

THE **TREVOR** PROJECT

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**NATIONAL**

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**SURVEY**

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**ON**

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**LGBTQ**

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**YOUTH**

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**MENTAL**

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**HEALTH**

**2020**

# INTRODUCTION

Experts are just beginning to understand the mental health impacts of the multiple crises in 2020 that have deeply impacted so many. But we know that suicide is still a public health crisis, consistently the second leading cause of death among young people, and continues to disproportionately impact LGBTQ youth. The need for robust research, systematic data collection, and comprehensive mental health support has never been greater.

**The Trevor Project's 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health is our second annual release of new insights into the unique challenges that LGBTQ youth face every day.**

Building on the findings of our inaugural survey, it provides critical insights around LGBTQ youth mental health disparities, discrimination, housing instability, barriers to affirming health care, subjection to conversion therapy, and suicide. The survey also highlights how safe spaces and social support positively impact the well-being of LGBTQ youth.

Representing the experiences of over 40,000 LGBTQ youth ages 13-24 across the United States, it is the largest survey of LGBTQ youth mental health ever conducted. This wealth of data highlights the resiliency and diversity of LGBTQ young people and demonstrates how important affirming one's identity is to their health and wellness. Findings from this cross-sectional survey also point to best practices for how to support LGBTQ young people and contribute positively to their mental health.

Among some of the key findings of the report from LGBTQ youth in the survey:

- **40% of LGBTQ respondents** seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months, with **more than half** of transgender and nonbinary youth having seriously considered suicide
- **68% of LGBTQ youth** reported symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder in the past two weeks, including **more than 3 in 4** transgender and nonbinary youth
- **48% of LGBTQ youth** reported engaging in self-harm in the past twelve months, including **over 60%** of transgender and nonbinary youth
- **46% of LGBTQ youth** report they wanted psychological or emotional counseling from a mental health professional but were unable to receive it in the past 12 months
- **10% of LGBTQ youth** reported undergoing conversion therapy, with **78% reporting** it occurred when they were under age 18
- **29% of LGBTQ youth** have experienced homelessness, been kicked out, or run away
- **1 in 3 LGBTQ youth** reported that they had been physically threatened or harmed in their lifetime due to their LGBTQ identity
- **61% of transgender and nonbinary youth** reported being prevented or discouraged from using a bathroom that corresponds with their gender identity
- **86% of LGBTQ youth** said that recent politics have negatively impacted their well-being
- **Transgender and nonbinary youth** who reported having pronouns respected by all or most people in their lives attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected

**This year's survey exemplifies our organization's commitment to using research and data to prevent LGBTQ youth suicide.**

We will continue to leverage new research to help inform our life-saving services for LGBTQ youth, as well as expand the knowledge base for organizations around the globe. Our partner organizations also conduct critical research, and we acknowledge that our life-saving programs and research build on their important work.

Given the lack of LGBTQ-inclusive data nationwide, we hope this report will provide valuable insights that can be used by researchers, policymakers, and the many organizations working alongside The Trevor Project to support LGBTQ young people everywhere.

The Trevor Project's research, advocacy, education, and direct service programs will continue to elevate the voices and experiences of LGBTQ youth. Our hope is that by publicly sharing our resources and our support for them, LGBTQ youth will hear us loud and clear: that they are beautiful the way they are, that their lives are valuable, and that they are never alone. If you are an LGBTQ young person, please know that The Trevor Project is here to support you 24/7.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amit Paley'.

**Amit Paley**  
CEO & Executive Director  
The Trevor Project

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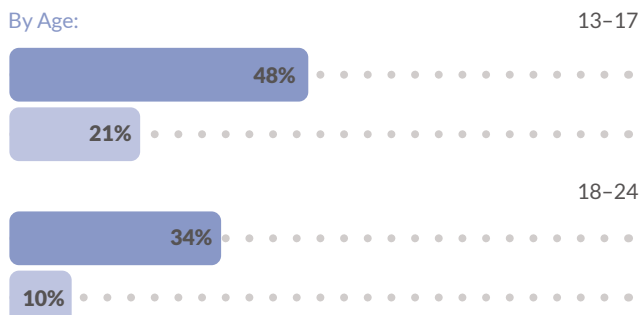
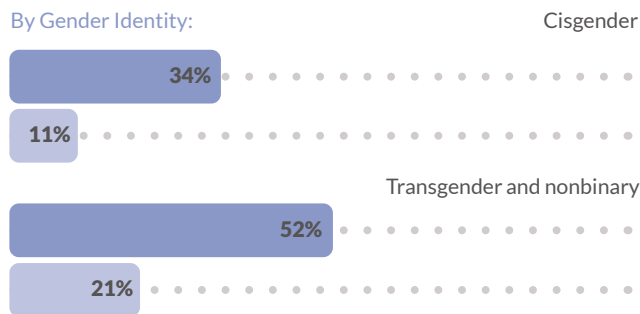
## SUICIDE & MENTAL HEALTH

