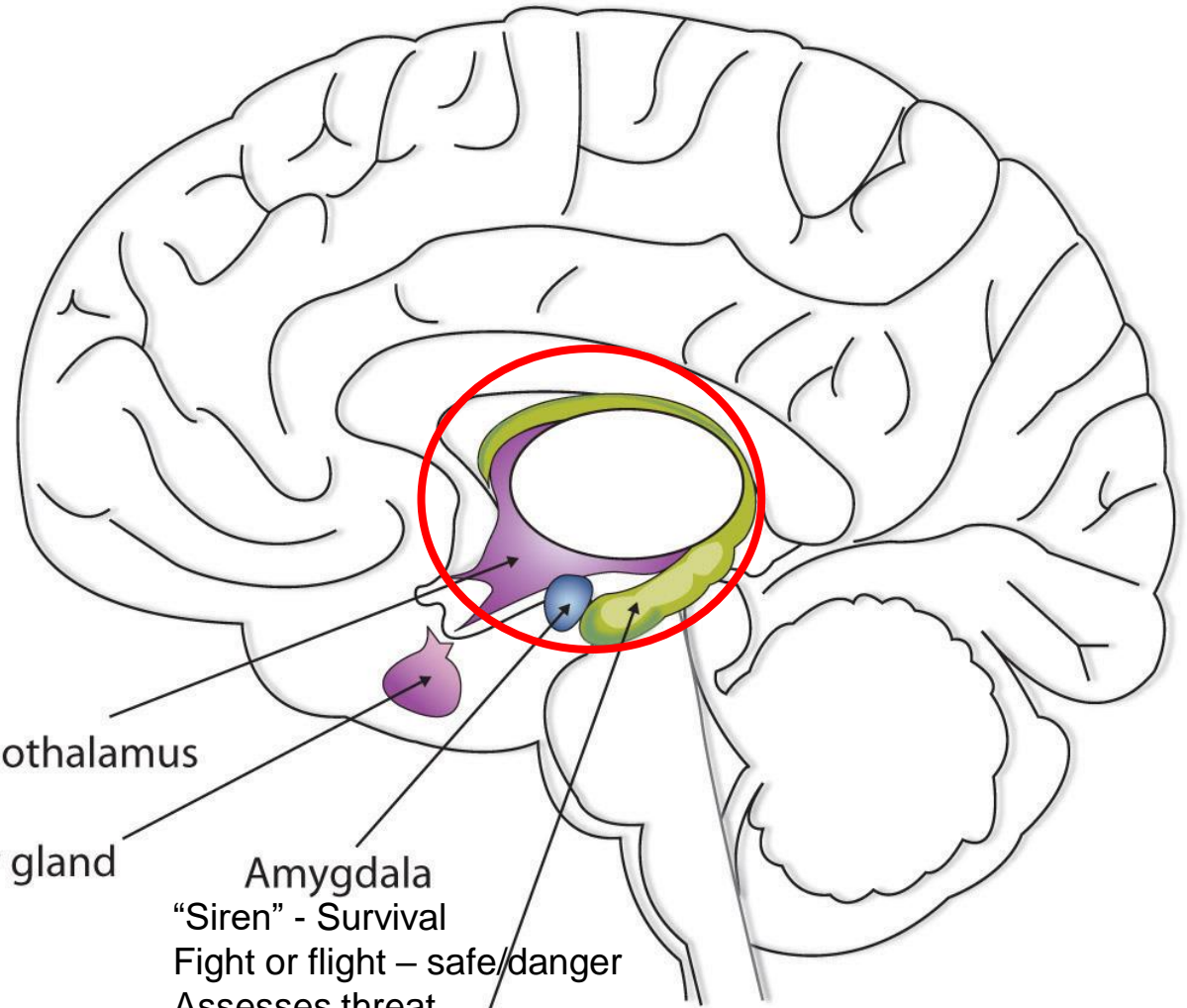
Receives message and sends out - Hypothalamus
request for cortisol and adrenaline
thru pituitary

