



# Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
June 2023

## The Real Mental Health Benefits of Celebrating Pride

By Heather Grey

**June is Pride Month in the United States. It's a time when many LGBTQIA+ community members gather to celebrate their experiences, support one another, and advocate for equal rights and opportunities.**

Over the past two decades, much progress has been made in promoting LGBTQIA+ rights and acceptance. However, LGBTQIA+ people continue to cope with stigma and discrimination. Many experience social isolation, harassment, and violence. Recent anti-LGBTQIA+ laws in some states increase the barriers that these community members face.

"This stigmatized and discriminated-against status often leads to minority stress for LGBTQ+ people," Pamela Lannutti, PhD, told Healthline. Lannutti is a professor and the director of the Center for Human Sexuality Studies at Widener University in Chester, Pennsylvania.

"Minority stress is chronic psychological stress experienced because a person is a part of a stigmatized group," she said. "Research has shown that it negatively affects personal and relational health and well-being."

Finding safe spaces where LGBTQIA+ people are not only accepted but also celebrated is important for members of this community.

### Increased risk of mental health challenges

Experiencing stigma, discrimination, and other sources of sexual and gender minority stress can take a toll on LGBTQIA+ community members' mental health and well-being.

"Members of the LGBTQ+ communities are at increased

risk for a number of mental health issues, including but not limited to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorders, misuse of substances, hopelessness, and suicide," Eddy Fagundo, PhD, CRC, CVE, told Healthline. Fagundo is a certified rehabilitation counselor and the Senior Manager of Education Content at the American Counseling Association.

"Many of the mental health challenges LGBTQ+ people face is a result of the discrimination and lack of acceptance they experience on a daily basis," he said.

A 2021 survey of LGBTQ youth conducted by the nonprofit organization The Trevor Project found that:

- 94 percent reported that recent politics negatively affected their mental health
- 72 percent reported symptoms of anxiety in the past 2 weeks
- 62 percent reported symptoms of depression in the past 2 weeks
- 42 percent had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year

Stigma and discrimination can also negatively affect the well-being of older LGBTQIA+ community members. A 2016 study found that when same-sex couples were exposed to campaigns against same-sex marriage, it negatively affected their psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction.

Some LGBTQIA+ community members experience intersecting forms of discrimination that may increase the challenges they face. For example, LGBTQIA+ community members who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) face racism as well as homophobia, transphobia, or both.

A 2020 review found that people who reported experiencing more than one form of discrimination were more likely to have symptoms of depression,

*Continued on the next page.*

 **First Choice Health**®



(800) 777-4114



[www.FirstChoiceEAP.com](http://www.FirstChoiceEAP.com)

Your EAP service is free, confidential and available 24/7 to help you balance your work, family, and personal life.

compared to people who reported only one form of discrimination.

Many LGBTQIA+ people also face barriers to accessing support services, including mental health treatment. "Data indicates that greater proportions of LGBTQ+ lack health insurance and have less access to care and preventive services, thus limiting their options for help," said Fagundo.

According to a 2020 study, only 12.6 percent of mental health facilities and 17.6 percent of substance misuse facilities in the United States have LGBT-specific programs.

### Potential benefits of celebrating Pride

For LGBTQIA+ community members who face discrimination and social isolation, Pride events offer important opportunities for connection, support, and belonging.

This may bring mental health benefits. For example, a 2019 study found that LGBTQ people who reported more connectedness to the LGBTQ community were less likely to report suicidal behavior.

"Pride events help connect members of the LGBTQ+ population to others and to support within the community. They give members of the LGBTQ+ community an opportunity to participate in an event where they are totally included and accepted," said Fagundo.

"These events may also help counter marginalization by making society more accepting of the LGBTQ+ population."

### Tips for making the most of Pride

**Take part in a variety of events.** Pride is a festive and fun time of year for many LGBTQIA+ people. It also provides a space for community mobilization and outreach. "Pride can function as a way to meet and interact with other members of the community socially, to build and act upon political goals, to explore one's own sexual and/or gender identity development, and just to have fun," said Lannutti. "To make the most out of Pride, I would encourage LGBTQ+ community members to take part in the full spectrum of Pride events," she continued. "Go to parties, but also consider volunteering for Pride-related community service, connecting with political groups, and learning more about the various LGBTQ+ organizations in your area who are present at Pride."

