

## LGB&T people and mental health

The majority of LGB&T people have good mental health and are able to cope well with difficult life events, such as those associated with the prejudice and discrimination that they may experience. Many people of all genders and sexual identities, have periods of mental ill health, which can range from feeling low and depressed to psychotic experiences or addictions.

*"I have been continually bullied at work through a variety of jobs because of my sexuality. I believe that this has had a detrimental effect on my mental health."*

However, we know that LGB&T people have worse mental health in general than either heterosexual or cisgender people. This includes being at greater risk of depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide. Experience of mental health problems can also mean greater risk of experiences like domestic abuse, drug use, poverty and homelessness.

The reasons for these higher rates of mental health problems are associated with the stigma experienced by many LGB&T people, including biphobic, homophobic and transphobic discrimination, experience of bullying, or having your gender or sexual identity denied.

*"I have several health issues and have been refused care by one doctor who 'suggested' that I go someplace else because she could not treat me since she 'did not know anything about transgender people.'"*

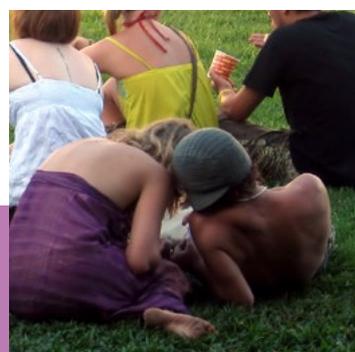
## LGB&T people and mental health support

Some health professionals can be negative towards LGB&T people, due to lack of education and the general misunderstandings about LGB&T identities in wider culture.

Being LGB&T does not make you 'mad' or mentally ill. The idea of being LGB&T being a 'disorder' is a thing of the past and this consensus is supported professionally in this country (by the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the British Psychological Society) and internationally.

Nobody should ever try to change your gender identity or sexual orientation. The UK Government, LGB&T organisations, and professional therapeutic bodies came together to make a clear statement that they think that 'conversion therapy' is not only wrong, but can be harmful to people. The conversion therapy consensus statement is freely available online from [www.ukcp.org.uk](http://www.ukcp.org.uk).

If you're seeking support for a mental health issue, or accessing gender or sexual identity services, it's vital that you're referred to trained professionals who you feel comfortable with.



# LGB&T Mental Health - Seeking Support

## Where to go and what to expect

- ▶ Not everyone who is experiencing mental health problems wants or needs to access a service. Some people find they can manage their mental health themselves and with informal support from friends and family. However, if you feel you'd benefit from accessing a service, it's important that this is your decision and that you do not feel pushed or coerced.

*"I think just a bit of respect and a willingness to listen/talk about it is all that's needed. I don't think my sexuality means I have special considerations; I just expect it to be treated as something that's a part of my identity and is acceptable."*

- ▶ The law does not allow discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and most mental health services are subject to a public duty to go further and to ensure that everyone has the same opportunities to access support.
- ▶ Given the stigma around being LGB&T, some mental health professionals still have a poor understanding. Shop around for a practitioner in the same way that you would for a plumber. Ensure that you find somebody with a decent understanding and with whom you feel comfortable.
- ▶ Look out for signs of how inclusive a service is – an easy one is whether it mentions sexual orientation or gender identity on its website or in other publicity. Recommendations are also helpful.
- ▶ Some mental health professionals still have a poor understanding of sexual and gender identity and/or may not have sufficient awareness to support you well enough.
- ▶ Don't feel that you should educate a health professional if they do have poor understanding: you shouldn't have to. As professionals offering a service they should be informed in order to help you.

*"It was such a relief to see somebody who had a clue. There was no sense of me having to educate him. He knew plenty about trans, and also never assumed that it was anything to do with my depression."*

- ▶ Don't be afraid to report biphobic, homophobic or transphobic behaviour, or to get somebody else to support you in doing this, if it does happen. Attempts to change sexual orientation or gender identity should always be reported as this is not accepted by any of the UK counselling or therapy bodies.
- ▶ Be aware that there are LGB&T specific services that you can access: we have included several in our resources website and a web search will also help you find those closest to you, as well as services available online or switchboards which provide support over the phone.
- ▶ There is also a lot of community support available. For example, you might like to join a local group, attend a pride event, or find an online network.

## Further Resources

In order to keep up-to-date, we've provided links to further resources on our website. Here you will find links to websites, to LGB&T services, and to community groups and publications.

[www.nationallgbtpartnership.org](http://www.nationallgbtpartnership.org)