**40% of LGBTQ respondents** seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months.

**More than half** of transgender and nonbinary youth have seriously considered suicide.

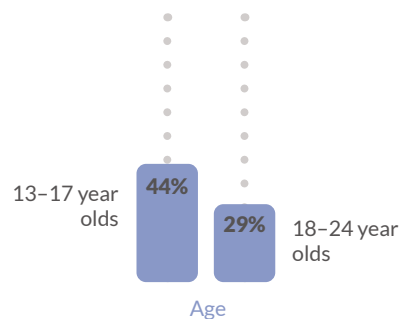
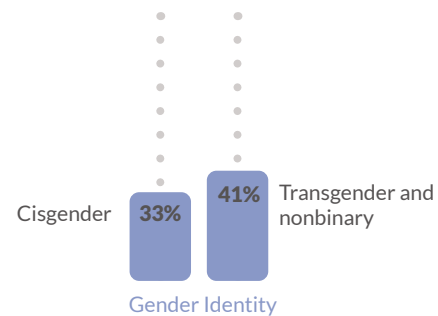
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LGBTQ youth who  
● considered and ● attempted suicide:



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Youth who attempted suicide among those who considered:



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## SUICIDE & MENTAL HEALTH

**68% of LGBTQ youth** reported symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder in the past two weeks, including **more than 3 in 4 transgender and nonbinary youth**.

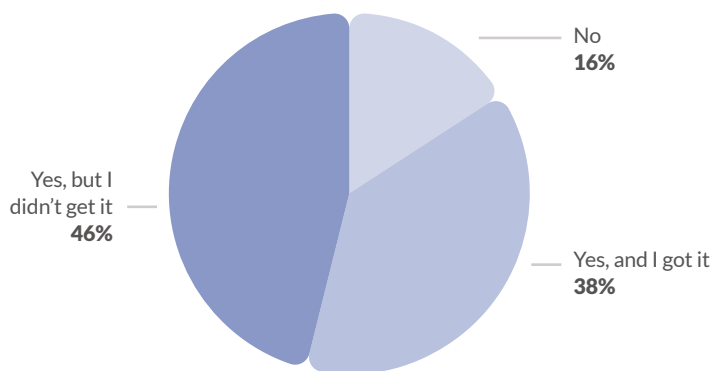
- **55% of LGBTQ youth** reported symptoms of major depressive disorder in the past two weeks, including **more than 2 in 3 transgender and nonbinary youth**
- **86% of LGBTQ youth** said that recent politics have negatively impacted their well-being
- **Nearly 15% of LGBTQ respondents** attempted suicide in the past twelve months, including **more than 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth**
- **48% of LGBTQ youth** reported engaging in self-harm in the past twelve months, including **over 60%** of transgender and nonbinary youth

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**46% of LGBTQ youth respondents** report that they wanted psychological or emotional counseling from a mental health professional but were unable to receive it **in the past 12 months**.

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In the past 12 months, have you wanted counseling from a mental health professional?



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**Over 40% of LGBTQ youth** reported they were unable to receive care due to concerns with parental permission.

**Ability to afford care** was the strongest barrier to receiving mental health care.

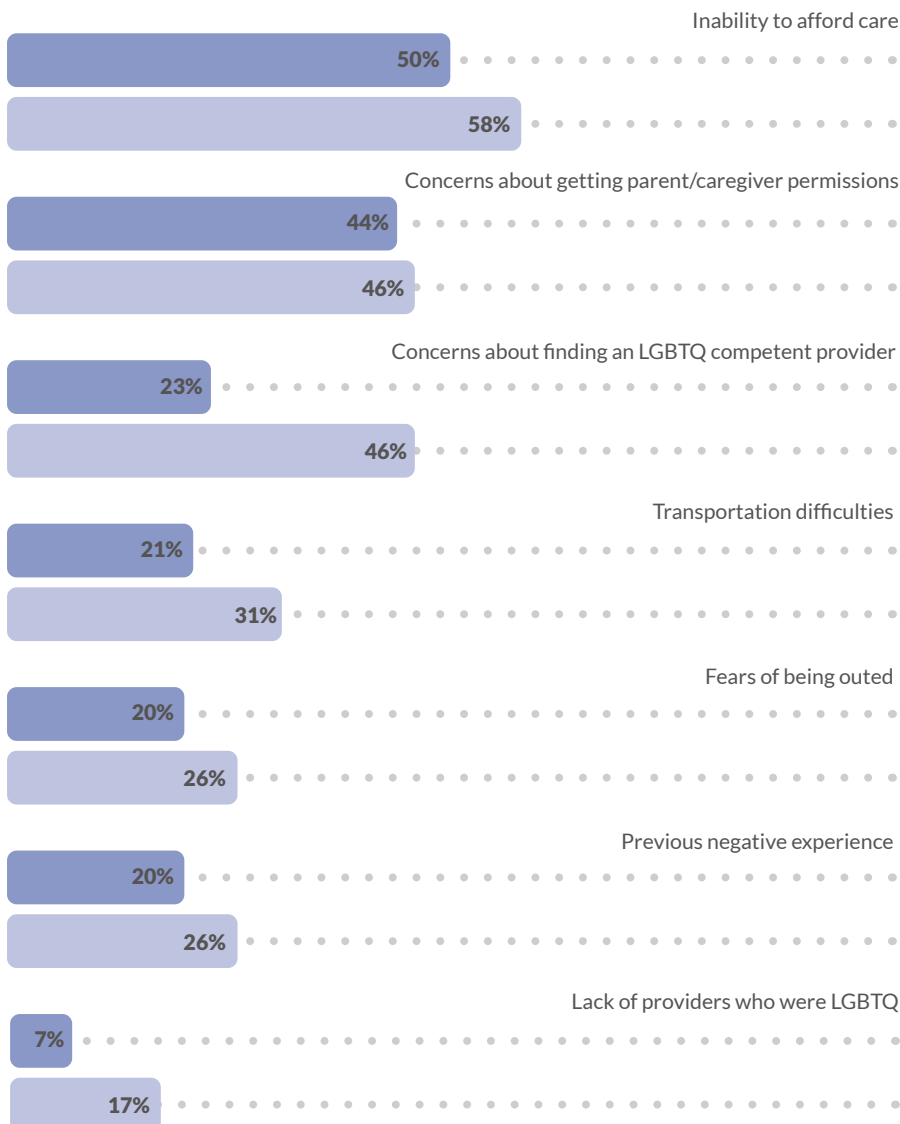
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## SUICIDE & MENTAL HEALTH

