

Managing fear and anxiety: Coping strategies for the LGBTIQ+ community

Embracing being LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer or questioning) can have a hugely positive impact on a person's wellbeing. It can lead to increased confidence, self-acceptance, and a greater sense of belonging to a community.

However, statistically it means that you're more likely to experience mental health problems such as depression, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts.

Being LGBTIQ+ doesn't cause these problems (which can affect anyone), but many things LGBTIQ+ people often go through can affect their mental health.

Discrimination, homophobia or transphobia, social isolation, rejection, and difficult experiences of 'coming out' are all common LGBTIQ+ issues but there are several resources available to help you to address these and to manage your wellbeing effectively.



What issues might LGBTIQ+ people face?

■ Mental health issues

Being LGBTIQ+ doesn't automatically mean someone will have mental health issues but may mean they're at higher risk of experiencing poor mental health. A study by Stonewall found that:

- Half of LGBTIQ+ people had experienced depression
- Three in five LGBTIQ+ people had experienced anxiety
- One in eight LGBTIQ+ people aged 18 to 24 had attempted to end their life
- Almost half of trans people had thought about taking their life

If you are experiencing depression, anxiety or suicidal thoughts, you can call **The Samaritans** on **116 123**. They offer a free 24/7 helpline that offers helpful, confidential support on issues relevant to the LGBTIQ+ community.

■ Hate crime

'Hate crimes' are crimes committed against people because of their race, sexuality, religion, gender identity or disability. Members of the LGBTIQ+ community are at a greater risk of experiencing hate crimes compared to heterosexual people, with certain LGBTIQ+ groups at particular risk.

This includes gay men, young people and those who are from Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups.

If you have experienced a hate crime, report it by calling 999 in an emergency or 101 at other times to contact your local police force.

■ Access to healthcare

LGBTIQ+ patients often face a combination of ignorance and discrimination in accessing healthcare.

- One out of five transgender patients have been turned away by a healthcare provider
- Around one in eight LGBTIQ+ people have experienced unequal treatment from healthcare staff because they are LGBTIQ+
- One in seven have avoided treatment for fear of discrimination

Healthcare providers have a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to treat LGBTIQ+ people fairly. If you've experienced discrimination by a healthcare provider, Citizens Advice has information on what to do next.

Recognise that your feelings are valid

Rejection, transphobia and hate crimes, whether experienced by you directly or through the accounts of others, can trigger powerful emotions like fear and anxiety.

These are perfectly normal responses to such situations. Their physical and mental impact, however, can sometimes stop you from living life to the full, and you may find yourself becoming fearful or anxious in situations that you would otherwise enjoy and benefit from.



Know yourself

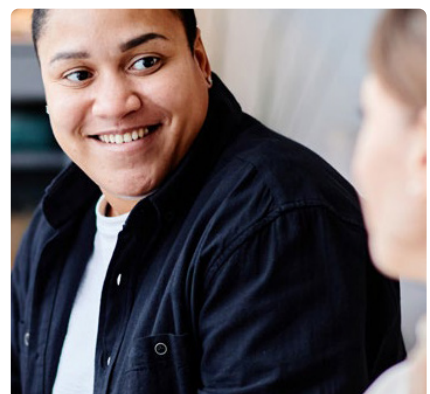
Try to learn more about your fear or anxiety. Keep an anxiety diary to note down how you're feeling, what causes you to feel anxious, and what happens.

When you understand how anxiety affects you, you'll be better able to manage it the next time it impacts you. This can be an effective way of addressing the underlying beliefs that are behind your anxiety. You could keep a list of things that help at times when you're likely to become frightened or anxious.

Talk to a trusted friend or family member

It's common for people inside and outside the LGBTIQ+ community to feel silly or even ashamed of their fears, which can lead to us hiding our feelings from those we're close to.

But there's no need to feel this way and you don't have to overcome your anxieties alone. If you've a friend or family member you trust, it can often feel better to open up. The act of talking about something can help reduce your anxiety levels, give you a different perspective and encourage you to get more support if needed.





Looking after your mental health

No matter who we are, challenges to our mental health challenges are inevitable. You can never fully avoid these but there are steps you can take to keep you in a strong position.

■ Stay active

Regular physical activity is one of the best ways to improve your mood and reduce stress. It doesn't have to be intense exercise; even a daily walk can make a big difference. Exercise releases endorphins, which are natural mood lifters. Find an activity you enjoy, whether it's dancing, cycling, or walking.

■ Get enough sleep

Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep each night. Establish a regular sleep routine by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day. Create a relaxing bedtime routine, such as reading a book or taking a warm bath, to signal to your body that it's time to wind down.

■ Connect with others

Spend time with friends and family, and don't hesitate to reach out if you need support. Joining clubs or groups with shared interests can also help you meet new people and build a support network.

■ Practice mindfulness and relaxation techniques

These can help you manage stress and stay grounded. Practices such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, and yoga can reduce anxiety and improve your mood. Even just taking a few minutes each day to sit quietly and focus on your breath can be beneficial.

■ Practice gratitude

Try keeping a gratitude journal where you write down things you're thankful for each day. This practice can help shift your focus from what's going wrong to what's going right.

■ Avoid alcohol and drugs

While it might be tempting to use alcohol or drugs to cope with stress, these worsen mental health and can lead to dependency issues. If you're struggling, seek healthier coping mechanisms and professional support if needed.

Helpful resources for the LGBTIQ+ community

Whether you're struggling with an LGBTIQ+ specific issue like transphobia, experiencing depression or anxiety, or you'd just like some information, there are plenty of resources available to help you:

[Stonewall](#) – offers help and advice for LGBTIQ+ people and their allies

[Albert Kennedy Trust](#) – supports young LGBTIQ+ people aged 16 to 25

[Gendered Intelligence](#) – a trans-led charity that works to increase the quality of trans people's lives, especially those under the age of 25

[Imaan](#) – supports LGBTIQ+ Muslims and provides an online forum where people can share experiences and ask for help

[LGBT Consortium](#) – search their database of LGBTIQ+ groups, projects and organisations to find services near you, including mental health services

[Switchboard LGBT helpline](#) – offers information and support. All their volunteers are LGBTIQ+

[Mind](#) – a list of organisations offering mental health support for LGBTIQ+ people

[The Gender Trust](#) - an information centre for anyone with any question or problem concerning their gender identity, or whose loved one is struggling with gender identity issues

[The Beaumont Society](#) - the largest and longest established transgender support group in the UK

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