



Looking after your mental health, for LGBTI+ people



Connecting for Life

yourmentalhealth.ie

About this leaflet

This leaflet explains how you can improve your mental health, particularly when you might feel very low due to challenges related to being lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex (LGBTI+).

It has three parts:

1. Mental health and LGBTI+ people

2. Mental health – how to look after it

3. Mental health – what to watch out for

1. Mental health and LGBTI+ people

Mental health is about how you think and feel and your ability to deal with ups and downs.

Good mental health means you can:

- **cope with the normal stresses of life**
- **get the most out of everyday life**
- **enjoy positive relationships with family and friends**

Your mental health does not always stay the same. Challenges can arise at any time in your life, but detecting and addressing a problem early can help.

Maintaining good mental health will also help you deal with problems as and when they arise, or during tough times in your life.

LGBTI+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.

Many LGBTI+ people are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity, but being LGBTI+ can still lead to specific challenges that can have a negative impact on your mental health.

LGBTI+ people have to deal with the normal stresses of everyday life as well as other challenges like:

- **coming out**
- **isolation**
- **harassment and bullying**
- **losing a partner or spouse**
- **relationships**

Coming out

Coming out means sharing your sexual orientation and/or your gender identity with people in your life.

Whoever you are or whatever your circumstances, coming out can be a challenging time. It is common for LGBTI+ people to be afraid that family and friends might reject them when they find out they are LGBTI+. However, coming out can be a rewarding experience which, in itself, can improve your mental health.

Most people get a positive and supportive response from family and friends and feel happy that they decided to come out.

People come out at all ages and in different ways. You can be 'out' to a few people in your life, everybody in your life, or somewhere in-between. The families of LGBTI+ people often feel that they too must come out, and this can cause them stress and worry.

If you are thinking of coming out, you may feel comfortable going through this process by yourself or you may like to draw on the experiences of other people. It is a good idea to prepare before you come out to a family member, friend or colleague. Remember, only come out when you feel ready, and when it feels safe to do so.

You may want to:

- **think about who you want to come out to – a person you can trust**
- **think about where and when you will come out – somewhere safe and comfortable**
- **be patient and give others time to take it in**

You could also connect with the LGBTI+ community. For example, consider joining an LGBTI+ group or getting involved with LGBTI+ organisations. Spending time with people who have similar experiences to your own, will help you decide your next steps.

Isolation

Most of us experience loneliness at some point in our lives. It might be because we spend more time by ourselves than we want, or because we feel disconnected from the people around us.

Isolation is when we are separated or feel separated from the people and things around us. It is possible to feel lonely and isolated when surrounded by other people. Sometimes, because of your LGBTI+ identity, you can feel different to family, friends or colleagues who are heterosexual, and as a result, feel isolated.

If you are struggling with isolation, you might feel like retreating more. This is likely to make the loneliness and isolation worse. Try to stay connected with family, friends and the LGBTI+ community or to find activities where you can meet people who have the same interests as you.

When you do things with others, you can help yourself to reduce loneliness and feel more included. Thankfully, there are many national and local LGBTI+ organisations in Ireland that can direct you to some local activities, networks or supports.

Harassment and bullying

Anyone can be bullied, but LGBTI+ people can also experience homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying – that is, targeted bullying because of sexual orientation/gender identity – or harassment. It can happen anywhere, such as the classroom, online, the workplace, sporting field or in the home.

Being a victim of bullying may lead you to feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable. Bullying and harassment can cause physical, mental and social pain and can make you feel alone, scared, angry, confused or sad. All of these can affect your mental health.

If you experience bullying or harassment:

- **Tell friends or someone responsible you trust**
- **Report it to someone in authority**
- **Talk to a welfare officer or teacher if you are in college or school**
- **Contact an LGBTI+ support organisation**
- **Talk to a local Garda LGBTI+ Liaison Officer – you can find out who this is by asking at your local Garda station**

Losing a partner or spouse

When an LGBTI+ person loses their partner or spouse, they may not get the same reaction or support that a heterosexual person gets when they lose their spouse or partner. People may not appreciate what your partner meant to you and the love you had for each other. Experiences like this can make grieving all the more difficult for LGBTI+ people.

Relationships

Sometimes relationships can be a source of pressure. This can put a strain on your mental health. When you begin a relationship with a new partner, remember to keep working on your existing friendships and family relationships as well.