# Nearly half of transgender and nonbinary youth didn't receive wanted mental health care due to concerns related to the LGBTQ competence of providers.

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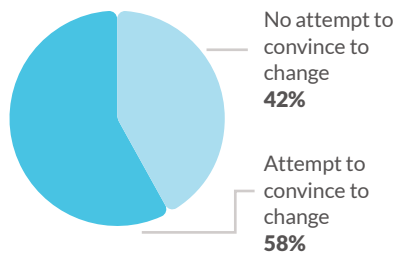
LGBTQ youth who wanted mental health care but were unable to get it cited the following reasons for ● cisgender and ● transgender and nonbinary respondents:



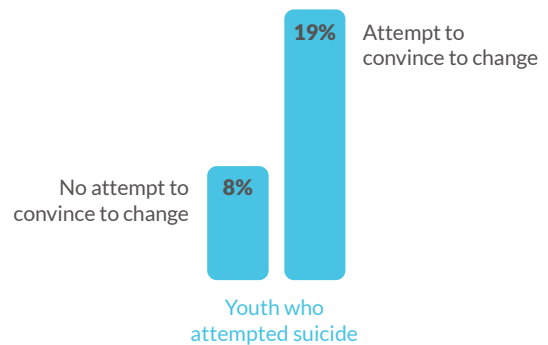
## CONVERSION THERAPY & CHANGE ATTEMPTS

**6 out of 10 LGBTQ youth** said that someone attempted to convince them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.

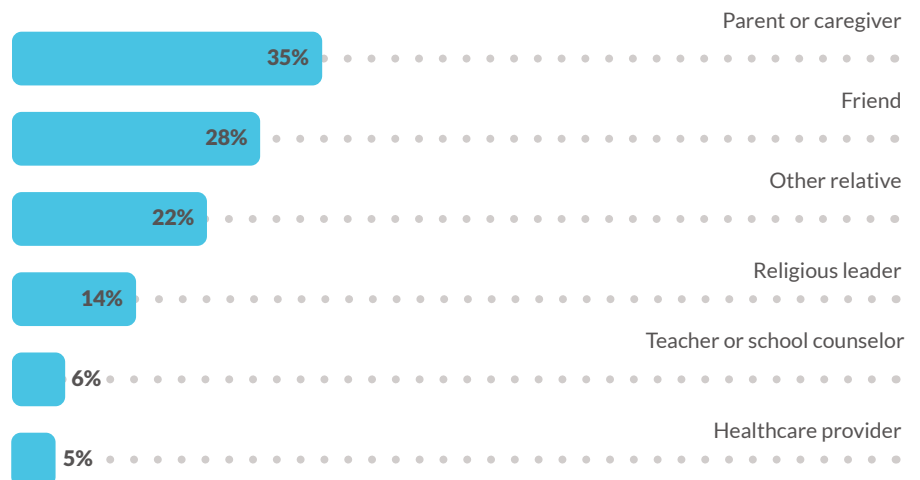
LGBTQ youth who reported someone attempted to convince them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity:



Youth who attempted suicide, comparison of those who experienced attempts to change their sexual orientation or gender identity to those who had not:



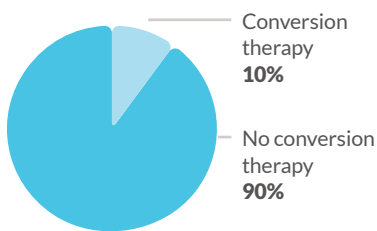
Who attempted to convince you to change your sexual orientation or gender identity?



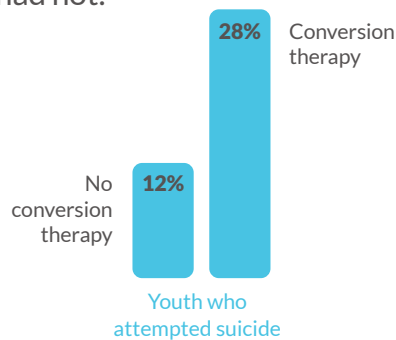
## CONVERSION THERAPY & CHANGE ATTEMPTS

**10% of LGBTQ youth** reported receiving conversion therapy from someone who tried to change their sexual orientation or gender identity to straight or cisgender.

