



The Trevor Project Research Brief: Sharing Thoughts of Suicide

July 2019

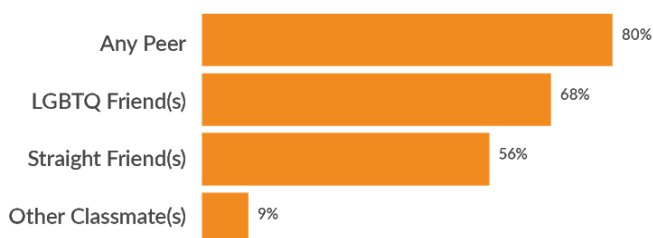
Summary

Suicide remains a significant public health issue as the second leading cause of death among youth aged 10-24 years old in the United States (CDC, 2017), with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) youth reporting more than four times the rates of seriously considering suicide and attempting suicide compared to their peers (Kann et al., 2018, Toomey, Syvertsen & Shramko, 2018). The Trevor Project's [2019 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#) found that 39% of respondents reported seriously considering attempting suicide in the past twelve months (The Trevor Project, 2019). A review of the research focused on sharing thoughts of suicide found that although most youth do not seek professional help, the majority do share their thoughts with their support network, especially peers (Michelmores & Hindley, 2012). However, the field has not explored if, and with whom, LGBTQ youth in particular share their thoughts of suicide. A better understanding of suicidal ideation disclosure among LGBTQ youth can help reduce disparities in suicide attempts by identifying the groups that should be equipped with tailored suicide prevention skills. This research brief uses data from The Trevor Project's 2019 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health to explore LGBTQ youth's disclosure of suicidal thoughts.

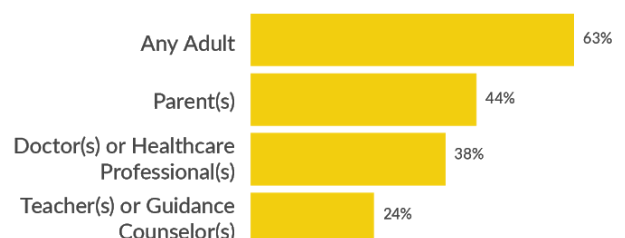
Results

The majority of LGBTQ youth with thoughts of suicide reported sharing them with at least one person, with youth most likely to share with LGBTQ friends in particular. Among youth who stated that they shared their feelings, 80% shared with a peer and 63% shared with an adult. Of those who shared with a peer, 68% shared with an LGBTQ friend, 56% with a straight friend, and 9% with another classmate. Of those who shared with an adult, 44% disclosed to a parent, 42% to a teacher or guidance counselor, and 38% to a doctor or healthcare professional. While all LGBTQ youth were more likely to share their suicidal thoughts with a peer, the *type* of peers they disclosed to differed by gender identity. Cisgender LGBTQ youth reported higher rates of having disclosed to their straight friends (61%) compared to transgender or non-binary youth (48%). Conversely, rates of disclosing to LGBTQ friends were higher among transgender or non-binary youth

Percentage of Youth Who Shared Feelings of Suicide with Peers



Percentage of Youth Who Shared Feelings of Suicide with Adults



(75%) compared to cisgender LGBTQ youth (63%). Transgender and non-binary youth also reported higher rates of disclosing their suicidal thoughts to parents (46%), teachers or counselors (26%), and doctors or healthcare professionals (43%) compared to cisgender LGBTQ youth (42%, 22%, and 21%, respectively).

Methodology

A quantitative cross-sectional design was used to collect data through an online survey between February and September 2018. LGBTQ youth ages 13–24 who resided in the United States were recruited via targeted ads on social media. No recruitment took place on The Trevor Project’s social media or website. A total of 34,808 youth consented to complete The Trevor Project’s 2019 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, with a final analytic sample of 25,896. Youth who reported that they ever had thoughts of killing themselves were asked “Have you shared your feelings about suicide with anyone?” If they responded yes, they were then asked “Who did you share your feelings with? (select all that apply)” with the options including: your parents, your straight friend(s), your lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ+) friend(s), your teacher(s) or guidance counselor(s), your classmate(s), your doctor(s) or other healthcare professional(s), someone else. Eight-two percent of the sample reported ever having thoughts of killing themselves, and 81% of those youth reported that they shared their thoughts with someone. The analyses in this report focus on youth who had thoughts of suicide and shared them with someone.

Looking Ahead

This research suggests a path to immediate action by equipping individuals with whom LGBTQ youth are most likely to disclose their thoughts of suicide with the skills needed to prevent suicide. In particular, our findings highlight the need for policies such as the *Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention* which ensures that educators receive best practice training to prevent suicide. Additionally, this research highlights the need for increased suicide prevention training in schools and universities aimed specifically at preparing peers to identify, support, and refer friends who might be experiencing thoughts of suicide.

Through our combined research, education, advocacy, and crisis services initiatives, The Trevor Project takes a multi-faceted approach to end LGBTQ youth suicide. Our crisis services team works 24/7 to be available for LGBTQ youth who are having thoughts of suicide and may not feel comfortable disclosing to others. We also provide educational trainings on suicide prevention for youth serving professionals that are specific to the needs of LGBTQ youth. Additionally, our advocacy team works year-round to encourage adoption of the *Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention*, which was developed by The Trevor Project, The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, The American School Counselor Association, and The National Association of School Psychologists.

References

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