


# SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY




**PAPYRUS**  
PREVENTION OF YOUNG SUICIDE



**Sexual orientation** refers to our sexual and/or romantic feelings and attraction towards the same gender or different genders. People describe their sexual orientation in many ways, and these are individual to each person. It can take a long time to explore, identify and accept our sexual orientation. This can start from a young age or, sometimes, later on in life.


**Gender identity** describes someone's sense of their own gender. This might be the same as the gender they were assigned at birth, or it might be different. Lots of things make up your gender; including your body, how you feel about your gender and how you choose to live your life and express your gender. Some people may feel uncertain about what gender they are, some people may identify with both genders and some people may feel like neither. There is no such thing as a 'bad' gender and struggling with gender identity is more common than you might think.



# HOW MIGHT I BE FEELING?

Unfortunately, due to prejudice and stigma, many people may repress their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. They may also experience poor treatment from others. People who are questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity often report feelings of shame or feeling scared, especially during their 'coming out' process. Not having access to a safe space where a person can talk about how they are feeling or explore how they identify, coupled with the level of discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ communities, means many people can struggle with self-esteem, have difficulties with mental health and struggle with thoughts of suicide and/or self-harm.

Some people may also experience positive feelings as they come to accept their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Being able to be themselves without prejudice or mistreatment and with support from peers, friends and family, will help a person to maintain their wellbeing; and it may allow a person to feel a greater sense of freedom, be able to express themselves openly or to have more positive and healthy relationships. However, if you are struggling it's really important to know where to get support and learn about ways to help you cope and understand your feelings.





# YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Someone being LGBTQ+ is not an excuse to bully or abuse them. Having a different sexual orientation and/or gender identity to others around you does not mean you are less worthy or that you are not entitled to acceptance and support.

Being LGBTQ+ is not wrong, nor is it a crime and something you ought to be punished for. These views are sadly still held by some, and have a direct impact on people's mental health and wellbeing. We are here to challenge those views, to say that there is nothing wrong or abnormal with being LGBTQ+.

New laws ensuring equality between people of different sexualities and genders show that society is moving in the right direction, ensuring everyone is treated equally and fairly. Awareness and equality campaigns are huge across the UK, and are attended and celebrated by thousands of LGBTQ+ people each year.

What is most important to know is that you do not need to manage this by yourself. Struggling with your sexual orientation and/or gender identity can be a really lonely and isolating experience, but it will not be this way forever. There is a huge community of LGBTQ+ people who have been through similar things you are experiencing today, and there are a lot of organisations who can support you. Things do get better, you are good enough and you are not alone.



# SUPPORTING SOMEONE ELSE

Sadly sometimes people who are LGBTQ+ experience bullying or abuse from others due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Many young people contact our service for support after they have experienced struggles related to this that have contributed to thoughts of suicide. However, these young people also tell us about the importance of a supportive network of friends and family during their struggles and beyond these.

You can make an important difference in people's lives by showing acceptance and support in these crucial moments. Thank them for being open and for trusting you with their feelings. If an LGBTQ+ person you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide and you're not sure what to say – don't panic. Hearing "I don't know how to help you right now, but I am here for you, let's look for some support together" can bring a huge amount of comfort to a young person who might be experiencing some really difficult feelings. It's supportive, it's honest and it helps you both work towards getting the right help.

If you don't agree with the sexual orientation or gender identity of the person you are supporting, or this conflicts with your beliefs, consider that the young person may be struggling a lot themselves. It is important to prioritise their safety over your opinion of their identity. Remember that the most important thing to a young person who is coming out is a network of supportive family and friends.

A Stonewall Report (LGBT in Britain: Health Report, 2018) found that one in eight LGBT people aged 18-24 (13 per cent) said that they have attempted to take their own life in the last year. The same report found that almost half of trans people (46 per cent) have thought about taking their own life in the last year. These are shocking statistics, and they show that people within these groups are more likely to have thoughts of suicide, especially if they don't receive any support.



