



Mental Well-Being and Suicide Prevention among LGBTQIA2S+ Youth in North Dakota

A Resource Guide for Schools, Families, Professionals, and Communities



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Introduction

Background and Purpose

The following toolkit is a community resource to promote LGBTQIA2S+ youth mental well-being and suicide prevention in North Dakota. This guide was designed to support schools, families, healthcare professionals, and communities in North Dakota who work with LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Specifically, this toolkit can be used to:

1. Increase awareness of LGBTQIA2S+ youth mental health in North Dakota,
2. Learn how families, schools, healthcare professionals, and communities can affirm and support LGBTQIA2S+ youth in North Dakota,
3. Access tools and resources for professionals and organizations who work with LGBTQIA2S+ youth in North Dakota, and
4. Help connect LGBTQIA2S+ youth and their loved ones to affirming resources in North Dakota and beyond.

LGBTQIA2S+ Terminology

- **Gender identity:** Refers to someone's personal sense of gender, such as man, woman, and non-binary. Gender identity may or may not match with someone's sex assigned at birth (male, female, intersex).
 - **Cisgender:** A term for people whose gender identity/expression is consistent with their sex assigned at birth.
 - **Transgender:** A term for people whose gender identity/expression differs from their sex assigned at birth.
- **Sexual orientation:** Refers to someone's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Examples include heterosexual (straight), gay, lesbian, and bisexual.
- **LGBTQIA2S+:** An acronym used in this report which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,

Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit, with the "+" (plus sign) used to denote the many other sexual and gender identities that are part of the queer community.

You can access the [LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary](#) for more on LGBTQIA2S+ terminology.

LGBTQIA2S+ Youth Mental Health

LGBTQIA2S+ youth are at a higher risk for mental health issues and suicide compared to their non-LGBTQIA2S+ peers. According to the Trevor Project's 2024 National Survey,¹ among LGBTQIA2S+ youth ages 13 to 24 nationwide,

- 39% seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year,
- 12% attempted suicide in the past year,
- 66% reported symptoms of anxiety, and
- 53% reported symptoms of depression.

In North Dakota, LGBTQIA2S+ youth face similarly elevated rates of mental health concerns and suicide compared to cisgender and heterosexual youth. According to the Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey,² among North Dakotan LGBTQIA2S+ youth ages 13 to 24,

- 38% seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year,
- 16% attempted suicide in the past year,
- 66% reported symptoms of anxiety, and
- 46% reported symptoms of depression.

Substance use is a significant risk factor for suicide,³ and rates of substance use are elevated among LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Among LGBTQIA2S+ youth under 21, 47% report past-year alcohol use, 29% report past-year marijuana use, and 11% report past-year prescription drug misuse.³ In North Dakota, rates of vaping, smoking, marijuana, and prescription drug use are all higher among LGBTQIA2S+ middle and high school students compared to heterosexual

and cisgender students. LGBTQIA2S+ students in North Dakota are also more likely to start drinking alcohol at an earlier age.⁴

Taken together, research shows that LGBTQIA2S+ youth nationwide, and within North Dakota, are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, substance misuse, thoughts of suicide, and suicide attempts.

Minority Stress Negatively Impacts Mental Health

Negative mental health outcomes among LGBTQIA2S+ youth are largely due to minority stress, or experiences of anti-LGBTQIA2S+ discrimination, rejection, and victimization.^{5,6} LGBTQIA2S+ youth can be exposed to minority stress across sources, including their family, friends, schools, and communities, as well as state- and national-level policies. Specific examples of minority stress include:

- **Family Rejection:** One in three LGBTQIA2S+ youth face parental rejection.⁷ Parental rejection can take many forms, including at its extreme being forced out of the home, subjected to conversion therapy, or experiencing emotional, verbal, or physical abuse. LGBTQIA2S+ youth who experience rejection from their families are more than eight times as likely to attempt suicide than LGBTQIA2S+ youth who are accepted by their families. Those who experience parental rejection are also nearly six times as likely to experience high levels of depression and nearly three and a half times as likely to use illegal drugs.⁸
- **School Bullying and Lack of Affirmation:** Bullying and harassment in school settings are pervasive issues for LGBTQIA2S+ youth. In North Dakota, LGBTQIA2S+ middle and high school students report significantly higher rates of bullying both in school and electronically compared to their peers.⁴ Additionally, only 35% of North Dakota LGBTQIA2S+ youth report that their school is an affirming space.² Elevated rates of bullying are particularly concerning given that LGBTQIA2S+ students who experience

bullying have three times the odds of attempting suicide.⁹

- **Socio-Political Climate:** Anti-LGBTQIA2S+ legislation, which enforces discriminatory practices and public debates over LGBTQIA2S+ rights, creates a hostile environment that negatively affects mental health and well-being among LGBTQIA2S+ youth. For example, 90% of LGBTQIA2S+ youth reported that recent anti-LGBTQIA2S+ politics and laws have negatively impacted their well-being.¹ This number is even higher in North Dakota, with 93% of LGBTQIA2S+ youth indicating negative effects.² Additionally, research indicates that among transgender and nonbinary youth living in states with anti-transgender laws, the suicide attempt rate rises significantly, by up to 72%, following the enactment of anti-transgender legislation.¹⁰ The North Dakota legislature has passed a variety of laws which restrict the rights of LGBTQIA2S+ youth and their families; transgender youth are particularly targeted by this legislation. To date, these include:
 - A sports ban which bars transgender students from playing on sports teams consistent with their gender identity,
 - An under-18 transgender healthcare ban which restricts access to best-practice gender-affirming healthcare for trans youth,
 - A bathroom bill which bans transgender students from using bathrooms consistent with their gender identity, and
 - A school bill that states school personnel cannot withhold or conceal transgender youth's gender identity from their parents.¹¹

Just as LGBTQIA2S+ youth may endure negative experiences in their homes, schools, and communities, these places can also be sources of affirmation, love, and acceptance. Everyone has a role to play in supporting LGBTQIA2S+ youth. The rest of this guide provides actionable steps for individuals to promote the well-being of LGBTQIA2S+ youth in North Dakota.