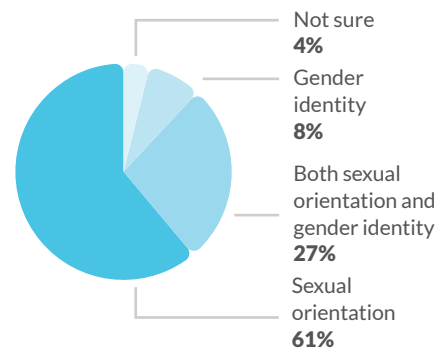
LGBTQ youth who reported undergoing conversion therapy:



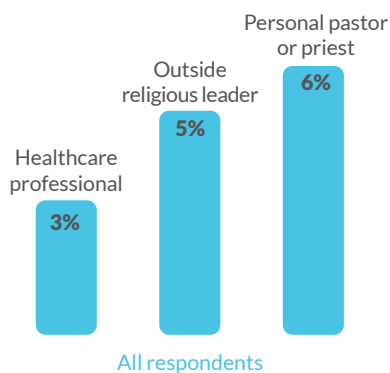
Youth who attempted suicide, comparison of those who experienced conversion therapy with those who had not:



Types of formal conversion efforts reported by LGBTQ youth who underwent conversion therapy:



LGBTQ youth underwent conversion therapy led by the following individuals:



**3% of youth** reported undergoing conversion therapy by a health-care professional.

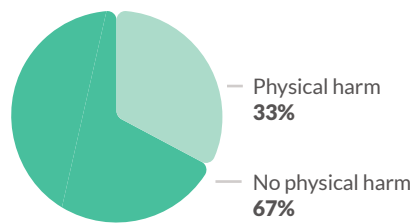
**78% of youth** who underwent conversion therapy reported that it was when they were **under the age of 18**.

## DISCRIMINATION & PHYSICAL HARM

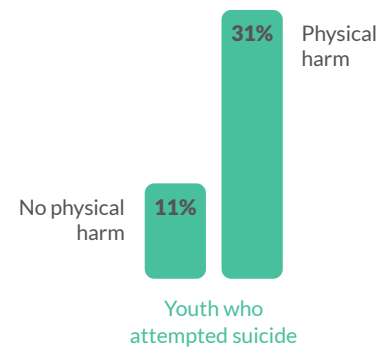
**1 in 3 LGBTQ youth** report that they have been physically threatened or harmed in their lifetime due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**40% of transgender and nonbinary youth** reported being physically threatened or harmed in their lifetime due to their gender identity, and **30% of LGBTQ youth** reported being physically threatened or harmed in their lifetime due to their sexual orientation.

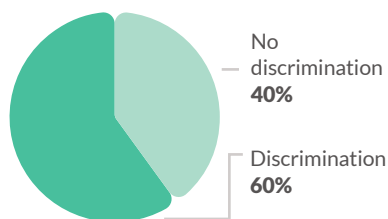
LGBTQ youth who experienced physical harm due to either their sexual orientation or gender identity:



Youth who attempted suicide, comparison of those who experienced physical harm with those who had not:



LGBTQ youth who experienced discrimination due to either their sexual orientation or gender identity:



Youth who attempted suicide, comparison of those who experienced discrimination with those who had not:



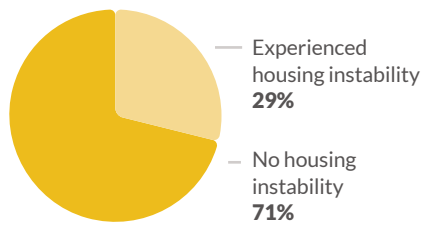
**61% of transgender and nonbinary youth** reported being prevented or discouraged from using a bathroom that corresponds with their gender identity, with **school being the most frequent place** where bathroom discrimination occurs.



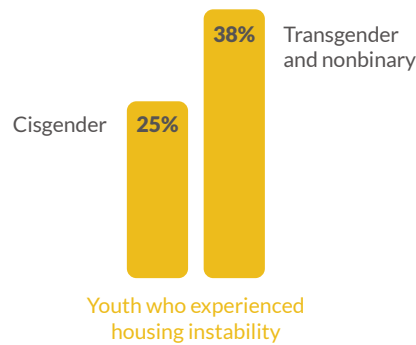
## HOUSING INSTABILITY

# 29% of LGBTQ youth have experienced homelessness, been kicked out, or run away.

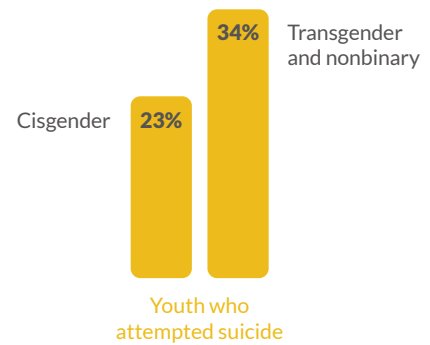
LGBTQ youth who have experienced housing instability:



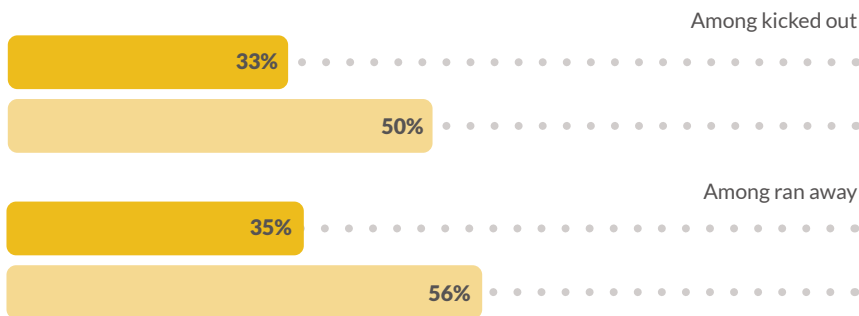
Youth who have experienced housing instability, comparison by gender identity:



Youth who attempted suicide among those who experienced housing instability:



Percentage of cisgender or transgender and nonbinary LGBTQ youth who reported that they were kicked out or ran away due to their LGBTQ identity:



28% of LGBTQ youth who experienced housing instability reported a suicide attempt in the past year.

