

LGBTQ+ mental health

Some people identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans, queer or questioning and others (LGBTQ+). Changes in equality in the past twenty years have meant that society is changing for the better. However, some people who identify as LGBTQ+ experience difficulties that can affect their health and well-being. LGBTQ+ people all experience coming out and can face prejudice and discrimination as part of a minority. This factsheet looks at some of these issues and how to get support.



KEY POINTS

- LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans, queer or questioning.
- Research shows that mental health problems like depression and anxiety can be more common in the LGBTQ+ community.
- There are specialist LGBTQ+ charities and mental health services that you may be able access for support.
- The Equality Act 2010 states that no service provider or employer may discriminate against anyone because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What does LGBTQ+ mean?](#)
2. [What issues might LGBTQ+ people face?](#)
3. [Where can I get help?](#)
4. [What if I have problems accessing services?](#)

1. What does LGBTQ+ mean?

'LGBTQ+' is a term that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans, queer or questioning and others. We use the phrase LGBTQ+ to describe people who may fit under this general term. You may not feel you fit into one of those terms. We recognise that everyone is different.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual

A person who is sexually attracted to people of their own gender or both genders.

Trans

Trans is a term that includes people who identify as transgender, or transsexual. Transgender people have a gender identity or gender expression that differs from the one given at birth.

Transgender is sometimes called transsexual if the person wants medical help to transition from one sex to another. These are separate issues but for the purpose of this factsheet we use the word trans to cover both terms. There are also many other terms used in the transgender community.

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2. What issues might LGBTQ+ people face?

Being LGBTQ+ does not in itself lead to mental health issues. However, members of the LGBTQ+ community have higher instances of mental health problems. The National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) carried out a review into mental health issues in the LGBTQ+ community. They reported what they found.¹

- LGBTQ+ people are at more risk of suicidal behaviour and self-harm than non-LGBTQ+ people.
- Gay and bisexual men are four times more likely to attempt suicide than the rest of the population.
- LGBTQ+ people are 1½ times more likely to develop depression and anxiety compared to the rest of the population.

Stonewall's 'Prescription for Change' report found lesbian and bisexual women had higher rates of suicidal thoughts and self-harm compared to women in general.² A transgender mental health study showed that 88% of transgender people had experienced depression and 84% had thought of ending their life.³ LGBTQ+ people under 26 are more likely to attempt suicide and to self harm.⁴ Among gay men, an estimated 14-20% has anorexia or bulimia.⁵

Lesbian, gay and bisexual

Early medical professionals felt being LGB was a mental illness. Homosexuality was seen as 'part of the problem' and people needed psychiatric treatment.⁶ In 1993, the World Health Organisation removed homosexuality from their list of mental illnesses. As this happened recently LGB people still face discrimination.

Transgender

The situation for the transgender community is more complex but there are signs that things are improving.

The International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) is a guideline doctors use to diagnose mental health conditions. The ICD-10 lists Gender Identity Disorders as a mental disorder. This includes Transsexualism and Dual-role transvestism.

Gender dysphoria is listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V). This is another guideline doctors use to diagnose mental health conditions. Most transsexual people experience gender dysphoria. Dysphoria means being unhappy. Gender dysphoria is a term medical professionals use. It refers to the distress people feel when their physical gender does not match their gender identity. This alone does not make it a disorder. When this causes a lot of distress, it can be defined as a disorder.⁷

Discrimination and bullying

More than half of younger LGBTQ+ people experience homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying in Britain's schools.⁸ Nearly half of pupils who experience bullying have symptoms of depression⁹. One in six LGBTQ+ adults has experienced hate crime or incident in the last 3 years.¹⁰ In a survey:

- 52% of the participants had experienced problems with work due to being trans or having a trans history,
- 19% had experienced discrimination, and
- 7% had left a job due to harassment or discrimination even though they had no other job to go to.¹¹

Coming out

For some people, coming out for the first time can be exciting and liberating. For others it can be difficult. It could be a combination of the two. It may not be a one-off event but something you do many times during your life. If you come out and experience rejection, you may not want to come out again. You may feel that you have to hide your real self, which can affect your mental wellbeing and cause stress.