Before Getting Started

Before reading more about the role you can take in promoting the mental well-being of LGBTQIA2S+ youth, be sure to consider the following:

- Being an LGBTQIA2S+ young person can and should be a source of pride. Many LGBTQIA2S+ youth [have shared](#) that their communities are a source of joy. Focusing on the positive aspects of being LGBTQIA2S+ and spreading messages of hope and resilience should be at the center of efforts to reduce risk and promote well-being.
- It is important when working with and advocating for LGBTQIA2S+ youth that you take care of yourself. Engagement in LGBTQIA2S+ allyship and advocacy can lead to [compassion fatigue](#), also known as secondary traumatic stress, which is the emotional, physical, and psychological toll experienced by those who provide care and support to individuals undergoing significant stress or trauma. Compassion fatigue can include feelings of burnout, helplessness, emotional exhaustion, and feeling numb or detached. It is important for supportive adults in [school](#), [healthcare](#), [home](#), and other community settings to recognize these signs of compassion fatigue and prioritize their own self-care and well-being as they help youth. Practicing self-care, seeking personal and professional support, and setting boundaries are all key to combatting compassion fatigue.



Promoting LGBTQIA2S+ Youth Mental Well-Being

Affirmation of identity and provision of support for LGBTQIA2S+ youth are crucial to promote resilience and mental well-being in the face of discrimination, stigma, and lack of acceptance. Below are recommended actions and suggested resources for North Dakota schools, parents and families, healthcare providers, and communities to promote and protect the well-being of LGBTQIA2S+ youth.

Schools

Affirming school environments are essential for the well-being and academic success of LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Schools that actively promote inclusivity and respect for all students create safe spaces where LGBTQIA2S+ students can learn and grow without fear of discrimination or harassment. Supportive schools contribute to better mental health, higher self-esteem, and improved academic performance among not only LGBTQIA2S+ students, but all students.¹² LGBTQIA2S+ students who feel safe at school are also less likely to feel sad or hopeless, or to consider or attempt suicide.¹³ However, only about half of LGBTQIA2S+ students nationwide report that their school environment is affirming;¹⁴ this number is even lower in North Dakota, with only 35% of LGBTQIA2S+ students indicating their school is affirming.²

To ensure schools are truly inclusive and supportive, consider these specific actions that school personnel can take:

- ✓ **Use Correct Names and Pronouns:** Pronouns are words used to refer to people in place of their names, such as he/him, she/her, and they/them.¹ A chosen name is a name that a person uses that is different than their legal name. Chosen names, like pronouns, may be used to reflect a person's gender identity. Using the correct pronouns for LGBTQIA2S+

students, particularly those who are transgender or non-binary, is a fundamental way to show respect and affirmation of their gender identity. In fact, LGBTQIA2S+ youth rank "respecting my pronouns" as one of the top five ways people can show support and acceptance. Transgender youth who have their chosen name used report lower levels of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts.¹⁵ Additionally, LGBTQIA2S+ youth who reported having their 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.¹⁶

In North Dakota, [state law](#) prohibits schools from enacting policies that force teachers and school staff to use a student's chosen pronouns. However, school staff can still choose to support students by using a student's chosen name and pronouns in all interactions and correcting themselves when mistakes are made. There is no ban on individual school personnel choosing to affirm youth with their name and pronouns. You can learn more about pronouns from the [North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services](#).



Learn how to introduce yourself with your name and pronouns. Try this:

"Hi! My name is Jordan, and my pronouns are she/her."

"Hello! I'm Sam, and my pronouns are they/them."

✓ **Establish a Gender and Sexualities Alliance (GSA):** A Gender and Sexualities Alliance (GSA) is a student-led club that aims to create a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. GSAs provide a space for LGBTQIA2S+ students and their allies to meet, socialize, and discuss issues they face, fostering mutual understanding and respect. These clubs also work to educate the school community about LGBTQIA2S+ issues, promote acceptance, and advocate for inclusive policies and practices within the school.¹⁷ By supporting the formation and activities of GSAs, school staff can help reduce bullying and harassment, improve the mental health and academic outcomes of LGBTQIA2S+ students, and create a more positive school climate for everyone. For

example, LGBTQIA2S+ students in schools with GSAs report experiencing less bullying, greater school safety, better academic performance, and higher self-esteem. Schools with active GSAs also had lower rates of suicide, depression, and substance use among LGBTQIA2S+ students.^{18,19}

✓ **Enact Inclusive Anti-Bullying Policies:** LGBTQIA2S+ inclusive anti-bullying policies are designed to protect all students from bullying and harassment, with specific provisions to address the discrimination faced by LGBTQIA2S+ students.²⁰ These enumerated policies aim to create a safe, respectful, and inclusive school environment where every student can learn and thrive without fear of discrimination or bullying. LGBTQIA2S+ students in schools with inclusive anti-bullying policies experience less verbal harassment, social aggression, and other forms of victimization, while also reporting a higher level of perceived school safety overall. Additionally, LGBTQIA2S+ students in schools with comprehensive anti-bullying policies report significantly lower levels of depression and anxiety, as well as reduced odds of attempting suicide, compared to those in schools without such policies.²¹⁻²³



DID YOU KNOW?

The Federal Equal Access Act mandates that schools provide GSAs the same resources, support, and student conduct rules of other school groups/clubs. This federal law protects the right to form a GSA here in North Dakota. You can learn more about [the right to establish GSAs in public schools](#) through GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD).