Relationship break-up can also have a powerful impact on your mental health. It can bring a range of emotions, such as uncertainty for the future, anger, sadness, loneliness and isolation, and often a sense of failure.

Relationship break-up can be more difficult if you are a parent. This is because you also have to deal with the impact on your children. It can be difficult to adjust to a new situation and this can affect your mental health. It's important to get support to help you through this difficult time.

2. Mental health – how to look after it

We all need to look after our mental health, and, just like physical health, it needs to be maintained.

The following are some ways you can look after your mental health:

- **Keep active**

Regular exercise can really give your mental health a boost. For example, a walk every day can make a big difference. See more at www.healthyireland.ie.

- **Accept yourself**

Everyone is different and is entitled to respect. Many different things, including your background, race, religion and sexual identity, make you who you are.

- **Eat and sleep well**

Having a balanced diet and a good sleep pattern will not only help the way you feel, but it will also help the way you think. Good food and regular sleep are essential for your mind and body to work properly. See more at www.healthyireland.ie.

- **Drink less alcohol**

Avoiding too much alcohol is important, especially if you're feeling down or worried.

Drinking alcohol will not help you deal with problems in the long term. Alcohol is a depressant and overdoing it can increase anxiety and lead to depression. See more at www.askaboutalcohol.ie.

- **Do something you enjoy**

Setting aside some time to do something you enjoy, especially if you are not feeling great, will help you feel better. For example, doing creative activities can help when you are anxious or low.

- **Stay in touch**

Trusted friends and family are important, especially at difficult times. You do not have to face things on your own. It is good to keep in contact or reconnect with someone close.

- **Talk about it**

Problems feel smaller when they are shared with others. Talking about feelings is a good way to deal with a problem. It can help you feel less isolated or overwhelmed.

- **Ask for help**

Asking for help is not a weakness but a sign of personal strength. Everyone needs help from time to time and there's nothing wrong with asking for it. See more at www.yourmentalhealth.ie.

3. Mental health – what to watch out for

The stress sometimes associated with being LGBTI+, as well as everyday stress, can make you feel alone, angry, tired or withdrawn. These feelings are normal and usually pass. However, if they become overwhelming or don't go away, they could be signs of a mental health problem.

Other signs of a mental health problem are:

- **Feelings of sadness or hopelessness**
- **Excessive and undue worry**
- **Significant mood changes**
- **Low self-esteem**
- **Changes in appetite or eating habits**
- **Changes in sleeping patterns**
- **Feeling tired all the time**
- **Withdrawal from friends and family**
- **Not caring about other things that are normally important**
- **Problems functioning, paying attention or staying focused**

If you are experiencing some of these signs, it is important to get support. Support can range from informal support from friends or family to advice from an LGBTI+ organisation or your GP.

Self-harm and suicide

Sometimes, more distressing problems can appear permanent and it can seem that things will never get better. Self-harm is used by some people as a way to try to escape from or deal with pain or stress that they cannot tolerate in their lives.

Some people also have thoughts of suicide. If you are having these thoughts, you need help and support to deal with whatever is causing you to feel this way. Most problems have a solution, but sometimes because you are feeling so low you can't see it.

You are not alone and there are people who can help you to work through your problems, no matter how difficult they appear to you.

Who to contact if you need urgent help

Contact your GP, or an 'out-of-hours' GP
see **www.hse.ie**

Contact Samaritans 24/7 on freephone
116 123 or email jo@samaritans.ie

Contact Pieta 24/7 on freephone
1800 247 247 or text HELP to 51444
(standard message rates apply)

Contact Text About It, a free 24/7
support service, by texting HELLO
to 50808
see **www.textaboutit.ie**

Go to, or contact, the Emergency
Department of your nearest hospital
see **www.hse.ie**

Call the emergency services on 112
or 999

*If you are being supported by a mental
health team, or have been in the past,
contact the service for support in
a crisis.*

For a range of supports and services for young LGBTI+ people, contact **BeLonGTo** Youth Services
www.belongto.org

Get in touch with **LGBT Ireland** on 1800 929 539
www.lgbt.ie

For information and support for Trans people and their families, contact **TENI** (Transgender Equality Network Ireland)
www.teni.ie



Information | Support | Services

1800 111 888

Visit **www.yourmentalhealth.ie** for information and support services for your mental health and wellbeing.

This leaflet is available to order on **www.healthpromotion.ie** and has been produced by;

**The HSE National Office for
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