LGBTQ+ people often experience homophobia, biphobia or transphobia. You may turn these feelings inwards. You could develop negative feelings towards your own sexuality or gender identity because of this. This can make it difficult for you to accept your own sexual orientation or gender identity. This can be called 'internalised homophobia or transphobia'.

Coming out to at least one supportive person, such as a friend or a work colleague, can lessen feelings of depression.¹² It can increase your overall sense of wellbeing and self-esteem. This is compared to someone not coming out at all.

Getting older

Many older LGBTQ+ people have experienced ill-treatment because of their sexual orientation or gender identity in the past. This could have been at work, from authority figures or their own family. Some feel that their sexual orientation has, or will have, a negative effect on them when getting older.¹³ Their concerns are around future care needs, independence, mobility, health and housing.

Age UK have a guide for older members of the LGBTQ+ community. Details of this can be found in the useful contacts section of this factsheet.

Substance abuse

LGBTQ+ people may be more likely to use drugs than heterosexual people. Lesbian and bisexual women are at more risk of substance dependence than the rest of the population.¹⁴ The Crime Survey showed:¹⁵

- drug use by gay and bisexual men was three times higher than for straight men, and
- illegal drug use by gay and bisexual women was four times higher than among heterosexual women.

Heavy drinking or drug use can make existing mental health problems worse and potentially trigger new ones.

You can find more information about 'Drugs, alcohol and mental health' at www.rethink.org. Or contact 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

Culture and identity

You may feel pressure to look a certain way as a gay person. Many LGBTQ+ people worry about how they look and wish they thought about it less.¹⁶

HIV and medication

LGBTQ+ people living with HIV can find that their medication affects their emotional wellbeing. However, there are now many different anti-HIV drugs available. You could try another one that suits you better.

HIV specialists are very experienced in working with people who have depression and anxiety. If you have had any mental health problems you should tell your HIV consultant when you start discussing treatment options. You can't take some anti-HIV medications with certain medications used to treat mental illness. But there are some which you can take with mental health medication.¹⁷ You should discuss any medication issues with your HIV consultant and psychiatrist. You should let them know if you are taking any medication for your mental health.

Accessing Healthcare

LGBTQ+ people, especially trans people, can experience more social isolation than the general population.¹⁸ This could make it harder for LGBTQ+ people who have mental health problems to get support and treatment. LGBTQ+ people and their carers may experience

discrimination. This may affect their ability to access services and receive the most appropriate support. A survey found that in gay and bisexual men who have accessed healthcare services in the last year:

- a third have had a negative experience related to their sexual orientation
- Only a quarter felt that healthcare workers had given them information relevant to their sexual orientation.
- One in eleven found their GP surgery welcoming.¹⁹

In a survey of lesbian and bisexual women:

- half reported a negative experience of healthcare in the last year
- two in five found practitioners assumed they were heterosexual and were therefore not given appropriate advice
- one in five felt they had no opportunity to discuss their sexual orientation²⁰

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3. Where can I get help?

Having a mental health problem is not something only LGBTQ+ people experience. However if you or someone you know might be struggling then it is important to seek help.

Here are some suggestions about where to get support:

Specialist LGBTQ+ mental health services

There are LGBTQ+ organisations that provide mental health advice and support. This might be through a counselling service, support groups, mentoring or a helpline. You can find local services by searching online for LGBTQ+ organisations in your area

Some of these services are listed in the 'Useful contacts' section at the end of this factsheet.

You can also call our advice service on 0300 5000 927 or email us at advice@rethink.org and we can look for you.

General mental health services

GPs

Going to see your GP is the main way to get support and treatment for mental health issues. You may have had problems accessing healthcare. However, there are steps being taken to improve things. The government brought in the NHS Constitution. This says that we all have the right 'not to be unlawfully discriminated against in the provision of NHS services.' This includes sexual orientation and gender reassignment.²¹ All NHS services must comply with this principle.

