

# Navigating Personal Safety while Taking Action as an LGBTQ Young Person

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As young people are seeing increased instances of violence on their screens, it's important to recognize that violence has been an all-too-common part of history for Black communities, especially Black transgender women. The LGBTQ community has mourned the deaths of its Black members for years, even before Black LGBTQ icons like Stormé DeLarverie and Marsha P. Johnson participated in what would become known as the Stonewall Riots. Just last year, more than 20 Black transgender people were killed in the U.S. — and due to misgendering and flawed mortality data, those are only the ones we know of. And just in the last month, a Black trans man named Tony McDade was shot and killed by police in Florida, and a Black trans woman named Nina Pop was stabbed to death in what is being investigated as a possible hate crime.

The Trevor Project hears every day from LGBTQ young people who express fear, pain, and outrage at this ongoing violence. Many LGBTQ youth are also inspired to participate in activism to end violence against Black communities.

The Trevor Project acknowledges that every LGBTQ young person's situation and environment is different. We want to share some tips to help LGBTQ youth navigate personal safety while channeling their energy into meaningful action online or in person.

## How to Talk to Your Peers

The Trevor Project takes an empathetic and non-judgmental approach to our conversations with LGBTQ youth in crisis. You may take a similar approach as you navigate challenging conversations regarding racial justice, police brutality, and protesting during a global pandemic.

- **Don't make assumptions.** Everyone is on an ongoing journey to learn more about themselves and their personal feelings about the continued violence against Black Americans. Emotional reactions to traumatizing events are complex and at times hard to express with words. Approach conversations without assuming that your peers know everything you know, and don't assume that you know their experience, either.
- **Validate their emotions.** Your peers may be experiencing a wide range of emotions right now, and that's okay. Even if they express multiple, potentially conflicting feelings, it's important to normalize those emotions. While it might be tempting to help them channel their feelings into direct action, be sure to first reflect back and acknowledge their feelings before exploring action steps.
- **Educate yourself.** Read and follow Black writers, activists, and organizers, especially if you are a non-Black ally. Share trusted resources with your peers and consider how your own identities and experiences might impact your personal safety and role in ending racial violence.
- **Share on social media.** Platforms like Twitter and Instagram are some of the easiest ways to share information with mass audiences. However, it's important to carefully consider what you share, especially if you are not out and your posts contain private information around your sexual orientation or gender identity. You may also want to share information from trusted public health sources and elevate Black organizers' voices directly.

## Examine & Challenge Personal Bias

As humans, we all develop biases based on our own experiences, identities, or learnings. While we all have biases, it is critical for us to become aware of and challenge our personal biases to build a world free of discrimination. It can be challenging to examine and confront your biases, including [unconscious bias](#), but it is essential to support your peers through tough conversations regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, immigration status, and more identities.

Some strategies for challenging bias include:

- Recognize that you have unconscious bias.
- Identify your specific biases.
- Question your thinking.
- Pay attention to the way unconscious bias affects your language, behavior, and choices.
- Commit to education.
- Avoid being defensive.
- Expand your networks.
- Hold others accountable.
- Listen to Black voices.

## Vigils & Protests

Many young people are looking for guidance on “if” or “how” to protest to end the unjust violence against Black Americans. It’s important to discuss the potential risks of protesting, which currently include COVID-19, on top of the vulnerabilities you may face as a young person, a person of color, or because of your sexual orientation or gender identity.

While The Trevor Project cannot know your specific circumstances, we encourage you to use this information to help you make the best decision around attending vigils and protests for yourself.

## Guiding Questions

Ask yourself these guiding questions to decide if attending a vigil or protest is right for you, and to prepare yourself to stay as safe as possible.

- What strategies have you considered to keep yourself physically safe during the protest?
- Where were you thinking of protesting?
- Who might you go with? Is there someone you could call in case of an emergency?
- What experience do you have attending protests in the past? What were those protests like?
- What would you do if you encountered police while protesting?
- What do you think would happen if you were to get arrested?
- Are you comfortable sharing photos or information on social media?
- Are the people in your photos comfortable with you sharing their image and likeness on social media?
- What specific risks might you face while protesting or interacting with police? How might you position yourself at a gathering, accordingly? (e.g. *How safe do you feel*)

*interacting with police directly? How might your perceived race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, immigration status, or size impact your risk engaging with police?)*

## Physical Distancing Tips

If you choose to protest, you may not be able to maintain six feet of physical distance from other protesters or police. Here are a few best practices that you can use to stay safe and reduce the risk of spreading or contracting COVID-19.

- Go with other people and stick together.
- Wear a mask and eye protection, such as goggles.
- Wear gloves, and keep your hands gloved when touching signs, public objects (such as railings or light posts), and other people.
- Use your bare hands if you need to touch your face, open a water bottle, or use your phone.
- Bring hand sanitizer and use it frequently on your hands and phone.
- Bring water and snacks. Step away from the crowd before removing your mask and apply hand sanitizer before eating or drinking.
- Dispose/wash your mask as soon as you get home.
- Shower and/or change your clothes as soon as you get home.
- Consider physically distancing from others after the protest, particularly those who are older and/or have pre-existing health conditions.

## Safety Tips

Many protests, vigils, and memorials across the country are occurring peacefully. That said, there are physical safety and legal risks that are important to consider. Use these tips to prepare and keep yourself and loved ones as safe as possible.

- Let others know when and where you're going. Check in with them before and after the protest to let them know that you arrived to/from your destination.
- Know your rights. Regardless of your immigration or citizenship status, you have the right to free speech, to have a lawyer in criminal proceedings, to be protected from unlawful searches, and to film acts of violence by police. (Learn more on [Protesters' Rights](#) and [Rights While Protesting Police Brutality](#) from the ACLU.)
- Know who to call in case of arrest, and write their number on your body in permanent marker.
- If arrested, the [National Lawyers Guild](#) may have a chapter in your area. Some chapters provide mass legal defense for protestors who are arrested.
- Bring some form of ID with you.
- Avoid wearing contact lenses, which can become easily saturated with tear gas.
- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes, including long pants and shirts that can create a barrier from tear gas.
- Consider leaving your cell phone at home, or turn off Face/Touch ID, go on airplane mode, and disable data.

- Bring extra mask(s) in case yours becomes contaminated or soaked with tear gas. Cover any identifying tattoos or scars, to the extent possible.
- Don't bring anything you wouldn't want to get arrested with.
- If you are undocumented or a non-citizen, you still have rights guaranteed to you under the U.S. Constitution. (Learn [about those rights from the ACLU](#).)
- If you believe you may be targeted by police because of your perceived race, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, size, ability or any other identity, consider staying away from police.
- Scan the crowd. If you see something odd or potentially unsafe, consider moving or leaving the area.
- Be aware of exits. Make sure you keep in mind how you can leave the protest or vigil if you're feeling unsafe.

The Trevor Project believes in the rights, autonomy, and safety of all LGBTQ young people. This information is meant to guide LGBTQ young people to make the safest decisions for themselves about how to participate in actions to end violence against Black communities. It is up to you to learn about and abide by laws specific to your state, how to express yourself online or at vigils and protests, and to decide how comfortable you are with publicly sharing parts of your identity.

*Remember, The Trevor Project's crisis counselors are trained and always available to support LGBTQ young people, 24/7 and for free. If you or someone you know needs help or support, contact The Trevor Project's TrevorLifeline 24/7 at 1-866-488-7386. Counseling is also available 24/7 via chat every day at [TheTrevorProject.org/Help](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/Help), or by texting START to 678-678.*