

LGBTQ-Supportive School Policies and Practices Help All Students Thrive

Adolescents are experiencing a mental health crisis.

The adolescent mental health crisis began before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected all students, but it did not affect all students equally. Poor mental health is reported far more often by LGBTQ youth.

In 2021



2 out of every **5**

students experienced emotional distress

LGBTQ students were

5X more likely

to attempt suicide during the pandemic

Source: *Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey, 2021*

All young people do better in LGBTQ-inclusive schools.

- ▶ Schools can be part of the solution by creating inclusive environments.
- ▶ LGBTQ-supportive school policies and practices also benefit heterosexual students. They may experience even greater health benefits than LGBTQ students do.
- ▶ The reverse is also true: Policies and practices that negatively affect the health of LGBTQ students also harm heterosexual students.
- ▶ The more LGBTQ-supportive policies and practices a school implements, the better the student health outcomes.



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention



When schools implement LGBTQ-supportive policies and practices, all students experience:

- ↓ Less emotional distress
- ↓ Less violence and harassment
- ↓ Less suicidal thoughts and behaviors

Source: *LGBT Health, 2022*

Photos and models are used for illustrative purposes only.



CDC identifies practices that work to promote adolescent health.

CDC's *What Works in Schools* program is a school-based approach to protecting and promoting adolescent health. It combines **safe and supportive school environments** with **quality health education** and **referrals to health services**. After implementing the program, schools have fewer students experiencing violence, drug use, risky sex behaviors, and poor mental health.

LGBTQ-supportive policies and practices positively affect a school's environment, making a safer and more supportive space for all students. They include:



Gender and Sexuality Alliances



Safe spaces for LGBTQ students



Professional development for staff on inclusivity



Anti-harassment policies

“When we improve the safety and supportiveness of school environments for LGBTQ students, all students benefit. Protecting our most vulnerable youth means that school is better for everyone.”

- Dr. Kathleen Ethier

Director, CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health

Learn more about
What Works in Schools

www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth

[@CDC_DASH](https://twitter.com/CDC_DASH)

Sources

Jones SE, Ethier KA, Hertz M, et al. Mental health, suicidality, and connectedness among high school students during the covid-19 pandemic—Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey, United States, January–June 2021. *MMWR Suppl.* 2022;71(Suppl-3):16–21. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su7103a3>

Kaczowski W, Li J, Cooper AC, Robin L. Examining the relationship between LGBTQ-supportive school health policies and practices and psychosocial health outcomes of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual students. *LGBT Health.* 2022;9(1):43–53. doi:10.1089/lgbt.2021.0133