You can contact [Faye Seidler](#), Consultant and Harbor Health Initiative Program Manager, to get connected to the North Dakota GSA Network which includes GSAs across the state. If you're interested in supporting students to start a GSA at your school, learn more about how to be a GSA advisor using GLSEN's [GSA 10 Actions for Advisors](#).



In North Dakota, there is no state law protecting LGBTQIA2S+ students from school-based discrimination; however, schools are allowed to add LGBTQIA2S+ protections to their anti-bullying policies.²⁴ To get started protecting LGBTQIA2S+ students in your school, GLSEN has a variety of resources to help schools [pass and implement LGBTQ-affirming policies](#). Fargo Public Schools [anti-bullying policy](#) and [nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policy](#) are exemplar inclusive policies here in North Dakota that specifically protect students based on gender identity/ expression and sexual orientation.

✓ **Provide Affirming Mentorship:** To be a trusted adult or mentor for LGBTQIA2S+ youth is incredibly impactful. Research by The Trevor Project highlights that LGBTQIA2S+ youth who report having at least one accepting adult are 40% less likely to have attempted suicide in the past year.²⁵ This support can take many forms, from being a reliable source of acceptance and understanding to providing a safe space where youth can express themselves without fear of judgment or rejection. In fact,



LGBTQIA2S+ youth say the most significant way that people can show their acceptance is by “trusting that I know who I am.”¹ Being visible as an ally, such as participating in supportive events, can also signal to youth that you are a safe person to turn to for support. Youth in North Dakota specifically have shared that representation and having openly LGBTQIA2S+ teachers is a key part of affirming spaces.²

Building trust also means maintaining confidentiality. [North Dakota law](#) states that school personnel cannot “withhold or conceal information about a student’s transgender status from the student’s parent or legal guardian.” However, this is not a forced outing bill as there is no mandatory obligation to disclose a student’s gender identity. Additionally, the law does not include any penalties or repercussions for school personnel who protect student privacy. GLSEN recommends that school personnel check with their school administration to see what protections are in place when it comes to student privacy about gender identity.

You can get started on your allyship journey by completing Safe Zone training. [The Safe Zone Project](#) provides a free, online, self-guided course. Minnesota-based Queer Space Collective also offers [LGBTQ+ inclusivity training](#) specifically for LGBTQIA2S+ youth-serving organizations. Trainings can be delivered either in-person or remotely and cover topics such as creating inclusive youth spaces and becoming an LGBTQ+ ally. The Trevor Project also delivers [ally training](#) and [CARE training](#) for schools and other youth-serving organizations. Finally, school personnel can join GLSEN’s [Educator Network](#) which shares resources and research to facilitate the work of supportive educators.

All school personnel have a role to play in supporting LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Below are more resources for school personnel, broken down by administrators, teachers, and health staff.

Additional Resources for School Personnel

Audience	Resources
All School-Based Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDC: LGBTQ Inclusivity in Schools: A Self-Assessment Tool
Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GLSEN: Model Local Education Agency Policies on Implementing Title IX and other Federal Nondiscrimination Protections for LGBTQIA2S+ Young People in K-12 Schools • GLSEN: Model Local Education Agency Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy
Classroom Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GLSEN: Safe Space Kit • GLSEN: Inclusive Curriculum Resource • Welcoming Schools: Lesson Plans
School Health Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Association of School Psychologists: LGBTQ Youth • American School Counselor Association: The School Counselor and Transgender and Nonbinary Youth • American School Counselor Association: The School Counselor and LGBTQ Youth • National Association of School Nurses: LGBTQ Students: The Role of the School Nurse

Parents and Families

Family and parental support are crucial in the lives of LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Research consistently shows that affirming and supportive family environments protect the mental health of LGBTQIA2S+ youth and reduce risk for suicide.^{26,27} Affirming parents also report a variety of positive outcomes themselves, including personal growth and increased compassion, strengthened relationships, greater activism and affirmation of personal values, and experiences of positive emotions, such as pride.^{28,29} Yet, over half of LGBTQIA2S+ youth report experiencing some form of parental rejection,³⁰ and only 42% of North Dakota youth feel their home is affirming.²

Parents and families can affirm and support LGBTQIA2S+ youth by:

- ✓ **Educating Yourself:** Take the initiative to learn about LGBTQIA2S+ identities and experiences. This helps you understand your child better and shows your commitment to supporting them. Learn more by engaging

in open and supportive conversations with your child about their identity. Acknowledge and affirm their feelings, even if you don't fully understand. LGBTQIA2S+ youth whose parents talk to them respectfully about their LGBTQIA2S+ identity and openly and respectfully discuss LGBTQIA2S+ issues have lower suicide rates.²⁷ There are resources online and across North Dakota to support your journey. You can find support with other parents and families virtually through [PFLAG Connects: Communities](#), which offers a safe, moderated space for families with gender-diverse loved ones. We encourage you to also read the resources included in this guide as a starting point for your journey as an affirming ally to your child.

Parents can seek additional education for themselves and their children through IN-clued workshops delivered by Planned Parenthood North Central States. IN-clued is a one-time, three-hour sex education workshop designed specifically for LGBTQIA2S+ youth that is proven to increase

sexual health knowledge, confidence in talking to a medical provider, and comfort in accessing sexual health care. Workshops are free and available for both youth and parents. You can indicate your interest in the program at bit.ly/INcludedND, or contact education@ppncs.org with any questions.



It can be hard to know what to say. These simple statements can show your child you care:

"I love you no matter what."

"I've got your back, always."

"I'm so proud to be your parent."

"I love seeing you be yourself."

"Thank you for trusting me."

"You can tell me anything. I am here for you."

- ✓ **Connecting Youth to Support:** Parents and families are an important pathway for youth to get connected to affirming resources and settings, such as LGBTQIA2S+ youth-serving organizations. These organizations provide safe spaces for youth to connect with peers, receive mentorship, and access support services. Research indicates that youth engaged with LGBTQIA2S+ community-based organizations have better mental health and higher self-esteem.³¹ In fact, LGBTQIA2S+ youth with access to affirming community events have reduced odds of attempting suicide.³² North Dakota's [QSpace](#) (QueerSpace) is a youth-focused LGBTQIA2S+ support group located in the Bismarck-Mandan area. It is designed to be a safe, accommodating environment for middle and high school students. You can also connect your child to one of the LGBTQIA2S+ organizations across the state,



which are listed by city in the Appendix of this guide.

If there is not an LGBTQIA2S+ organization in your area, you can also connect your child to online support, such as [TrevorSpace](#), an affirming international community for LGBTQ young people ages 13-24 or [Q Chat Space](#), an online community for LGBTQ+ youth between the ages of 13 to 19. Research suggests that online environments are important for LGBTQIA2S+ youth, providing a space to learn about their identities and gain peer support by connecting to other LGBTQIA2S+ youth. In fact, LGBTQIA2S+ youth who have access to a safe, understanding online space have reduced suicide risk.^{33,34}

- ✓ **Rejecting Conversion Therapy:** Conversion therapy, also known as reparative therapy, aims to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. Conversion therapy can lead to severe emotional and psychological distress, including depression and suicide.³⁵ It is based on the false premise that being LGBTQIA2S+ is a mental disorder that needs to be cured. Conversion therapy is opposed by major medical and mental health organizations, because sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts are cruel and harmful.³⁶ In North Dakota, licensed social workers are [banned](#) from practicing conversion therapy; however, there is no state-wide ban on conversion therapy itself, leaving youth at risk of being

subjected to conversion therapy by other mental health professionals or religious organizations.

Emphasize to your child that their identity is valid and does not need to be changed. Seek out mental health professionals who are experienced in working with LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Affirming therapists can provide a safe space for your child to explore their identity and navigate challenges. You can find LGBTQIA2S+ affirming healthcare practitioners in North Dakota through the [Harbor Health Initiative LGBTQ+ Directory](#). Project Youth Affirm's [checklist](#) can also help youth find an affirmative therapist.

✓ **Advocating for Your Child:** Standing up for your child when they face mistreatment, and advocating for equitable treatment, are important actions for affirming parents and families.²⁶ Starting with the school environment, learn about [LGBTQIA2S+ student rights](#) and what [unlawful discrimination](#) may look like for your child. Even if a school does not have an inclusive anti-bullying policy, federal law still protects students from anti-LGBTQIA2S+ harassment and discrimination at their school. If a student has faced discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, families can [file a complaint](#) with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights or submit a report with the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. Families can also contact local organizations, such as the [ACLU of North Dakota](#) or the [North Dakota Human Rights Coalition](#) for help. Gender Justice also provides [legal assistance](#) and [Trans Rights Resources for Students](#) specific to North Dakota.

You can also learn about the [healthcare rights](#) of your child and be prepared to act in the face of healthcare discrimination. The Human Rights Campaign's [What to Do if You Experience Discrimination](#) guide provides help on how to file a discrimination grievance against hospitals, state health departments, and specific healthcare

providers. Additionally, the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services nondiscrimination policy covers both gender identity and sexual orientation. If your child has been discriminated against based on their identities, ND HHS provides [guidance](#) on how to take action. If you need help navigating health insurance coverage and access to local and regional resources for your child, Faye Seidler offers free LGBTQIA2S+ peer support and can be contacted at fseidler@canopymedicalclinic.com.

Want to learn more about supporting and advocating for your child? Below are additional resources to support your journey as an affirming caregiver.

Additional Resources for Parents and Families

- PFLAG: [Guide to Being a Trans Ally](#)
- PFLAG: [Guide to Being a Straight Ally](#)
- The Family Project: [Supportive Families, Healthy Children](#)
- Gender Spectrum: [Understanding Gender](#)
- PFLAG: Parents: [Quick Tips for Supporting Your LGBTQ Kids—and YOURSELF—During the Coming-Out Process](#)
- [My Kid is Gay](#)
- Advocates for Youth: [Are You an Askable Parent?](#)

Healthcare Providers

Affirming healthcare environments are crucial for the well-being of LGBTQIA2S+ youth. However, many LGBTQIA2S+ youth experience stigma in healthcare settings, and primary care providers and pediatricians report a lack of knowledge and competence in providing care to LGBTQIA2S+ youth.³⁷ Fear of stigma and lack of understanding from providers can discourage LGBTQIA2S+ youth from seeking

necessary care and lead youth to conceal their identities when they do seek care; in fact, 24% of LGBTQIA2S+ youth did not seek mental health care due to concerns about being outed, and 22% did not seek care due to fear that providers would not understand their sexual orientation or gender identity.¹ Additionally, LGBTQIA2S+ youth are less likely to receive past-year necessary medical care.³⁸

Providers can create a welcoming and affirming environment through:

✓ **Training and Education:** Healthcare providers should pursue continuing education to stay informed about LGBTQIA2S+ health issues and best practices. Research shows that LGBTQIA2S+ cultural competency trainings for healthcare professionals are effective in increasing knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to LGBTQIA2S+ healthcare delivery.³⁹ Providers can attend workshops, webinars, and conferences focused specifically on LGBTQIA2S+ health. Organizations such as the Fenway Institute's [National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center](#) offer valuable resources and training programs, including [learning resources related to LGBTQIA2S+ youth](#). These trainings can help increase cultural competence and help providers, including [behavioral health professionals](#), understand the unique challenges faced by LGBTQIA2S+ youth and how to deliver evidence-based, affirming care.

