

Family Acceptance Project

The Family Acceptance Project used in-depth individual interviews with LGBT adolescents and their families throughout California to look at stress (experiencing and internalizing negative life events and victimization in the social environment) with negative health outcomes in LGBT adult, including depressive symptoms, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation. They chose families from a range of backgrounds, experiences, and geographic areas. This included youth from accepting, ambivalent and rejecting families, including youth living in gated, middle-class, low income, farming, and rural communities, immigrant families, youth in foster care, and adjudicated and homeless youth and their families.

The Family Acceptance Project interviews focused on family history and child development, sexual orientation and gender identity, religious beliefs and values, culture and ethnicity, coming out, family response and adaption over time, school-based experiences and victimization, resiliency and strength, sources of support, future goals and aspirations.

The following care-giver behaviors were assessed in the study:

| Rejecting | Accepting |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hitting, slapping or physically hurting a child because of their LGBT identity• Verbal harassment or name calling because of their LGBT identity• Excluding youth from family and family activities because of their LGBT identity• Blocking access to LGBT friends, events, and resources• Telling your child that God will punish them because of their LGBT identity• Making your child keep their LGBT identity a secret | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talking with the child about their LGBT identity• