

LGBTQ+ Youth and Mental Health

Presenting Problem:

A participating PCP emailed a consultation request to WI CSCP, stating that they were working with a 15-year-old patient who recently engaged in self-injurious behaviors and ran away from home. The parent, who was assigned female at birth, was distraught, was refusing to respond to their given name, and was requesting to be called by a different name. The patient's step-parent has been refusing to use the requested name, insisting that the patient is 'acting out,' resulting in arguments. The patient states they have "always felt more like a boy." Significant depression and anxious symptoms are present, as well as transient thoughts that life was not worth living. The PCP asks how to proceed when addressing LGBTQ+ issues in teens.

Consultant's Response:

Gender issues may be at the heart of the patient's problems, resulting in unwanted negative attention and conflict with peers and family members, along with anxiety, depression, self-injury, and suicidal thoughts.

Recommendations:

- **Psychoeducation** for the patient and parents about gender-related issues will be particularly important.
- It is important to develop [a safety plan](#), including crisis resources to use as needed.
- Referral for **individual psychotherapy** for the patient to explore gender issues, as well as to address safety, anxiety, and depression symptoms, would be prudent.
- Referral for **family therapy** to help decrease conflict and strengthen relationships is crucial.
- Complete [PHQ-9](#) and [SCARED rating scales](#) to help clarify the depression and anxious symptoms.
 - If the anxiety and/or depression symptoms are causing moderate-to-severe distress and/or functional impairment, consideration of an SSRI trial is reasonable.
- If school functioning is negatively affected, the patient and parent could ask the school to develop an [Individual Education Plan \(IEP\)](#) which could address anxiety, depression, and potential bullying.

Teaching Points:

- There is a list of definitions of [gender expression, gender identity, transgender, and other LGBTQ+](#).
- Statistics on the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth show high rates of depression, anxiety, and stress, which have increased over the last year.
 - [Studies: LGBTQ youths have higher rates of mental health issues, abuse](#)
 - Close to [three-quarters](#) of LGBTQ+ teens experience anxiety disorder, and **two-thirds** suffer from major depressive disorder.
 - Native/Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and multiracial LGBTQ+ teens encounter multiple obstacles due to their intersectional identities.
 - Overall, LGBTQ+ youth are [four times as likely](#) to have suicidal thoughts, to make a plan for suicide, and to attempt suicide than their peers.

- LGBTQ+ high school students abuse alcohol at [25 percent higher rates](#) than peers and are significantly more likely to report recent alcohol and marijuana use. In addition, LGBTQ+ teens report using hard drugs, including cocaine, ecstasy, meth, and heroin, at **triple** the rates of their peers.
- Negative attitudes toward LGBTQ+ persons may put these youth at increased risk compared with other students for experiences with violence. ‘Violence’ can include behaviors such as bullying, teasing, harassment, and physical assault.
 - The 2021 national [Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\)](#) report shows particularly stark increases in mental health challenges, experiences of violence, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors—especially among girls and youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, or another non-heterosexual identity (LGBQ+).
 - [Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary and Trends Report](#)
- Parental rejection can lead to depression, use of drugs and alcohol, and risky sexual behavior among teens.
- A supportive environment can help mitigate these risks:
 - Supportive and accepting parents can help youth cope with the challenges of being an LGBTQ+ teen. On the other hand, unsupportive parents who react negatively to learning that their child is LGBTQ+ can make it harder for their teen to thrive.
 - [7 Ways to Provide Support for LGBTQ Teens](#)
- A positive school climate has been associated with decreased depression, suicidal feelings, substance use, and unexcused school absences among LGBTQ+ students.