Additionally, the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services offers a 9-module [Health Equity training series](#) that includes a module on the LGBTQIA2S+ population. The training is geared towards those working in healthcare or in roles which address social determinants of health. Content is tailored to the needs of North Dakota. The courses are free and can be taken for North Dakota CEU/CME credit.

Providers can also connect with the Trans and Gender Diverse Health Coalition of North Dakota and the surrounding region. This group meets on the third Monday of

every month at 12:00 PM CT. If you have any questions or want to join the coalition, you can email info@harborhealthinitiative.org.



DID YOU KNOW?

Access to gender-affirming healthcare is associated with lower rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts in transgender and non-binary youth.⁴⁰ However, in North Dakota, [state law](#) bans minors from accessing gender-affirming healthcare within the state, including puberty blockers, hormone replacement therapy, and surgery. Youth who started treatment before April 2023 can continue treatment under the law. Minors are also allowed to access gender-affirming care out of state.

✓ **Inclusive Administrative Practices:** Making administrative practices more inclusive is essential to providing affirming care.⁴¹ Making your healthcare setting welcoming to LGBTQIA2S+ youth can include steps such as:

- **Revising intake forms** to be inclusive of all gender identities and sexual orientations. Allow patients to specify their chosen name and pronouns. You can review additional guidance on [inclusive language for intake forms](#).
- **Ensuring your EHR system** can accurately record and reflect a patient's gender identity, sexual orientation, and chosen name. Make sure this information is accessible and respected by all staff members. The Human Rights Campaign's best practices for [patient identification and data collection](#) is a great place to learn more.

- **Establishing non-discrimination policies** that include sexual orientation and gender identity-related protections. Clearly communicate the policy to both patients and employees, consistent with [best practices](#). The American Medical Association provides [example language and signage](#).
- **Visually signaling** that your practice is a safe space. This can include displaying LGBTQIA2S+ brochures and educational materials, or having affirming, trained staff wear rainbow or transgender flag pins or buttons. Simply wearing a pin displaying your pronouns increases willingness to return to care and patient satisfaction among transgender and non-binary patients.⁴²
- **Implementing gender inclusive bathrooms.** Offices can convert existing single-occupancy restrooms into gender inclusive restrooms. This can often be done simply by changing the signage to show that the restroom is for use by anyone, regardless of gender.



✓ **Professional Organization Guidelines:** Healthcare providers should align their practices with the best practices recommended by their professional accreditation organizations. These organizations provide evidence-based recommendations for working with LGBTQIA2S+ patients. Regularly consult the guidelines and best practices issued by professional organizations, including recommendations related to client rights, intake and assessment guidance, confidentiality, service delivery, and personnel (e.g., LGBTQIA2S+ inclusive workplace policies for agency staff). Review [LGBTQIA2S+ patient non-discrimination statements](#) from your relevant professional organization. Integrate these best practices into your daily operations, policies, and patient interactions.

✓ **Provider Directories:** Consider creating a profile to be added to the [North Dakota Harbor Health Initiative LGBTQ+ Directory](#) which helps patients connect with affirming and culturally competent healthcare providers in their area. Use the provider directory when making referrals for LGBTQIA2S+ patients to ensure you connect them with providers who can provide affirming care.

Your organization can also [participate](#) in the Human Rights Campaign's Healthcare Equality Index (HEI), which evaluates hospitals and healthcare facilities on policies and best practices in LGBTQIA2S+ patient care. Currently, the Fargo VA is the only North Dakota healthcare facility to take part in the HEI. The Fargo VA was [rated positively](#) due to its LGBTQIA2S+ inclusive practices, including LGBTQIA2S+ inclusive patient and employee non-discrimination policies, staff trainings on LGBTQ+ inclusive care, and sexual orientation and gender identity data collection for health records.

More resources for healthcare providers can be found in following table.

Additional Resources for Healthcare Professionals

Audience	Resources
All Healthcare Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAMHSA: A Practitioner’s Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children • HRC: Creating an LGBTQ Affirming Clinic: A Guide for Practice Managers and Providers
Pediatricians and Other Primary Care Physicians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Academy of Pediatrics: LGBTQ+ Health and Wellness • American Academy of Pediatrics: Supporting & Caring for Transgender Children • National LGBTQIA Health Education Center: Gender Affirming Pediatric Care Toolkit • LGBTQ Primary Care Toolkit: A Guide for Primary Care Clinics to Improve Services for Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM) Patients
Mental Health Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Psychological Association (APA): Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People • American Psychological Association (APA): Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Sexual Minority Persons • American Counseling Association: Competencies for Counseling LGBTQIA • American Counseling Association: Competencies for Counseling Transgender Clients

Communities

Communities can help promote LGBTQIA2S+ well-being by supporting safe and affirming spaces in North Dakota. Living in an LGBTQIA2S+ supportive community at the county-level is related to reduced odds of suicide among LGBTQIA2S+ youth.⁴³ Below are ways that faith communities and local businesses can actively show their support.