Pituitary gland

Amygdala
“Siren” - Survival
Fight or flight – safe/danger
Assesses threat

Hippocampus

– info from amygdala put into context &
creates memory, learning



COVID-19 Increased Mental Health Risk In Young Adults 18+

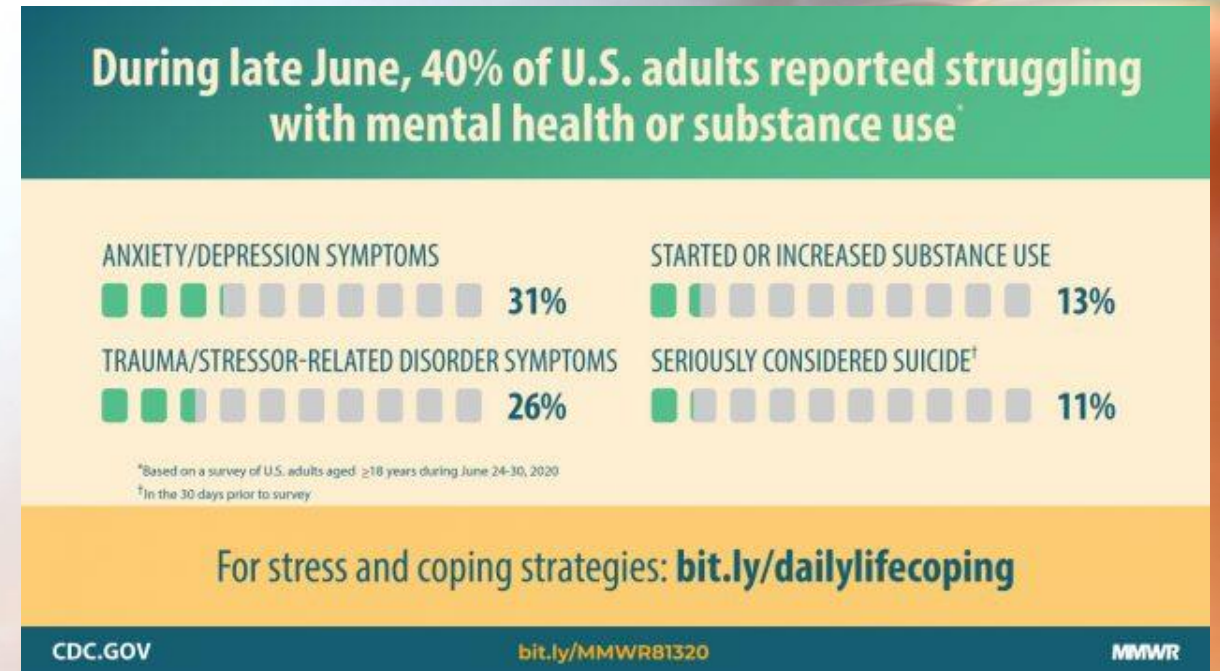
COVID-19 related mental health: symptoms of anxiety disorder (normally closer to 19%), and depressive disorder (normally 7%) increased considerably in the United States **during April–June of 2020**, compared with the same period in 2019.

During June 24–30, 2020 survey incl 5412 adults ≥18 years across the United States 10.7% seriously considered suicide in 30 days prior to survey w/sig higher rates among these respondents:

- **Young adults ages 18-24 – 25.5%**
- Hispanic respondents – 18.6%
- Non-Hispanic Black respondents – 15.1%
- Unpaid caregivers for adults – 30.7%
- Essential workers – 21.7%



https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm?s_cid=mm6932a1_w



Anxiety, depression, trauma disconnects



-Prevents my being present to myself or another, or allowing God's presence.

-Prevents me from holding space for others.



Trauma Symptoms

- Depression
- Irritability
- Decreased interest
- Feeling numb
- Concentration declines
- Insomnia
- Emotional overwhelm
- Shame and worthlessness
- Loss of sensing a future; hopelessness
- Fewer or no memories
- Nightmares and/or flashbacks
- Hypervigilance/mistrust
- Generalized anxiety/panic attacks
- Chronic pain/headaches
- Substance abuse/eating disorders
- Feeling out of body
- Self-destructive behavior
- Loss of sense of 'Who I am'

(Janina Fisher, PhD, *Psychoeducational Aids for Working with Psychological Trauma*, 2009)



Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety



- Numbness, tingling
- Bodily sensation of heat or cold
- Wobbly legs
- Inability to relax
- Fears the worst outcome
- Dizziness; lightheadedness
- Racing or heavily pounding heart
- Unsteadiness
- Terrified
- Nervous
- Choking feeling
- Trembling hands
- Shakiness, shivering
- Fear losing control
- Difficulty breathing
- Fear of dying
- Feeling scared
- Indigestion or discomfort in stomach
- Faint
- Flushed face, blushing
- Sweating, not due to air temperature



Source: Beck, A. (1990). *Beck Anxiety Inventory*. San Antonio: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

