



Community Care Is Self-Care

A Guide for LGBTQ+ Students

You know better than anyone that LGBTQ+ youth face unique mental health challenges due to a variety of stressors — including harassment, family and peer rejection, bullying from their peers, isolation and a lack of belonging.¹ That can have a major impact on your overall well-being, which is why self-care is so important. Tapping into community care is a great way to take care of yourself. In this guide, we'll share ways to find and build that community support.

Why Community Matters

When you surround yourself with people who affirm who you are, it can contribute to your feelings of safety (physical as well as emotional) and belonging. Having a supportive community also promotes positive feelings about the future and, in connection, behaviors like setting strong goals. And research backs it up — a study out of the University of Maryland found that LGBTQ+ youth who participated in community-based LGBTQ+ organizations were more likely to have better mental health.²

How to Find My Community

In School

When schools are supportive, they can play a critical role in supporting you. Here are some great first steps you can take:

1. Join your school's GSA if you have one. GSAs provide a safe space and a social outlet for LGBTQ+ students and allies.
2. Identify at least one trusted adult. Look for teachers and school staff who make you feel safe and seen. Symbols like pride flags or safe space stickers can help you identify adult allies.
3. Surround yourself with peers who support and understand you. Spending time with supportive friends can help you alleviate feelings of isolation and also empower your own identity development.

Outside of School

We recognize the unfortunate reality that not all schools are affirming. If supports are not available at your school, you can look for local community organizations to join. Try entering "LGBTQ+ youth organizations near me" into your favorite search engine. You can also search for LGBTQ+ community centers [here](#) (you just have to filter by your state).

If you live in an area without a local group (we know this is a problem in rural areas and red states!), you can also find community online. Here are a few spaces we recommend:

- + [TrevorSpace](#): An online space for LGBTQ+ youth (ages 13-24).
- + [Q Chat Space](#): Live chats for LGBTQ+ teens (ages 13-19).



Reaching Out for the First Time

It can be intimidating to send a message or make a call. It feels vulnerable. But all of these places that we have mentioned in this guide are here to *help* you. Supporting LGBTQ+ youth like you is what they were designed for. Here is some language to get you started (feel free to personalize it!):

My name is ... and I'm looking to connect with other LGBTQ+ young people in the community. I'd love to learn more about what resources, events, or support groups your organization offers for someone my age. It's important to me to feel seen and supported, and I'm hoping to find a safe space where I can be myself and meet others who understand what I'm going through. If there are any programs, drop-in hours, or ways to get involved, I'd really appreciate any information you can share. Thank you so much for the work you do — I look forward to hearing from you!

Participating in My Community

Once you've found your people, you can start really building on that caring community. Here are some ideas you can try:

- + Help plan or volunteer at an event for your group — a Pride parade, a queer film festival, or a drag show.
- + Attend an educational workshop or discussion panel about an LGBTQ+ topic or participate in a book club that highlights queer authors.
- + Take part in your group's advocacy efforts — voter mobilization, freedom to read, banning conversion therapy, etc.
- + Mentor new group members and help direct them to available mental health support and counseling services, as well as any external resources.

We know it's not easy. But you're not alone, and we care about you. And when you find your community, you'll see that a whole lot more people care about you, too.

Sources

1. Human Rights Campaign 2023 LGBTQ+ Youth Report
<https://reports.hrc.org/2023-lgbtq-youth-report#mental-health-and-well-being>
2. Fish, J. N., Moody, R. L., Grossman, A. H., & Russell, S. T. (2019). LGBTQ youth-serving community-based organizations: Who participates and what difference does it make? *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 48(12), 2418–2431. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-01129-5>