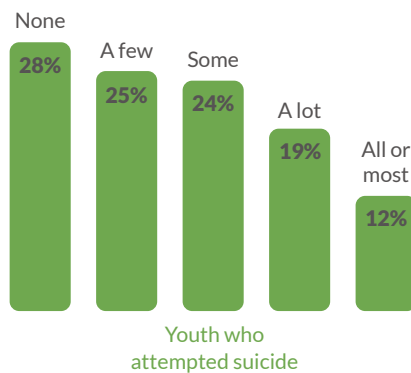
## SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER & NONBINARY YOUTH

# Affirming gender identity among transgender and nonbinary youth is consistently associated with lower rates of suicide attempts.

Transgender and nonbinary youth who report having their pronouns respected by **all or most** of the people in their lives attempted suicide at **half the rate** of those who did not have their pronouns respected.

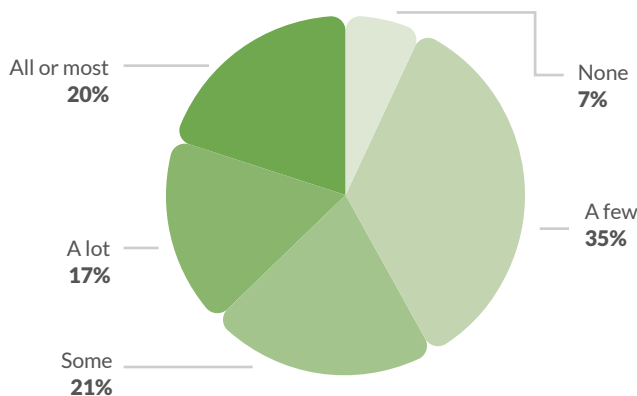
**Only 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth** reported having their pronouns respected by all or most of the people in their lives, including **less than one in ten** among those who primarily identified as nonbinary.

Youth who attempted suicide, comparison of number of people who respected their pronouns:

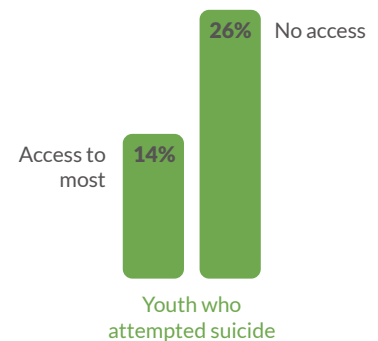


Transgender and nonbinary youth with access to binders, shapewear, and gender-affirming clothing **reported lower rates of attempting suicide** in the past year compared to transgender and nonbinary youth without access.\*

Amount of people in transgender and nonbinary youth's lives who respect their pronouns:



Youth who attempted suicide, comparison of those who had access to binders, shapewear, and gender-affirming clothing to those who had not:



\*Binders and shapewear refer to undergarments, such as tank tops or bodysuits, that help youth who are experiencing gender dysphoria align the appearance of their body with their gender identity.

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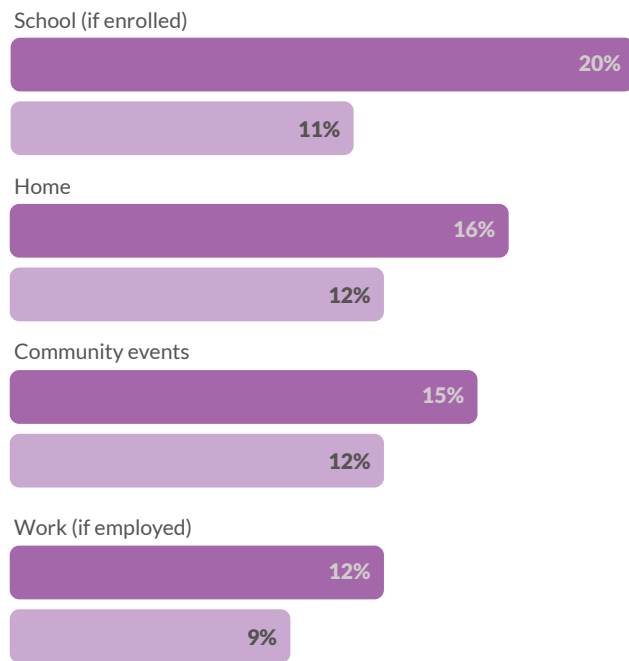
## FINDING SUPPORT

**78% of LGBTQ youth** report having access to at least one in-person LGBTQ-affirming space.

**86% of LGBTQ youth** report having high levels of support from at least one person.

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Youth who attempted suicide in the past year, comparison of whether spaces are  
● not LGBTQ-affirming or ● LGBTQ-affirming:



**13% of youth** who reported high levels of support from family, friends, or a special person reported attempting suicide in the past year **compared to 22% of those with lower levels of support.**