Emotional Changes

- Feelings of sadness, which can include crying spells for no apparent reason
- Feeling hopeless or empty
- Irritable or annoyed mood
- Frustration or anger, even over small matters
- Loss of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyed activities
- Loss of interest in, or conflict with, family and friends
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Fixation on past failures or exaggerated self-blame or self-criticism
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure, and the need for excessive reassurance
- Trouble with thinking, concentrating, making decisions and remembering things
- Ongoing sense that life and the future are grim and bleak
- Frequent thoughts of death, dying or suicide

Behavioral Changes

- Tiredness; depletion of energy
- Insomnia or sleeping too much
- Changes in appetite — decreased appetite and weight loss, or increased cravings for food and weight gain
- Use or abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Agitation or restlessness - pacing, hand-wringing or inability to sit still
- Slow thinking, speaking or body movements
- Frequent complaints of unexplained body aches and headaches
- Social isolation
- Poor school performance or frequent absences from school
- Neglected appearance
- Angry outbursts, disruptive or risky behavior, or other acting-out behaviors
- Self-harm — for example, cutting, burning, or excessive piercing or tattooing
- Making a suicide plan or a suicide attempt



Trevor Project 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Trevor-Project-National-Survey-Results-2020.pdf>

Trevor Project - LGBTQ youth crisis intervention and suicide prevention organization

Largest survey polled **40,000** LGBTQ people **ages 13 - 24**

- 68% reported symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder
- 55% reported symptoms of major depressive disorder
- 40% (2 of 5) reported they “seriously considered” attempting suicide in the past year
- 15% attempted suicide in the past year



https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/40-percent-lgbtq-youth-seriously-considered-suicide-past-year-survey-n1233832?fbclid=IwAR2PXTnLg1TKIFvHdjk70x82-99IOnyb62-8y4OZdY5UOmPPoA_HRG0RTsQ

LGBT Youth Suicide Statistics

	Transgender Youth	LGB Youth	Heterosexual Youth
Contemplated Suicide	> 50%	40%	13%
Suicide Attempts	37% vs. 54% <i>(b)</i> (Support vs. No support)	23%	5%



a) Trevor Project - <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Trevor-Project-National-Survey-Results-2020.pdf>

b) *The Report of the 2015 Transgender Survey (Ages 18+)* US Transsurvey.org

Pandemic and Transgender Mental Health

- Moving home to unsupportive people during quarantine
- Uncertain COVID impact as few states collect data on LGBTQ community
- Gender dysphoria - the psychological difficulties caused by living in a body that does not match one's gender identity.
 - Estimated 0.17%–1.3% of adolescents and young adults identify as transgender
- Medical care
 - Delays in and rescheduled elective surgery or other transition-related care (i.e. hormone therapy prescriptions)
 - Discrimination - "trans broken arm syndrome"

"The volume has been turned up on everything: Pandemic places alarming pressure on transgender mental health," *The Washington Post*; Aug. 18, 2020



"Gender dysphoria in adolescence: current perspectives," *Adolescent Health Medicine and Therapeutics*, 2018; 9: 31–41 Riittakerttu Kalfiala-Heino, Hannah Bergman, Marja Työläjarvi, and Louise Frisen

Bullying Resources

GlSEN.org - Gay, lesbian and straight education network - national educational organization focused on LGBT issues in K-12 schools. GLSEN offers a variety of resources and materials **focused on anti-LGBT bullying.**

pflag.org - Parents and friends of lesbians and Gays - tools to create safe schools, training program, updates on national legislation and advice for supporting LGBT parents of school-aged children.



LGBTQ+ GSA Groups at Fairfax Co. High Schools

- W.T. Woodson High School – GSA, Josh MacNabb, History & Social Studies Teacher
- Madison High School – Gay Straight Alliance – Christina Palo, History & Social Studies Teacher
- Oakton High School - Gay Straight Alliance – Scott Larson, Business & IT Teacher
- Marshall High School – Gender & Sexuality Alliance; The Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) is a club which provides a place for all students, of whatever sexual orientation, to feel welcome and comfortable. The group aims to raise awareness of issues facing LGBTQ students, who face physical and mental abuse at a much higher rate than other students. Martha Noone, English Teacher
- South Lakes High School – Gender & Sexuality Alliance



Risk Factors for Suicide

Risk factors are variables that increase chances that someone will consider, attempt, or die by suicide. These are not causative or predictive of a suicide attempt, but they're important to be aware of.