Some NHS trusts have published their own LGBTQ+ guides for medical professionals.^{22, 23, 24} There is a project in Manchester called 'Pride in

Practice', this is a service that GP surgeries can sign up for. It offers surgeries support to become LGBTQ+ friendly and inclusive. The LGBT Foundation runs the project with support from the Royal College of General Practitioners. GPs can call the LGBT Foundation helpline and get advice for supporting LGBT patients. Their contact details are in the ['Useful Contacts'](#) section of this factsheet.

Direct Payments

Disabled and older LGBTQ+ people may get help with their social care needs. One way to do this is through direct payments. If you have eligible needs, your local authority gives you the money to buy the services you want. This can give you more freedom to organise your own care. Direct payments may enable people to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity without fear of being discriminated against.²⁵

You can find more information about direct payments at www.rethink.org. Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

LGBTQ+ support services

There are many organisations offering emotional and practical support to the LGBTQ+ community. National relationship counselling service Relate offers LGBTQ+ relationship counselling through some of its local services. There may be LGBTQ+ social groups, sports clubs or activities in your area that you could become involved in. There are services for younger people that can help with advice, support and meeting other LGBTQ+ people.

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4. What if I have problems accessing services?

Accessing general health services can be a difficult experience for someone who is LGBTQ+. People can be worried about disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity to health professionals. This may be in case they are misunderstood, or the service cannot meet their needs. You may decide to come out to your GP or any other medical professional. It may help to talk this through with someone beforehand. You could practice the conversation with a friend. You may prefer to do this with someone you do not know. For example, you could talk it through with someone on an LGBTQ+ helpline.

What are my rights as an LGBTQ+ person?

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is illegal for a service provider to directly or indirectly discriminate against anyone who identifies as LGBTQ+. The NHS and any other organisation that offers services is a service provider.

Stonewall have a guide called 'Protecting Patient Rights' with the General Medical Council. This is about protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ people in health services. You can find it at:

www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/protecting-patients-your-rights-as-lgb-people-3.pdf.

What if I am not happy with my treatment?

If you are not happy with your treatment you can:

- talk to your doctor about your treatment and ask for a second opinion,
- get an advocate to help you speak to your doctor,
- contact Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) and see whether they can help, or
- make a complaint.

There is more information about these options below:

Second opinion

If you are not happy with your treatment, you should talk to your doctor and see if you can resolve the situation with them. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) produces guidelines for the treatment of different mental health conditions. You can refer to these guidelines if you feel your doctor is not offering you the right treatment.

You may feel that your treatment needs to be changed. If your doctor does not agree you could ask for a second opinion. You are not legally entitled to a second opinion but your doctor might agree to it if it would help with treatment options.

Advocacy

An advocate is someone who is separate from the mental health service but understands the system and your rights. They can come to a meeting with you and your doctor and make sure you get what you are entitled to. Advocates help you make sure your voice is being heard. Some organisations may have specialist LGBTQ+ advocacy services. You can search online to see if there are any local advocacy services in your area. Or you could call our Advice Service so we can search for you.

'PALS'

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) at your NHS trust can try to help you with any problems or issues you have with an NHS service. You can find your local PALS' details at: [www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-\(PALS\)/LocationSearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363).

Complaints

If you have no success using an advocate or PALS you could complain using the NHS complaints procedure. The GP practice or mental health trust should be able to give you a leaflet about their complaints procedure.

You can find more information about:

- Second opinions
- Advocacy
- Complaining about the NHS or social services

at www.rethink.org. Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.



Age UK

An organisation that offers guidance and support for older people including LGBTQ+ who may be experiencing difficulties in accessing services or care. Their guide for older LGBTQ+ people can be found using this link:

www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/Information-guides/AgeUKIG02_Lesbian_gay_or_bisexual_inf.pdf?dtrk=true

Telephone: 0800 678 1174

Email via website: www.ageuk.org.uk/contact-us/information-and-advice//

Website: www.ageuk.org.uk

Antidote

A service that offers information and support exclusively to LGBTQ+ people around drugs, alcohol and addiction. Part of London Friend's service.