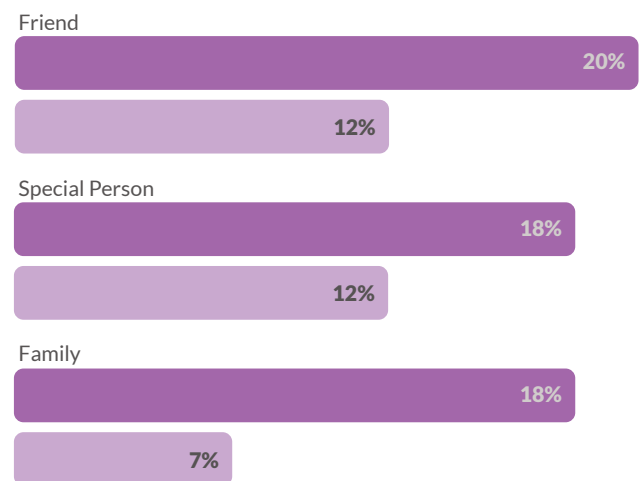
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**12% of those** who reported at least one in-person LGBTQ-affirming space attempted suicide in the past year compared to **20% of LGBTQ youth without in-person LGBTQ-affirming spaces.**

- **Over 80% of youth** said that celebrities who are LGBTQ positively impact how they feel about being LGBTQ
- **More than half of youth** said brands who support the LGBTQ community positively impact how they feel about being LGBTQ

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Youth who attempted suicide in the past year, comparison on whether they received ● low or moderate support or ● high support from the following individuals:



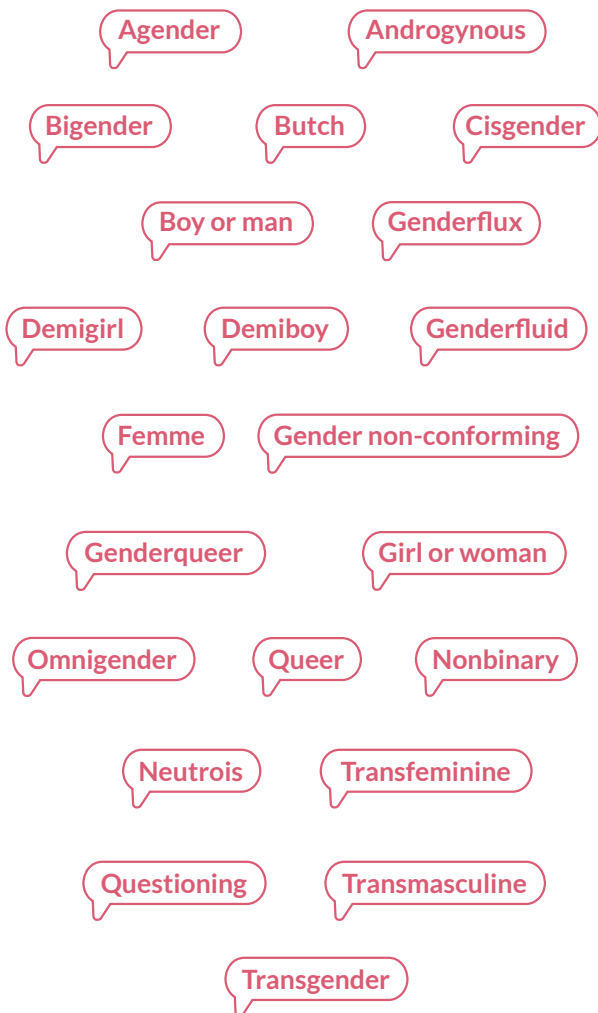
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## DIVERSITY OF GENDER IDENTITY & SEXUAL ORIENTATION

LGBTQ youth identify themselves in an incredibly wide range of ways.

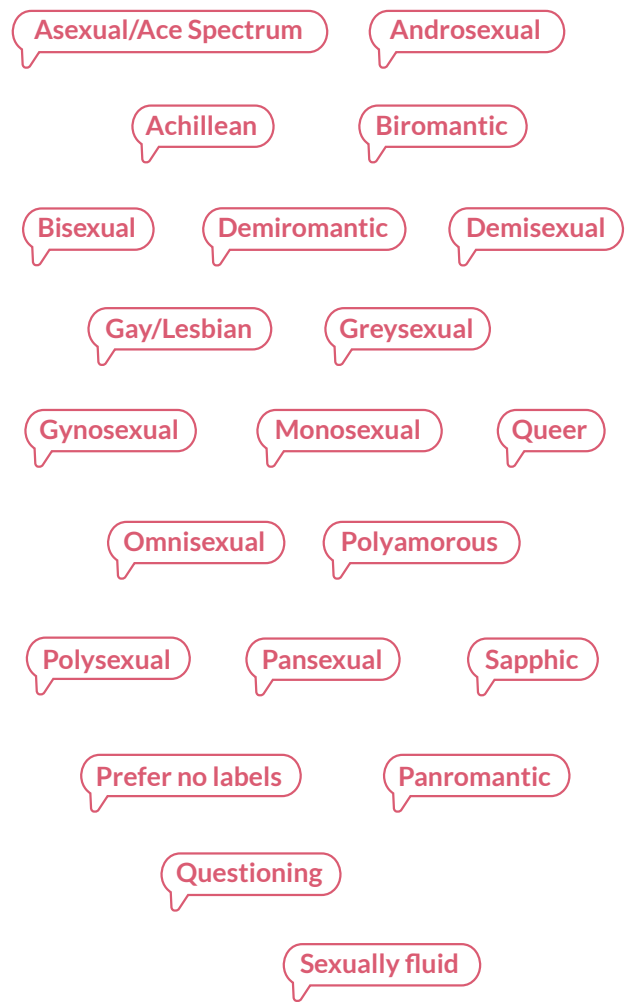
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LGBTQ youth in the survey identified with more than 100 different combinations of terms to describe their gender identity:



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LGBTQ youth in the survey identified with more than 100 different combinations of terms to describe their sexual orientation:



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## RESEARCH

The mission of The Trevor Project's Research Department is to **produce and use innovative research** that brings new knowledge and clinical implications to the field of suicidology and LGBTQ youth mental health.