## WHAT CAN I DO TO GET SUPPORT?

To get support the first step is telling someone how you feel. At PAPYRUS we know how much bravery and courage it takes to speak up when you are struggling. There are many organisations that can offer you support, whether you're questioning your gender or sexuality, experiencing thoughts of suicide or supporting someone you're worried about.

# Support for LGBTQ+

## SupportLine

Provides emotional support and details of agencies, counsellors, helplines, support groups across the UK.

Telephone helpline: **01708 765200**

Email: **[info@supportline.org.uk](mailto:info@supportline.org.uk)**

## Cara-Friend (Northern Ireland)

Helpline for anyone who is lesbian, gay or bisexual or anyone who has concerns about their sexual orientation. Counselling, befriending, information – including details of social events and venues in Northern Ireland. Face to face befriending and social support groups.

Belfast Office: **(028) 9089 0202**

Foyle Office: **(028) 7128 3030**

LGBT Switchboard: **0808 8000 390**

## The Rainbow Project

A health organisation that works to improve the physical, mental & emotional health and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ people and their families in Northern Ireland.

Belfast Office: **(028) 9031 9030**

Foyle Office: **(028) 7128 3030**

Email: **[info@rainbow-project.org](mailto:info@rainbow-project.org)**

## SAIL – Supporting Families

Organisation that aims to support parents, families, carers and individuals who are transgender, non-binary or living with gender variance. We directly support families across the region, as well as advocating for trans people and their families at a regional, national and European level.

Telephone: **(028) 9532 0023**

Email: **[info@sailni.com](mailto:info@sailni.com)**

## **GenderJam NI**

Organisations support and advocate for young trans, non-binary, questioning and intersex people in Northern Ireland.

Telephone: **028 9099 6819**

Email: **[info@genderjam.org.uk](mailto:info@genderjam.org.uk)**

## **HERe NI**

HERe NI is a community organisation and registered charity based in Belfast. We are here to support lesbian and bisexual women and our families and improve the lives of lesbian and bisexual women across Northern Ireland.

Telephone: **028 9024 9452**

## **EACH (Educational Action Challenging Homophobia)**

National voluntary organisation which supports lesbians, gay men and their families. Helplines throughout the UK as well as parent groups. Run by parents of gay men and lesbians.

Actionline: **0808 100 0143**

Website: **[www.each.education](http://www.each.education)**

## **FFLAG**

Helping parents and families understand, accept and support their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members with love and pride.

Helpline: **0845 652 0311**

Website: **[www.fflag.org.uk](http://www.fflag.org.uk)**

## **LGBT Foundation**

A national charity delivering advice, support and information services to LGBT communities.

Helpline: **0345 330 3030**

Website: **[www.lgbt.foundation](http://www.lgbt.foundation)**

## **Switchboard – The LGBT+ Helpline**

LGBT+ helpline, message and email service. Trans-friendly and nonbinary-friendly. Confidential support and advice, this service is run by volunteers who self-define as LGBT+.

Helpline: **0300 330 0630**

(Opening hours: 10am – 10pm everyday)

Website: **[www.switchboard.lgbt](http://www.switchboard.lgbt)**



## Support for Gender Identity

### **Beaumont Society**

National 24hr helpline and other support for trans individuals, their partners and families.

Helpline: **01582 412220**

Website: [www.beaumontsociety.org.uk](http://www.beaumontsociety.org.uk)

### **Depend**

Free confidential advice, information and support for all family members, spouses, partners and friends of trans people in the UK.

Website: [www.depend.org.uk](http://www.depend.org.uk)

### **Mermaids**

Telephone information and listening service for children and teenagers with gender identity issues and their families.

Helpline: **0808 801 0400**

Website: [www.mermaidsuk.org.uk](http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk)







# IF I'M STRUGGLING WITH THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

Call HOPELINE247 on: 0800 068 4141

Our Suicide Prevention Advisers are here for you.  
If you need support give us a call.

# HOPELINE247

If you are thinking about suicide or are concerned about a young person who may be, you can contact HOPELINE247 for confidential support and practical advice.



Call: **0800 068 4141**

Text: **88247**

Email: **pat@papyrus-uk.org**

**[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)**

Our Suicide Prevention Advisers  
are ready to support you.



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