Telephone: 0207 833 1674, open 10am-6pm Monday to Friday

Address: London Friend, 86 Caledonian Rd, London, N1 9DN

Website: www.londonfriend.org.uk/get-support/drugsandalcohol

Being Gay is Okay

A service that gives online information and advice for under 25 year olds.

Telephone: 01483 727667 (Tuesdays and Thursdays 7:30pm – 10pm)

Email via website: www.bgiok.org.uk/contact/contact_main.html

Website: www.bgiok.org.uk

The Beaumont Society

A national transgender support network offering emotional support via a weekly helpline, as well as general information and support groups

Telephone: 01582 412220

Address: The Beaumont Society, 27 Old Gloucester St, London, WC1N 3XX

Email via website: www.beaumontsociety.org.uk/contact-us/

Website: www.beaumontsociety.org.uk

Birmingham LGBT Centre

Voluntary organisation providing advice and support to LGBTQ+ people in Birmingham. Offers counselling, well-being services and wide range of support groups.

Telephone: 0121 643 0821

Address: Birmingham LGBT Centre, 38/40 Holloway Circus, Birmingham, B1 1EQ

Email: hello@blgbt.org

Website: www.blgbt.org

ELOP (East London Out Project)

A London based LGBT mental health and wellbeing centre offering a holistic approach. They offer free counselling, support groups, and young people's services.

Telephone: 020 8509 3898

Address: 56-60 Grove Rd, Walthamstow, London, E17 9BN

Email: info@elop.org

Website: www.elop.org

Equality Advisory and Support Service

An organisation that provides advice on discrimination and human rights issues

Telephone: 0808 800 0082, (9am–7pm Monday to Friday, 10am-2pm Saturday)

Textphone: 0808 800 0084

Address: FREEPOST EASS HELPLINE FPN6521

Email via

website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/app/ask/session/L3RpbWUvMTQ5Nzq3MDY0MS9zaWQvRFh2ZE92bG4%3D

Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

The Gender Trust

An organisation that provides support and information for those in the transgender community and anyone affected by gender identity issues.

Telephone: 01527 894 838

Address: Gender Trust, 76 The Ridgeway, Astwood Bank, B96 6LX

Email: info@gendertrust.org.uk

Website: www.gendertrust.org.uk

GIRES (Gender Identity Research and Education)

A charity that provides information for transgender people and medical professionals, including research and links to support groups

Telephone: 01372 801554

Address: The Gender Identity Research and Education Society, Molverley, The Warren, Ashted, Surrey, KT21 2SP

Email: info@gires.org.uk

Website: www.gires.org.uk

GMFA (Gay Men Fight Aids)

A gay men's health charity and have booklets and workbooks that you can download for free. They are written by counsellors and cover topics exploring self esteem and relationships. They also have information on HIV medication and offer a UK social, leisure and sports activities handbook called 'The Guide'.

Address: 11 Ebenezer St, London, N1 7NP

Email via website: www.gmfa.org.uk/Pages/Contact.aspx

Website: www.gmfa.org.uk

Leicester LGBT Centre

Voluntary organisation providing support to LGBTQ+ people in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Offers counselling, and wide range of support groups.

Telephone: 0116 254 7412

Address: 15 Wellington St, Leicester, Leicestershire, LE1 6HH

Email via website: www.leicesterlgbtcentre.org/contact-us/

Website: www.leicesterlgbtcentre.org

LGBT Foundation

A Manchester based charity offering mental health services and resources to the gay community. This includes befriending, free counseling and a support helpline.

Telephone: 0345 3 30 30 30(10am- 10pm Monday- Friday)

Address: 5 Richmond St, Manchester, M1 3HF

Email: helpline@lgbt.foundation

Website: www.lgbt.foundation

London Friend

A long-running LGBTQ+ charity which offers a telephone support service, as well as low-cost counseling, social and support groups. They run a specific befriending service and a carers' support group. Based in North London.