### To address this mission we:

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#### Advance Scientific Inquiry

Providing empirical data to better understand the lives of LGBTQ youth and suicidality including risk factors, protective factors, and outcomes.

- The Trevor Project will be a leading source of scientific information on the needs and strengths of LGBTQ youth
- The Trevor Project will collaborate with key national and international research teams and agencies to improve the lives of LGBTQ youth

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#### Support The Trevor Project's Life-Saving Work

Using internal and external data and research findings to advance The Trevor Project's crisis services and peer support programs as well as advocacy and education initiatives.

- The Trevor Project's advocacy and training activities will be supported by data collected directly by The Trevor Project as well as evidence gathered from the broader research literature
- The Trevor Project will embody an evidence-informed culture in which all staff are supported and recognized in the use of research evidence

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#### Inform Public Knowledge

Ensuring our research and evaluation findings are applicable and widely communicated to the broader public including LGBTQ youth-serving agencies and mental health organizations.

- The Trevor Project will serve as a national model on how to integrate the best research evidence into its practices, programs, and policies
- The Trevor Project will be a leading resource on terminology related to LGBTQ youth

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#### Recommended Citation

The Trevor Project. (2020).  
2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health.  
New York, New York: The Trevor Project.

For additional information please contact:  
Research@TheTrevorProject.org

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## METHODOLOGY

# The content and methodology for The Trevor Project's 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health were approved by an independent Institutional Review Board.

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The content and methodology for The Trevor Project's 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health were approved by an independent Institutional Review Board.

A quantitative cross-sectional design was used to collect data using an online survey platform between December 2, 2019 and March 31, 2020. A sample of individuals ages 13–24 who resided in the United States was recruited via targeted ads on social media. No recruitment was conducted via The Trevor Project website or any of The Trevor Project social media sites. Respondents were defined as being LGBTQ if they identified with a sexual orientation other than straight/heterosexual, a gender identity other than cisgender, or both. In order to ensure the representativeness of the sample, targeted recruitment was conducted to ensure adequate sample sizes with respect to geography, gender identity, and race/ethnicity. Qualified respondents completed a secure online questionnaire that included a maximum of 150 questions. Questions on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) were aligned with the best practices identified in SOGI measurement. Questions on considering and attempting

suicide in the past 12 months were taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey to allow for direct comparisons to their nationally representative sample.

Each question related to mental health and suicidality was preceded by a message stating:

**"If at any time you need to talk to someone about your mental health or thoughts of suicide, please call The Trevor Project at 1-866-488-7386."**

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. No names or personal details were included to ensure anonymity. A total of 60,795 youth from unique IP addresses consented to complete the online survey. Youth who indicated that they lived outside of the U.S. ( $n=210$ ), were outside the 13–24 age range ( $n=551$ ) or who did not meet predefined demographic characteristics during the targeted recruitment phase ( $n=6,412$ ) were directed out of the survey. To create the analytic

sample, a filter was applied to remove youth who did not reach the midpoint of the survey, which included questions on suicide ( $n=13,343$ ). Youth who were not LGBTQ ( $n=205$ ) were excluded from the analytic sample.

Additionally, a mischievous responders analysis identified and removed 73 youth who provided obvious hate speech about LGBTQ populations in the free response options or who reported answering dishonestly.

**The final analytic sample was comprised of 40,001 LGBTQ youth ages 13–24 in the United States.**

Preliminary analyses were conducted to identify any potential problems with redundancy (e.g., multicollinearity) among similar variables such as experiences of discrimination and victimization. All variables contributed uniquely to indicators related to suicide attempts.

## METHODOLOGY

Our analytic sample has representation from over **4,000 Hispanic/Latinx LGBTQ youth**, over **1,500 Black/African American LGBTQ youth**, over **1,500 Asian/Pacific Islander LGBTQ youth**, and over **500 American Indian/Alaskan Native LGBTQ youth**.

### COMPARABILITY

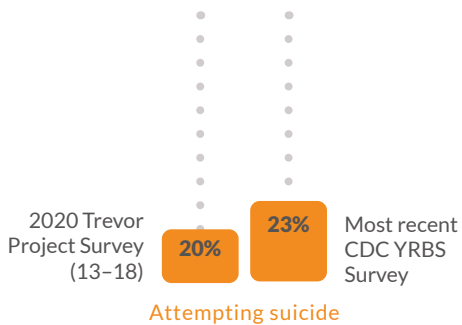
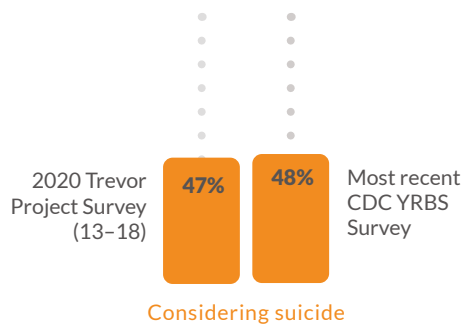
In order to better understand how our sample compares to a national probabilistic sample, we included questions regarding considering and attempting suicide that were identical to those used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in their Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBS).

