



EMPOWERED

Colorado LGBTQ+ Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Initiative

It's Time to Have the Talk about Suicide

September is **Suicide Prevention Awareness Month**, an important month for advocates, organizations, and community members to raise awareness on the often stigmatized topic. It's a time to bring attention to suicide prevention and shift public perception, as well as to provide resources, share stories, and remember those affected by suicide. As a community, LGBTQ+ folks have been impacted by suicide at a higher rate than the general population. It's hard to know actual suicide rates among LGBTQ+ folks because sexual orientation and gender identity are not reported in death records, but **research suggests** LGBTQ adults are twice as likely to attempt suicide.

Youth are at highest risk, with LGB youth attempting suicide at **five times the rate** of heterosexual youth. The biggest risk factor for youth: family acceptance. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth who reported high levels of family rejection during adolescence were 8.4 times as likely to report having attempted suicide

than LGB youth that reported no family rejection. You'll notice that the statistics reported haven't included the 'T', or transgender individuals. This is due to the fact that they often get left out of research and data collection. What we do know from surveys confirms that transgender individuals are impacted by suicide at higher rates than the rest of our community.

Forty percent of transgender adults report having made a suicide attempt, and of those, 92% reported having attempted suicide before the age of 25. This isn't to say that LGBTQ+ elders should be left out of the conversation, as the **older adult population** makes up about 17% of fatal suicides and older LGBTQ+ adults face more disparities than heterosexual peers in their age group.

It's hard not to be disheartened by the statistics. However, more and more people are adding their voices to the outcry that numbers like the ones above are unacceptable. There are those who are open

5 HEALTHY TIPS

How to Have the Talk offers some questions you can ask your friend or loved one about their mental health.

- 1 **Are you okay?** You don't seem like yourself lately.
- 2 **Is there something going on?** Last time we went out, it seemed like you were drinking (or using) more than usual.
- 3 **Have you been taking care of yourself?**
- 4 **What can I do to help you feel more supported?**
- 5 **Are you feeling safe?** Have you thought about hurting or killing yourself?

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ADVOCATE CHRISTOPHER LA FLEU

Christopher La Fleur (he/him) is a contemporary fine artist working in Denver. After surviving suicide and an overdose, he decided that he wanted to contribute as much as he can to the world through his business, his art, and his charitable donations. He also supports the annual Envision:You Art Show as the art curator of the event.



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HAVE THE TALK *continued*

about telling their story, like **ALOK**, a gender non-conforming writer and public speaker who talks about their suicide attempt and advocates for reform. The Trevor Project developed the **It Gets Better Project**, a nonprofit organization with currently over 60,000 first-hand LGBTQ+ stories of empowerment aimed at LGBTQ+ youth.

Just as important as the influencers and the organizations are the people who want to make a change with those around them.

**AWARENESS MONTH**

One of the best things we all can do is make it a regular habit to **talk with our friends and loved ones** about our mental health. **Talking about suicide** and asking someone directly if they have thought about it is the first step in encouraging someone to live. There are a lot of resources

out there to help you start, some of which are listed below.

If you or a loved one needs immediate support, you can contact **Colorado Crisis Services** at 1-844-493-8255 or the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at 1-800-273-8255, or any of the following LGBTQ+ specific hotlines.

TrevorLifeline 1-866-488-7386

TransLifeline (877) 565-8860

SAGE Elder Lifeline
(877) 360-LGBT (5428)

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT**HOW TO HAVE THE TALK**

How to Have the Talk provides language and resources to offer support to a loved one who may be struggling with a mental health and/or substance use challenge. This dynamic campaign includes drag performances, community-building on social media, and resource materials.

To reach the most people possible, we've been collaborating with organizations all over the state. Organizations have been sharing about How to Have the Talk on social media and their public spaces. How to Have the Talk tip cards contain a list of LGBTQ+ affirming mental health resources and some questions to ask someone who may be struggling with their mental health.

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**FRESH PRESS**

On August 11, a school board in Loudoun County, Virginia passed an inclusivity policy that protects the rights of transgender and gender-expansive students. The policy, passed 7-2, requires that public school staff and students in the district use the correct name and pronouns indicated by each student. It also ensures that students can participate in school programs consistent with their gender identity. All mental health professionals working in the district will complete LGBTQ+ specific training teaching them how to prevent and respond to any bullying or harassment based on gender identity or expression. The policy ensures respect and rights for transgender and gender-expansive students, rights that are recognized for all other students by default. While the backlash to the passing of this policy is disheartening, it's still a win for all of the young LGBTQ+ students of the district who are a step closer to being able to live as their authentic selves.

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COMMUNITY PARTNER

Colorado Artists in Recovery (CAiR) utilizes recovery-oriented principles to provide a safe and inclusive environment for people affected by behavioral health challenges. Through their workshops and events, they nurture a person's creative expression and help them create meaningful connections.



"If you or a loved one is seeking a supportive community of sober souls to fuel your creative spirit, please join us for our free upcoming workshops in September! We have both in-person and virtual options," said Darin Valdez, Founder of CAiR

REGISTER HERE