- Mental disorders
- Alcohol and other substance use disorders
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity and/or aggression
- Trauma or abuse history
- Major physical illnesses
- Chronic physical pain
- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- Family history of suicide
- Job or financial loss
- Loss of relationship(s)
- Easy access to lethal means
- Local clusters of suicide
- Lack of social support; isolation
- Stigma in asking for help
- Lack of healthcare for mental health and substance abuse treatment
- Cultural and religious beliefs, such as the belief that suicide is a honorable resolution of a personal dilemma
- Exposure to or admiration for others who have died by suicide (in real life or via the media and Internet)



Suicide Warning Signs

Can help you determine if someone is at risk especially if the behavior is new, has increased, or is related to a painful event, loss, or change

- Discussing wanting to die or threatens to kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill themselves
- States feeling hopeless or no reason to live – Indifference about their future...“I don't care.”
- States not deserving to live; puts self down
- Expresses hopelessness
- Says 'goodbye' to important people
- Gives away important belongings
- Discussing feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Admits being a burden to others
- Discloses feeling suicidal and/or has a specific plan for how they would commit suicide
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Agitation or behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings



<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/how-we-can-all-prevent-suicide/>

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/preventing-suicide/warning-signs-of-suicide>

Being an Ally Impacts LGBTQ Mental Health

“Who am I?” “What am I?”

Safe environments – free from rejection, discrimination, victimization

- Key is feeling supported by family and friends
- Having 1 supportive person reduces the risk of suicide by 30%
- Respect for identity and pronouns of transgender and nonbinary youth
- Be an advocate in your religious and spiritual community for acceptance
- Acceptance of and ability to express one's identity



Before Asking... "What can I do?" Ask... "*How can I be?*" ...Non-anxious Presence

- What is non-anxious presence?
 - Staying connected with myself and others
 - Keeping centered
 - Self-awareness and calm state under stress
 - Think before acting (respond) more than act before thinking (reacting)
 - Recognize anxiety and not let it drive behavior
 - Self-control and can focus on larger goal
- Modeling peace



Peter Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times* (2006).

How Can I Be a Non-Anxious Presence?

- Focus on being present in your body in the moment, breathing, heart rate –place your hand on heart, inhale deep breath, hold for count of 4, exhale out for 8 count...Feel your heartbeat in your chest.
- Remember his 3 big messages of God's Presence:
 - "I love you"
 - "Do not be afraid"
 - "I will never leave you"



Peter Scazzaro, 9/22/20 Podcast "Relax. It's Going to Be Ok."

We can hold space and connect with one another through our **non-anxious presence**.

Breath Prayer - Just breathing and praying (silently alone or together) can create a safe and calm setting by joining with Holy Spirit



Holding Someone in the Light
- visual prayer, holding someone in God's love and illuminating presence

Instill Hope – Helping “conjure up the necessary image that can catapult you into your future.” -- Fr. Greg Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 2011

ELC Community of Support

1. Shared experience with positive responses to the questions: “Whose am I?” and “What am I?” - *You are my beloved, in whom I am well-pleased. Mark 1: 11*
2. Relationship-building - notice & connect: caring adult who can listen, not to advise, as turning point. “*You belong!*”
3. *We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... Hebrews 12: 1*
4. The Advocate ...*the Father will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever... You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. John 14: 16*
5. Help them hear the support & hope ever present ...*the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction... 2 Corinth 1: 3-4*



I believe I have the influence that could broaden a teen or young adult's perspective and avert a potential suicide.

- True
 False

Prevention

- A caring person with right knowledge in the right place at the right time. Acute risk as time-limited.
- Being present brings safety, reduces fear
- Impulsivity; removing easy means available & find safe environment.
- Delays allow professional help.
- Suicidal ideas related to treatable disorders.
- Uncomfortable to think about and respond
 - Education for confidence and skills (warning signs and risk factors)
 - Courage to address discomfort
- Engage to slow down the risk and provide larger perspective, hope.
- Anyone can contact suicide help lines to ask for help