✔ **Faith communities** can provide an affirming and supportive environment for LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Research indicates that LGBTQIA2S+ youth who are affiliated with affirming religions, meaning faith communities that accept and include LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, have better mental health outcomes.⁴⁴ In fact, LGBTQIA2S+ youth who are part of affirming faith communities have 30% decreased odds of past-year suicide.²⁷ Yet,

many LGBTQIA2S+ youth are exposed to non-affirming religious environments which leads to internalized negative views about their identity, lowered self-esteem, and greater psychological distress.^{45,46}



Faith leaders may find the following resources beneficial in learning to create an affirming church community that supports LGBTQIA2S+ youth and their families:

- National LGBTQ Task Force: [Made, Known, Love: Developing LGBTQ-Inclusive Youth Ministry](#)
- Human Rights Campaign: [Coming Home: To Faith, To Spirit, To Self](#)
- PFLAG: [Be Not Afraid, Help is on the Way! Straight for Equality in Faith Communities](#)
- PFLAG: [Faith in Our Families: Parents and Families Talk About Faith, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression](#)

If you are seeking an affirming faith community, The Harbor Health Initiative keeps a [directory](#) which includes affirming faith resources across the state. It is important when finding a church to understand the difference between a [welcoming church and an affirming church](#). The Human Rights Campaign also provides [guidance](#) for parents on how to spot warning signs that a religious community is promoting conversion therapy. You can also reach out to Ross Keyes at ross@ndvoices.org to join [Interfaith Alliance North Dakota](#), a group which brings folks together across diverse faiths and beliefs to protect religious freedom for all, including advocating against efforts to restrict the rights of LGBTQIA2S+ people.



- ✓ **Local businesses** can display symbols of LGBTQIA2S+ support, such as the rainbow flag, at your business or on your website. You can also display an [All Are Welcome in North Dakota sign](#) from the ACLU of ND. Additionally, businesses can take part in and support local Pride events using the [North Dakota Pride Guide](#) to identify Pride events in your city. Consider partnering with the local LGBTQIA2S+ organizations included in this resource guide and support their events and initiatives through sponsorships, donations, or volunteer efforts. If you are seeking LGBTQIA2S+ affirming businesses, you can use the [Everywhere is Queer searchable map](#) to find LGBTQIA2S+ owned spaces in North Dakota and across the world; LGBTQIA2S+ business owners can also apply to have their organization added to the map.



DID YOU KNOW?

You can add the tags “LGBTQ friendly” and “Transgender Safe Space” to your business profile on Google. When individuals search your business on Google maps or search, they can see that your business is a safe space.

Additional Considerations for Rural Youth and American Indian/Alaska Native Youth

LGBTQIA2S+ youth in North Dakota who live in rural areas, and those who are American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), experience heightened levels of discrimination, isolation, and lack of access to supportive resources compared to their peers. These barriers worsen the challenges LGBTQIA2S+ youth already face, further affecting mental well-being. Understanding and addressing the unique needs of these communities is crucial in fostering safe and inclusive environments where all LGBTQIA2S+ youth in North Dakota can thrive.

Rural LGBTQIA2S+ Youth

Rural LGBTQIA2S+ youth face a variety of factors that can negatively affect mental health. For example, 69% of LGBTQIA2S+ youth who live in rural areas feel that their community is unaccepting of LGBTQIA2S+ people. They are also less likely to have access to schools that are LGBTQIA2S+ affirming. As a result, LGBTQIA2S+ youth living in rural areas are more likely to report experiencing past-year physical harm and discrimination. They are also more likely to experience depression, consider suicide, and attempt suicide than youth living in urban and suburban communities.⁴⁷

Isolation is a significant issue, as rural regions often have fewer LGBTQIA2S+ community resources, leading to increased feelings of loneliness and lack of connection. Additionally, rural youth may have limited access to mental health services and healthcare providers who are knowledgeable about LGBTQIA2S+ issues, as well as reduced connection to supportive community organizations.⁴⁸ As such, online resources and support networks offer crucial social connections and access to information for rural LGBTQIA2S+ youth.⁴⁹ In particular, the internet can be an important connection to other LGBTQIA2S+ people for youth who do not have access to LGBTQIA2S+ peers at school, or



access to LGBTQIA2S+ community programs or GSAs.⁵⁰

The following online resources provide moderated, safe spaces for LGBTQIA2S+ youth:

- [TrevorSpace](#), an affirming international community for LGBTQ young people ages 13-24
- [Q Chat Space](#), an online community for LGBTQ+ youth between the ages of 13-19
- [LGBTQ Teens Chatroom](#), available Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 4 to 7 PM PST for LGBTQ youth 19 and younger
- [Trans Teens Chatroom](#), available Thursdays and Fridays from 4 to 7 PM PST for trans youth 19 and younger

To learn more about the possible benefits of online community connectedness for LGBTQIA2S+ youth, The Family Online Safety Institute also offers a virtual webinar on [Empowering LGBTQ+ Teens Online](#).

Telehealth, or healthcare services delivered virtually using the internet, is another tool that can connect LGBTQIA2S+ youth in rural areas to needed resources. Telehealth can address the barriers of geographic isolation and lack of services by offering access to mental health support, medical consultations, and specialized care that might otherwise be unavailable in rural areas.⁵¹ Youth and their families can use the [Harbor Health Initiative LGBTQ+ Directory](#) to find providers who offer online healthcare, including therapy. The North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services [Mental Health Program Directory](#) also indicates which providers offer virtual telehealth services. For providers, the National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center offers a [Telehealth and LGBTQIA+ Communities Toolkit](#) which contains resources to help healthcare settings incorporate LGBTQIA2S+ affirming telehealth services.

American Indian/Alaska Native LGBTQIA2S+ Youth

AI/AN LGBTQIA2S+ youth are at greatest risk of suicide compared to LGBTQIA2S+ youth of other races, with 48% of AI/AN LGBTQIA2S+ youth considering suicide and 24% attempting suicide in the past year.¹ The legacy of historical trauma and the continued systemic oppression of Native peoples contributes to higher rates of mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress, substance use, and suicide.^{52,53} Connecting AI/AN LGBTQIA2S+ youth to community support that centers cultural heritage and identity is imperative. Research indicates that cultural belonging, connection to traditional, Native lifestyle, and living in communities engaging in cultural reclamation may all reduce suicide risk.⁵⁴ Organizations such as [We R Native](#), [Native Hope](#), and [Healthy Native Youth](#) provide resources and a sense of community that can support development of positive cultural identity for AI/AN youth. Youth can also get connected to events, programs, and services through North Dakota's [Native Inc.](#)

AI/AN LGBTQIA2S+ youth may also have limited access to mental health services due to geographic barriers and provider shortages. For example, 80% of North Dakota AI/AN individuals live in rural areas and small towns,⁵⁵ which significantly reduces access to care. Additionally, when services are available, they may not be culturally competent and may be delivered by non-Native practitioners.

