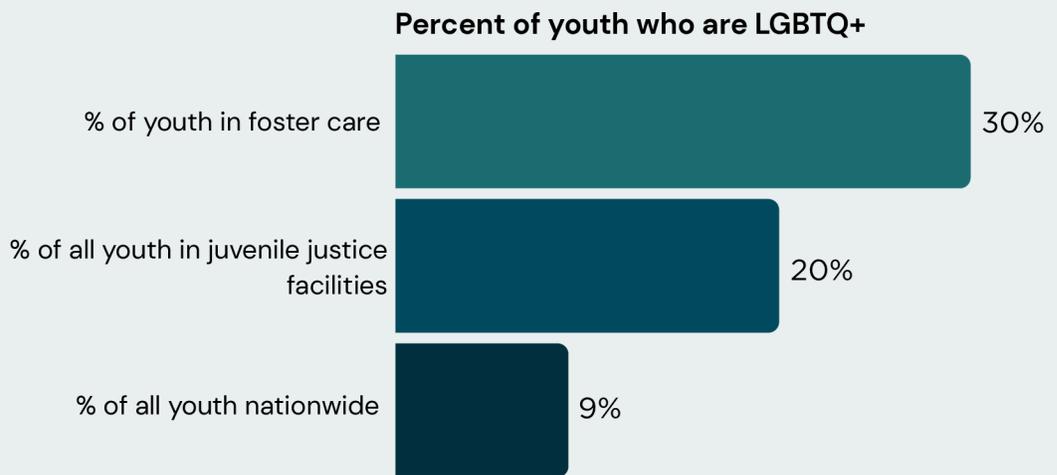


Risk & Protective Factors for Systems Involvement for LGBTQ+ Youth

Research studies from the past 30 years have consistently found that LGBTQ+ youth have increased risk of juvenile justice and child welfare involvement. While Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth comprise 7 to 9% of the youth population in the United States, they make up 20% of youth involved in the juvenile justice system and 30% of youth involved in the child welfare system. This increased risk does not stem from any pathology within LGBTQ+ youth, but instead reflects their reduced protective factors, often stemming from the bias-based behaviors of the adults and peers around them.^{1,16}

LGBTQ+ Youth Overrepresentation in Child & Family-Serving Systems



LGB students experiencing high levels of homophobic teasing at school and low parental support at home report the highest levels of alcohol and marijuana use.

In schools, LGBTQ+ youth receive harsher disciplinary responses⁴ including expulsions.

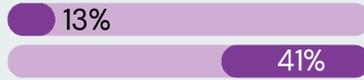
LGBTQ+ youth, especially girls, are convicted of both adult and juvenile crimes and receive harsher case outcomes than their straight, cisgender peers.

Over the past few decades, communities around the country have worked to reduce the risk factors and increase the protective factors that buffer against system involvement for youth. These factors are typically framed in four domains: individual, family, school/community, and peers. Examples of protective factors in these domains include access to safe environments, positive activities, and healthy peers and adults—the absence of these supports are risk factors. Anti-LGBTQ+ climates in communities may reduce key protective factors and exacerbate the risk factors linked to systems involvement for LGBTQ+ youth.

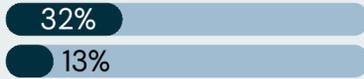
Protective & Risk Factors

What Helps
Family Activities
Mentorship & Support
Safe Environments
Positive Social Skills
Positive & Healthy Friends
Healthy & Safe Activities
Religious & Club Affiliations

13% of **trans youth** who were outed to their families received family support. This is significantly less than 41% of trans youth who were not outed ⁹



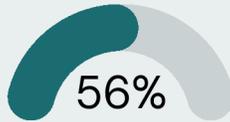
32% of gay and lesbian youth who were **outed to their families experienced depressive symptoms**, compared to 13% of youth who were not outed ⁹



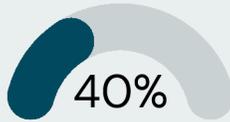
45% of trans and nonbinary youth or their families have considered relocating due to the anti-LGBTQ+ climate in their communities ¹⁵



56% of LGBTQ+ youth in out-of-home care have experienced periods of unstable housing due to unsafe conditions in group homes or foster homes ⁶



40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ+, increasing their risk for victimization, substance use, survival crimes, and suicidality ⁵