Discussing Suicidal Thoughts: **Connecting with the Disconnected**

- Breathing, grounding for non-anxious presence
- Listen empathically to understand, going slowly
- Validate feelings
- Express concern:
 - “Joe, I’ve noticed [*what you’ve seen, heard, sensed*], and I’m concerned. I wanted to check in with you and talk with you about this because I care about you.”
- What to say:
 - “I’m sorry you feel bad.”
 - “I’m glad you trust me enough to tell me; how can I help?”
 - “Tell me more.”
 - “We can get through this.”
 - “Let’s keep you safe.”
 - “Let’s find someone who can help.”
- Courage to ask about suicide directly:
 - “Others in similar situations have thoughts about ending their life. Have you had these thoughts?” They can feel relief to bring up the subject of suicide.
 - “Are you considering killing yourself?”
- Ask about a suicide plan:
 - If yes, then insist they seek professional help
 - If they refuse, you can include others in the situation – family members, school counselors, their therapist or other health professionals, church leaders
- Remind them that depressed feelings can change over time.
- Safety plan:
 - If you sense imminent risk (in your ‘gut’) you can remove the means by which they tell you they are thinking to kill themselves; seek immediate help (crisis assessment – see resource list in handout)
 - You can break trust to get them help; delay or impede access to their means (take away keys, pills)
 - This may anger the person or cost the friendship/relationship but it’s their life you are attempting to save ultimately



Discussing Suicidal Thoughts: Connecting with the Disconnected:

How peers can help keep their friend safe

- Can always call the Trevor Lifeline (866-488-7386) or other crisis line (see resource slide in handout).
- Share information with a trusted adult
- You can break trust to get them help; delay or impede access to their means (take away keys, pills).
- This may anger the person or cost the friendship/relationship but it's their life you are attempting to save ultimately.

Trevor Project - <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Safer-Space.pdf>



How to talk about Suicidal Thoughts- Simple Strategies for Parents and Friends

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLX4SqT7H-c>

Trevor Project 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health

The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ young people, providing 24/7 life-saving support via phone, text, and chat. Operates the world's largest safe space social networking site for LGBTQ youth and runs innovative research, education, and advocacy programs for over 20 years.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Trevor-Project-National-Survey-Results-2020.pdf>



Resources for Parents, Family, Friends

Trevor Project: The National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, 2019

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Trevor-Project-National-Survey-Results-2019.pdf>

PFLAG for Northern Virginia

<https://pflagnova.wordpress.com/>

PFLAG - Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

Faith in Our Families: PARENTS, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS TALK ABOUT FAITH, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY - booklet

<http://pflagdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/faith-in-families.pdf>

PFLAG - FAIRFAX TRANS FAMILIES (PARENTS GROUP)

<http://pflagdc.org/?event=fairfax-trans-families>



Crisis Line for LGBTQ+ Individuals, Family, Friends

1) Trevor Lifeline **1-866-488-7386** The Trevor Project Crisis and Suicide Line

- TrevorChat - TrevorChat.org - Available at designated times every day of the week.
- TrevorSpace – an online, social networking community for LGBTQ young people ages 13-24, their friends and allies (www.TrevorSpace.org)
- Trevor Support Center – a place where LGBTQ youth and their allies can find answers to frequently asked questions, and explore resources related to sexual orientation, gender identity and more (www.TrevorSupportCenter.org)
- Can call if you have questions or concerns about LGBTQ+ family member or friend at risk for mental health crisis

2) Suicide Prevention Lifeline - **1-800-273-8255**



Crisis Line for Transgender Individuals

- Trans Lifeline — a crisis telephone line staffed by transgender people **877-565-8860**
- Crisis Text Line -Text **HOME** to [741741](https://www.crisistextline.org) to connect with a Crisis Counselor, Free 24/7 support



Suicide Assessments

1. Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board Crisis Response
 - Merrifield Crisis Response Center – **(703) 573-5679** - 8221 Willow Oaks Corporate Drive, Lower Level, Fairfax, Virginia 22031 provides 24-hour comprehensive walk-in psychiatric emergency services to individuals of all ages who are experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis.
 - Mobile Crisis Unit - On-scene evaluation, treatment and crisis intervention (8:00 am – midnight) to help individuals unwilling or unable to come to the Merrifield Center. Serves Fx. Co., & cities of Fairfax and Falls Church; also towns of Vienna and Herndon.
2. Children's Regional Crisis Response – **(571) 364-7390** 24 hr. rapid response for ages 21 and under; screening, triage in Fx. Co., Arlington Co., Prince Wm, Loudoun; Fairfax, Falls Church, Alexandria, Manassas



Parasympathetic Nervous System – braking, calming

Prefrontal Cortex

“Rational brain”

- Rational thought
- Self-awareness
- Compassion
- Connection with others
- Will power
- Ethics, morals, social norms

Sympathetic Nervous System
Accelerates

Limbic System –
“Emotional brain”

Spiritual Practices – Non-anxious presence, breathing, receptivity, slow down & create space, notice God’s Presence, tolerate and let go of difficult thoughts/emotions