A variety of resources are available to aid providers in developing cultural competence working with Native populations, including LGBTQIA2S+ Native individuals:

- SAMHSA: [Behavioral Health Services for American Indians and Alaska Natives](#)
- University of Nevada, Reno: [Native American Cultural Competency for Behavioral Health Providers: Self-Paced Online Course](#)
- National American Indian and Alaska Native MHTTC: [Cultural Elements of Native Mental Health with a Focus on Rural Issues, Recorded Webinar](#)
- Fenway Institute: [Health Care Considerations for Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ Indigenous Communities](#)

An important consideration when working with Native LGBTQIA2S+ youth is developing an understanding of the term two-spirit. Two-spirit is a term used by some Indigenous North American cultures to describe a person who embodies both masculine and feminine qualities, often holding unique spiritual and social roles within their community. The two-spirit concept is deeply rooted in Native American cultural and spiritual traditions. While two-spirit individuals may identify with LGBTQIA+ experiences, the term itself is specific to Indigenous heritage and is not appropriate for non-Native LGBTQIA+ individuals to adopt. Additionally, the term two-spirit does not simply refer to someone who is LGBTQIA and Native;⁵⁶

in fact, only 20% of AI/AN LGBTQIA2S+ youth identify as two-spirit.⁵⁷ To learn more about two-spirit identity, SAMHSA's Tribal Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) Center maintains a [repository of helpful webinars](#) related to two-spirit identities in tribal communities. The following North Dakota-based organizations provide support and resources specifically for two-spirit individuals:

- [North Dakota Two Spirit Society and Allies](#)
- [Turtle Mountain Two-Spirit Society](#)
- [Sitting Bull College Two-Spirit Club](#)



Conclusion

Everyone has a role to play in promoting the health and well-being of LGBTQIA2S+ youth living in North Dakota. Educators, parents, healthcare providers, and community leaders all play a vital role in creating supportive environments where LGBTQIA2S+ youth can thrive. By fostering acceptance, standing up against discrimination, and ensuring access to culturally competent care, we can significantly improve the well-being of LGBTQIA2S+ North Dakotan youth. We encourage you to use the toolkit and resources provided in this guide to actively support and advocate for LGBTQIA2S+ youth in North Dakota. Together, we can build a more inclusive and affirming environment for the youth in our state.

About the Toolkit

The LGBTQIA2S+ Toolkit was created by ND HOPES, a partnership between the University of North Dakota and NORC at the University of Chicago. ND HOPES is an initiative funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) working to reduce suicide attempts and deaths in North Dakota. ND HOPES delivers suicide prevention programs, resources, and supports, with tailored initiatives for populations disproportionately affected by suicide, including LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Additional resources and training opportunities can be found on our website www.ndhopes.com. You can follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram (@nd_hopes), and Twitter/X (@NDHOPES). If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact us at info@ndhopes.com.

Appendix

Mental Health Resources

- **[FirstLink](#)**
FirstLink is a free, confidential service offering listening and support, referrals to resources/help, and crisis intervention 24 hours a day to the entire state of North Dakota. Call 211 or text your zip code to 898-211.
- **[Lifeline Chat and Text](#)**
Lifeline Chat and Text provides free and confidential support from a trained professional, 24/7. You can call 988, text 988, or [chat](#) from your computer. [For LGBTQIA2S+ youth](#) (under age 25), press '3' when calling 988 or text 'Q' when texting 988 to access LGBTQIA2S+ specific support.
- **[Trans Lifeline](#)**
Trans Lifeline is a peer support phone service run by trans people for trans and questioning peers. You can speak to someone by calling 1-877-565-8860.
- **[The Trevor Project](#)**
The Trevor Project has trained counselors available for LGBTQIA2S+ youth feeling lonely, thinking about suicide, or just needing support. Call 1-866-488-7386, text START to 678-678, or chat from your computer.
- **[The LGBT National Help Center](#)**
The LGBT National Help Center offers confidential peer support, information, and resources from members of the LGBTQIA2S+ community by calling 888-834-4565. Youth callers 25 and under can call the [LGBT National Youth Talkline](#) at 800-246-7743.
- **[LGBT National Coming Out Support Hotline](#)**
For a safe space to discuss coming out with someone in the LGBTQIA2S+ community, you can call the LGBT National Coming Out Support Hotline at 888-688-5428.

Directory of LGBTQIA2S+¹ Organizations in North Dakota, Organized by Location

Beach:

- [Beach Pride Family](#) provides fellowship and advocacy for LGBTQIA+ people in Beach and surrounding areas. Email beachpridefamily@gmail.com to learn more.

Belcourt, Saint John, Dunseith:

- [Turtle Mountain Two-Spirit Society](#) serves a mission to unite, educate, and advocate on behalf of Two-Spirit people. Email tmtwospiritsociety@gmail.com to learn more.

Bismarck/Mandan:

- [Dakota Outright](#)'s mission is to improve the lives of LGBTQIA2S+ people in Central North Dakota through connection, visibility, and advocacy. Email dakotaoutright@gmail.com for more information.
- [LGBT+ Club at Bismarck State College](#) provides support, social activities, and education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and allied students, faculty and staff on the Bismarck State College campus, in the Bismarck-Mandan community, and beyond. Current contact information can be found on their website.
- [QSpace \(QueerSpace\)](#) is a queer youth group for youth ages 12-18 in the Bismarck-Mandan area. It is designed to be a safe, accommodating environment for middle and high school students. For meeting updates and reminders, more information about QSpace, or to ask facilitators a question, contact or follow them on Instagram (@qspacebismarck) or on Facebook (@qspacebismarck).