Address: London Friend main office, 86 Caledonian Rd, London, N1 9DN

Email: office@londonfriend.org.uk

Website: www.londonfriend.org.uk

Metro

Provides health, community and youth services across London and the south east of England. Mental health support includes counselling, mental health drop-in, sexual health counselling and advocacy.

Telephone: 020 8305 5000

Email: hello@metrocharity.org.uk

Website: www.metrocentreonline.org

Mind Out

A mental health service for LGBTQ+ people which provides advice, information, advocacy, peer support groups, mentoring and wellbeing events.

Telephone: 01273 234 839

Address: Community Base, 113 Queens Rd, Brighton, BN1 3XG

Email: info@mindout.org.uk

Website: www.mindout.org.uk

Opening Doors London

A service led by Age UK Camden providing a range of services and activities for LGBTQ+ people over 50 in London.

Telephone: 0207 239 0400

Address: Age UK Camden, Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9NA

Email via website: www.openingdoorslondon.org.uk/contact-us/

Website: www.openingdoorslondon.org.uk

Outcome

A LGBTQ+ mental health service run through Mind in Islington, offering psychotherapy, counselling, art therapy, alternative therapies and activities

Telephone: 020 7272 5038

Address: Outcome, Mind Spa, 35 Ashley Rd, London, N19 3AG

Email: sigal.avni@islingtonmind.org.uk

Website: www.islingtonmind.org.uk/outcome.asp

Pink Therapy

Pink Therapy has a directory listing qualified therapists throughout the UK who work with the LGBTQ+ community from a positive stance

Telephone: 07971 205323

Address: BCM 5159, London, WC1N 3XX

Email: admin@pinktherapy.com

Website: www.pinktherapy.com

Stonewall

A charity for all LGBTQ+ people both in the UK and abroad. They can provide information and advice. They have a database that can help you find local lesbian, gay and bisexual community groups or services.

Telephone: 020 7593 1850

Address: 192 St John Street, London, EC1V 4JY

Email: info@stonewall.org.uk

Website: www.stonewall.org.uk

Switchboard LGBT+

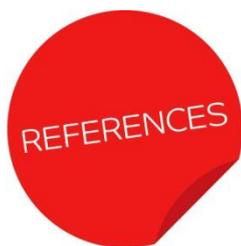
A service that gives national information and a listening service over phone and email and instant messaging. All volunteers identify as LGBTQ+ so the person answering the telephone will have an understanding of your situation. They are based in London but do take calls from the whole of the UK.

Telephone: 0300 330 0630 (10am-10pm every day)

Address: Switchboard, PO Box 7324, London, N1 9QS

Email: chris@switchboard.lgbt

Website: www.switchboard.lgbt



¹ National Institute of Mental Health England *Mental disorders, suicide, and deliberate self harm in lesbian, gay and bisexual people: a systematic review*; 2007. doi: [10.1186/1471-244X-8-70](https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-8-70) (Accessed: 15th June 2017)

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⁷ American Psychiatric Association *Gender Dysphoria* 2013

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- ¹⁹ As note 16.
- ²⁰ As note 2.
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- ²² NHS Leicester City *In the Pink: A Practical Guide for GPs & Other Health Practitioners* 2012.
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(Accessed: 15th June 2017).
- ²³ NHS Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County *In the Pink: A Practical Guide for GPs & Other Health Practitioners*.
www.nottinghamwestccg.nhs.uk/attachments/article/21/In20the20pink.pdf (Accessed: 15th June 2017).
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<http://www.smhp.nhs.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Cw9jyGjtobQ%3D&bi=181&mid=607>
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This factsheet is available
in large print.



Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927

Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

RAIS
PO Box 17106
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 9:30am to 4pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Leading the way to a better
quality of life for everyone
affected by severe mental illness.

For further information
on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone 0121 522 7007
Email info@rethink.org

 [facebook.com/rethinkcharity](https://www.facebook.com/rethinkcharity)

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 www.rethink.org

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Go to www.rethink.org for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us on 0300 5000 927 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

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let's end mental health discrimination