**Find your own way to mark the occasion.** While some people love big parties and parades, others prefer smaller social gatherings in quieter settings. Both approaches can make for a meaningful Pride celebration. Even if you want to attend a big event, you might not be able to do so. For example, people who are not out to their families or other community members might feel unsafe publicly participating in Pride. Scheduling conflicts, challenges with travel, or other barriers may also keep some people from large community events. Fortunately, there are many ways to mark the occasion and celebrate your identity during Pride. "Coming out to yourself and being authentic with others in a safe, intimate space is a way to celebrate your personal Pride," said Jared Sulc, APC, a psychotherapist who practices at Berman Psychotherapy in Atlanta, Georgia. "This type of Pride celebration could be a personal self-care practice. Think yoga practice or meditation dedicated to your authentic self or a small gathering of friends you trust to watch your favorite [LGBTQIA+] film."

**Connect online.** Taking part in online Pride events is another way to participate while connecting with fellow community members and LGBTQIA+ organizations. "Connecting with others through social media platforms like Facebook, Discord, and Reddit can help promote the same feelings of safety, support, and community," said Taylor Stearns, PsyD, a licensed psychologist in the San Francisco area in California. "Also, many cities participating in Pride have added virtual events over the last 2 years that people can participate in from around the world." You may also find media focused on LGBTQIA+ topics to stream or download online. In some areas, local libraries and stores stock this media as well. "Listen to affirming podcasts. Read books by LGBTQIA+ authors. Watch shows or movies made by queer folks," suggested Lana Liipe, LCSW, the owner of Honu Therapy in Honolulu, Hawaii.

**Foster inclusive spaces.** Not all community members feel equally safe or welcome at Pride events. "In some areas, BIPOC and other marginalized members of the LGBTQ+ community have been excluded from or discriminated against by Pride organizers. For these individuals, Pride may be a source of additional minority stress," said Lannutti. For white LGBTQIA+ community members, learning about the ongoing legacy of racism that affects people within and outside of LGBTQIA+ spaces is an important step in fostering more inclusive spaces. Actively listening to marginalized members

*Continued on the next page.*

of LGBTQIA+ communities, supporting anti-racism initiatives, and mobilizing against other forms of discrimination may help create more equitable and empowering Pride events.

**Celebrate safely.** If you plan to drink alcohol during Pride, it's important to practice moderation and avoid driving while intoxicated. If you have a substance use disorder, avoiding alcohol and drugs during Pride can help support your recovery. Sulc encourages people with substance use disorders to develop a proactive plan for supporting their recovery during Pride events. "This plan could include taking a sober friend with you or planning to attend a support group after the event," he told Healthline. "Give yourself permission to take a break [from the event] so you can get back in touch with your recovery if you become overwhelmed."

### Resources for LGBTQIA+ people

Pride can be a great time to tap into support resources. Many community organizations engage in outreach efforts during this time.

"Pride is an opportunity to get out information about what's available in communities. Educate yourself, find your resources, and do not ever think that you're by yourself," said Kat Hammer, a licensed clinical social worker at Thriveworks in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Depending on where you're located, there may be local organizations that offer mental health services or social support to members of LGBTQIA+ communities in your area. National resources are also available, including:

- **Center for Disease Control and Prevention:** LGBT Youth Resources: a government-curated collection of resources for LGBTQIA+ youth
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:** a government agency that connects people to substance use and behavioral treatment services
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness:** a nonprofit organization that provides information and support resources to help people better understand and manage mental health challenges
- **The Trevor Project:** a nonprofit suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization that provides LGBTQIA+ youth with free online and phone support from trained counselors
- **Trans Lifeline:** a nonprofit organization that runs a peer trans support hotline

- **SAGEConnect:** a nonprofit program that connects LGBTQIA+ elders with peer volunteers
- **PFLAG:** a nonprofit organization that provides information and support to LGBTQIA+ people, their families, and allies

If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, or another mental health condition, talk with a doctor as soon as possible. They can refer you to a mental health specialist for counseling or other treatment.

"The process of counseling can decrease isolation and provide a safe space to express concerns," said Hammer, "but it's also important for people to ensure that they find a therapist that makes them feel safe and that they feel a connection with. They should try people out, and if someone doesn't feel good, trust that."

### The takeaway

LGBTQIA+ community members have fought hard for equal rights, opportunities, and treatment in the United States — and the fight continues.

If you're an LGBTQIA+ community member, you might find that stigma, discrimination, or other social challenges are negatively affecting your mental health and well-being.

Celebrating Pride and connecting with other members of LGBTQIA+ communities may provide an important sense of support and belonging. Pride is also a great time to seek out support resources and organizations for LGBTQIA+ people.

Whether you plan to attend Pride in person or connect from your own home, there are many ways to get involved.

### References:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/benefits-of-celebrating-pride#takeaway>