¹ Organization descriptions use the terminology and wording used by the organizations themselves. As such, various terms referring to the LGBTQIA2S+ community are used, reflective of the organizations' description of their mission and/or population served, in their own words.

Fargo:

- Evolve is Queer Youth Group in Fargo for 18–24-year-olds. The group is hosted by [Youthworks](#) and transportation is provided! If you are interested in joining, please reach out to the Youthworks Fargo office at 701-232-8558 or email mbensontuff@youthworksnd.org.
- [Fargo-Moorhead Pride Collective and Community Center](#)'s mission is to create a sense of community and promote education and social activities aimed at furthering the social and physical well-being and development of the LGBTQIA2S+ community in the Red River Valley. Contact info@pride-collective.org for more information.
- [FM Gay Men's Chorus](#) is a group of gay/bi/supportive straight men/male-identified people ages youth to adult in the Fargo-Moorhead area who love to sing and want to share their talents with the broader community. New members are always welcome, even without any prior singing experience. Email info@fmgmc.org to learn more.
- [North Dakota State University \(NDSU\) Pride Alliance](#) is an organization for gender and sexual minority NDSU students and their allies. They meet weekly to engage in events and activities. Current contact information can be found on their website.
- [NDSU GradPrism](#) is a social affinity group for LGBTQ and ally graduate students interested in networking and connecting with one another. Current contact information can be found on their website.
- [Project RAI \(Rainbows Are Inclusive\)](#) are driven by a single goal: to reduce suicide in LGBTQ+ youth. They provide support for LGBTQ+ youth and adult caregivers of LGBTQ+ children through advocacy, support groups, and resource sharing. Email projectraifm@gmail.com for more information.
- [Red River Rainbow Seniors](#) is a social group dedicated to providing advocacy, education, support, and fun for elder LGBTQ+ people. Email rrrainbowseniors@gmail.com to get in touch.
- [Stonewall Sports Fargo](#) is an LGBTQ+ and ally community-based, non-profit sports league, only open to adults. Contact fargo.commissioner@stonewallsports.org to learn more.

Grand Forks:

- [Grand Forks Out and Proud](#) aims to provide safe spaces and programming for all members of the queer and trans community. Email gfoutandproud@gmail.com for information.
- [University of North Dakota Pride Center](#) fosters a supportive and inclusive campus community for queer and trans students, faculty, and staff through intersectional programs education, support resources, and advocacy. Contact UND.pridecenter@UND.edu.

Jamestown:

- [University of Jamestown's Sexuality and Gender Alliance \(SaGA\)](#) supports the LGBTQ+ community on campus by promoting awareness, as well as educating the campus and community about LGBTQ+ issues and advocacy. Current contact information can be found on their website.

Mayville:

- [Mayville State University's Rainbow Alliance](#) includes students within the LGBTQ+ community and their campus allies. The club is a safe and supportive setting to find and influence inclusion. Current contact information can be found on their website.

Minot:

- [Magic City Equality](#) educates the general public and the LGBTQ2S+ community in northwestern and north central North Dakota about LGBTQ2S+ culture, current events, and community concerns. They also host peer support groups. Email president@magiccityequality.com.

- [QSpace Minot](#) is a LGBTQ+ support group in Minot for youth & young adults (from middle school through young adulthood). For information on meetings and events, you can follow them on Instagram @qspaceminot or contact Mary Elizabeth at gamas.maryelizabeth@gmail.com.
- [Raven's Mom](#) provides grief support for those who've lost someone to suicide and parent support for those caring for LGBTQ+ youth. Contact Asheley LeFors at ravenmomforever@gmail.com for more information.

Williston:

- [The Rainbow Rendezvous](#) is for the LGBTQ+ community and supporters. They host social events, including meetups and picnics. Email willistonrainbowrendezvous@gmail.com for more information.

Directory of National LGBTQIA2S+ Organizations, in Alphabetical Order

- [The Ace and Aro Advocacy Project \(TAAAP\)](#)
The Ace and Aro Advocacy Project (TAAAP) is an organization dedicated to providing resources on asexuality and aromanticism to the public.
- [The Asexual Visibility and Education Network \(AVEN\)](#)
AVEN hosts the world's largest online asexual community as well as a large archive of resources on asexuality. AVEN strives to create open, honest discussion about asexuality among sexual and asexual people alike.
- [Bisexual Resource Center](#)
The Bisexual Resource Center works to connect the bi+ community and help its members thrive through resources, support, and celebration.
- [Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network \(GLSEN\)](#)
GLSEN works to ensure that LGBTQ students are able to learn and grow in a school environment free from bullying and harassment.
- [GSA Network](#)
GSA Network is a next-generation LGBTQ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains queer, trans, and allied youth leaders to advocate, organize, and mobilize an intersectional movement for safer schools and healthier communities.
- [Human Rights Campaign \(HRC\)](#)
As the largest national lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer civil rights organization, HRC envisions a world where LGBTQ+ people are ensured of their basic equal rights, and can be open, honest, and safe at home, at work, and in the community.
- [interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth](#)
interACT works to empower intersex youth and advance the rights of all people with innate variations in their physical sex characteristics through advocacy, public engagement and community connection.
- [Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays \(PFLAG\)](#)
PFLAG is the first and largest organization dedicated to supporting, educating, and advocating for LGBTQ+ people and their families.
- [The Trevor Project](#)
The Trevor Project's mission is to end suicide among LGBTQ+ young people.

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