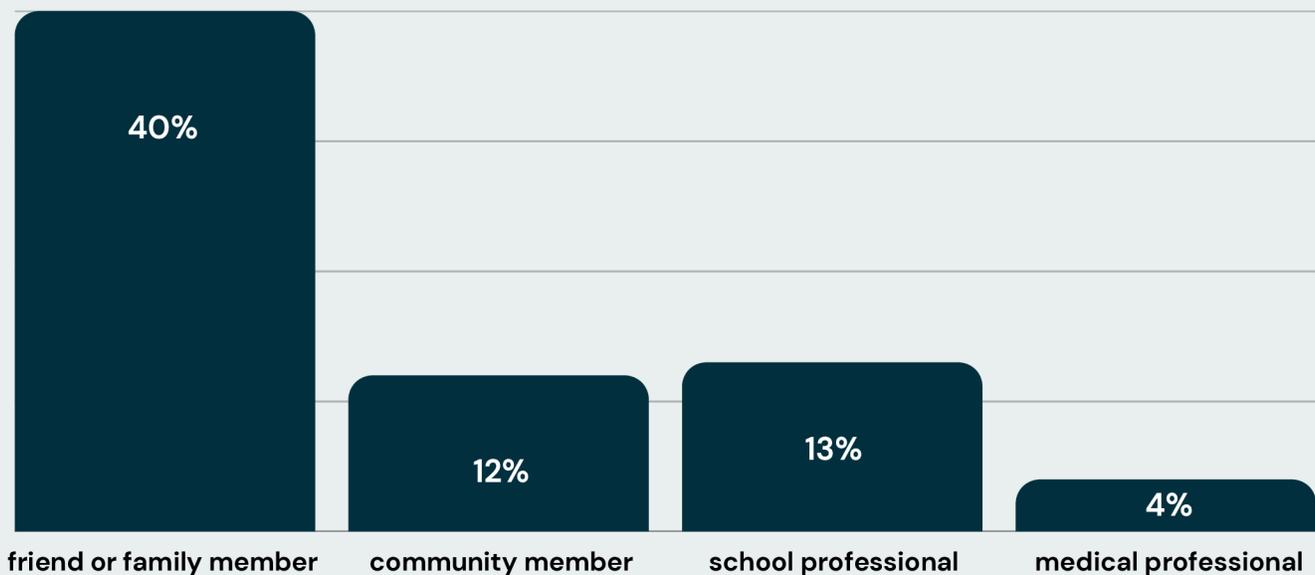
What Harms
Schools that do not address academic, social, and emotional needs
Bullying and rejection as barriers to positive social opportunities
Unsafe environments
Peers with risky and delinquent behaviors
Reduced positive social opportunities due to bullying and rejection
High levels of conflict with parents
Maltreatment and abuse
Home discord

LGBTQ+ youth with foster care involvement who also attended an affirming school, were **50% less likely** to have reported a past-year suicide attempt. In rural schools, interventions by peers and teachers significantly predicted LGBTQ+ student safety.¹³



Having access to an older LGBTQ+ adult role model is associated with *higher levels* of self-reported **life purpose** among LGBTQ+ young people.¹⁴

Youth Reported LGBTQ+ Role Models



LGBTQ+ youth face disproportionate system involvement due to societal biases and reduced protective factors like family support and safe environments. Strengthening positive influences like affirming schools, mentorship, and stable housing, can improve outcomes. Meaningful action from families, educators, and policymakers is essential to reducing disparities, ensuring LGBTQ+ youth receive the support needed to thrive.

Citations

1. Center for American Progress et al. (2017). Unjust: LGBTQ Youth Incarcerated in the Juvenile Justice System.
2. Ramos, N., Barnert, E., & Bath, E. (2022). Addressing the Mental Health Needs of LGBTQ Youth in the Juvenile Justice System. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 61(2), 115–11
3. Espelage D, Aragon S, Birkett M. Homophobic teasing, psychological outcomes, and sexual orientation among high school students: what influence do parents and schools have? *School Psychol Rev.* 2008;37(2):202–216
4. Himmelstein, K. E., & Brückner, H. (2011). Criminal-justice and school sanctions against nonheterosexual youth: a national longitudinal study. *Pediatrics*, 127(1), 49–57. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-2306>
5. DeChants, J.P., Green, A.E., Price, M.N, & Davis, C.K. (2021). Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBTQ Youth. West Hollywood, CA: The Trevor Project.
6. Mallon, G.P. (1998). We don't exactly get the welcome wagon: The experience of gay and lesbian adolescents in child welfare systems. New York: Columbia University Press.
7. The Trevor Project. (2024). U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/>
8. Lee W. et al. (2024). State-level anti-transgender laws increase past-year suicide attempts among transgender and non-binary young people in the USA. *Nature Human Behaviour*.
9. McCauley, P. S., Del Farno, A. J., Caba, A. E., Renley, B. M., Shuler, S., Eaton, L. A., & Watson, R. J. (2024). Stress of being outed to parents, LGBTQ family support, and depressive symptoms among sexual and gender diverse youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 34(1), 205–221. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12912>
10. The Trevor Project. (2023). U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/>
11. Russell, S. T., Sinclair, K. O., Poteat, V. P., & Koenig, B. W. (2012). Adolescent health and harassment based on discriminatory bias. *American Journal of Public Health*, 102, 493–495. <https://doi.org/ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300430>
12. The Trevor Project. (2023). School-Related Protective Factors for LGBTQ Middle and High School Students. https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/The-Trevor-Project_School-Protective-Factors.pdf
13. De Pedro, K. T., Lynch, R. J., & Esqueda, M. C. (2018). Understanding safety, victimization and school climate among rural lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 15(4), 265–279.
14. The Trevor Project. (2024). Adult LGBTQ+ Role Models in the Lives of LGBTQ+ young people. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/adult-lgbtq-role-models-in-the-lives-of-lgbtq-young-people/>
15. The Trevor Project & Movement Advancement Project. (2025) How State Policy Affects the Well-Being and Relocation of LGBTQ+ Young People.
16. The Trevor Project. (2021). LGBTQ Youth with a History of Foster Care. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/lgbtq-youth-with-a-history-of-foster-care-2/>.