Analyses were conducted to compare rates of seriously considering suicide and attempting suicide in the past 12 months among youth ages 13–18 in our sample to the 2017 YRBS sample of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) high school students.

**YRBS prevalence rates among LGB youth for seriously considering suicide (48%) were comparable to rates among the same age range in our sample (47%).**

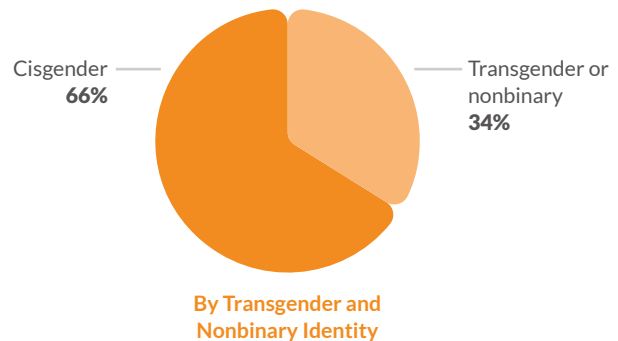
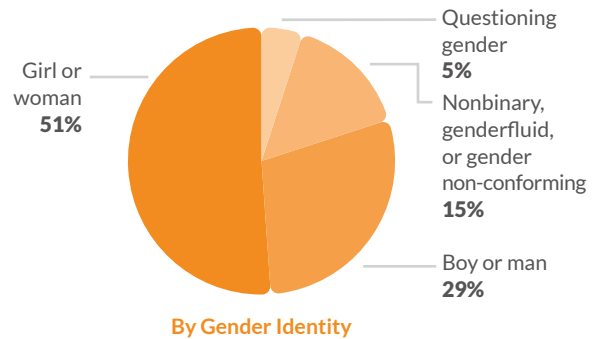
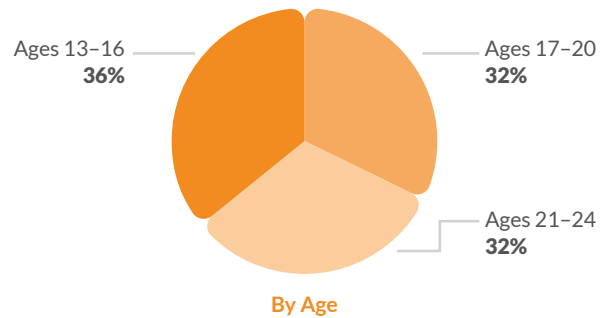
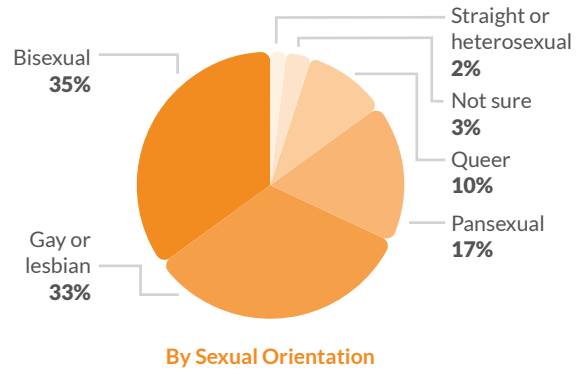
Additionally, 23% of LGB youth in the 2017 YRBS reported a suicide attempt in the past 12 months compared to 20% in our sample of youth ages 13–18.

### Comparability metrics: Trevor Project Survey and YRBS Survey



### PARTICIPANTS

Youth participants in the survey were recruited broadly and represented a wide range of the LGBTQ community.



# The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning young people.

## Need Help? We are here for you 24/7

For over 20 years, we have worked to save young lives by providing support through our free and confidential crisis services programs, including TrevorLifeline, TrevorChat, and TrevorText. We also run TrevorSpace, the world's largest safe space social networking site for LGBTQ youth, and operate innovative advocacy, research, and education programs across the country.



**TrevorLifeline**  
The only nationwide, 24/7 crisis and suicide prevention lifeline offering free and confidential counseling for LGBTQ youth.



**TrevorText**  
A free, confidential, 24/7, secure service for LGBTQ youth to text a trained Trevor counselor for support and crisis intervention.



**TrevorChat**  
A free, confidential, 24/7, secure instant messaging service that provides live help for LGBTQ youth by trained counselors.



**TrevorSpace**  
The world's largest safe space social networking community for LGBTQ youth, their friends, and allies.

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

- @TrevorProject
- @TheTrevorProject
- @TrevorProject



**Trevor Research**  
Our programmatic evaluations ensure we significantly reduce suicidality with our services, and we also publish external research to help peers support LGBTQ youth.



**Trevor Advocacy**  
Our advocacy work at the federal, state, and local levels includes publicly advocating for/against particular bills and filing/joining amicus briefs in major cases.



**Trevor Education**  
Our online education programs include information about school policies and training programs for teachers and guidance counselors.