

The logo for the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network features a dark blue silhouette of the state of Tennessee. Inside the silhouette, the words "Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network" are written in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below the silhouette, the tagline "Saving Lives in Tennessee" is written in a smaller, italicized, white font.

**Tennessee Suicide
Prevention Network**

"Saving Lives in Tennessee"

Suicide and GLBT Youth

- There exist numerous obstacles to research in the field of GLBT youth suicide risk. These include stigma surrounding both the subjects of suicide and homosexuality, lack of consistently applied and accepted terminology, lack of racial/ethnic minority representation in existing studies, and the possibility that individuals who are willing to reveal their sexual orientation may be more likely to disclose suicidal tendencies as well. Additionally, death records and hospital data do not record sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Precise numbers on the connection between sexual orientation and suicide risk vary, but the Massachusetts 2006 Youth Risk Survey, to date the most authoritative source on the subject, found that GLBTQ youth were four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.
- Studies on GLBT youth suicide have found that attempts within this subgroup are more likely to be fatal and more likely to involve serious injury. Additionally, it has been that many suicide attempts among GLBT youth occur within one year of disclosure of sexual orientation to parents.
- Generally speaking, the suicide risk factors and warning signs for GLBT youth are largely the same for other young adults, but the GLBT adolescent is subject to several unique risk factors. An early, forced, mistimed, or forestalled coming-out process puts such an individual at increased risk.
- Understanding the family and school background is crucial to assessing suicide risk; depending on the support they offer and their overall safety, these environments can become major protective factors or the GLBT youth's greatest threat. A 2009 study out of San Francisco State University found that GLBT teens who were rejected by their families were more than eight times the risk for a suicide attempt. Teens in rural communities or those with lower adult educational attainment typically experience hostile, even dangerous school climates.
- The 2009 National School Climate Survey published by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students experienced harassment at school in the past year and nearly two-thirds felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation. GLBT students were also four times as likely to as their heterosexual counterparts to cut school due to safety concerns, and the reported grade point average of students who were harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was almost half a grade lower than for students who were not (2.7 vs. 3.1).
- A 2008 study found that substance abuse among GLBT teens at double the rate for heterosexual teens. Questioning youth who are less certain of their sexual orientation report are at even higher risk than straight or openly gay teens for substance abuse, as well as depression.
- While the number of GLBT resources available to schools has increased in recent years, many mental health providers, physicians, and school faculty do not have accurate information about GLBT suicide risk; consequently their response to troubled and/or suicidal youth may be ineffective, cause further psychological damage, and/or discourage further disclosure attempts.
- Tennessee was one of 42 states which received a grade of "F" in the 2004 State of the States report issued by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). The report cited a lack of a state non-discrimination law and substandard safe-schools policies at the local level.

Sources: *Child Welfare*, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, *Pediatrics*, Suicide Prevention Resource Center and the Trevor Project.

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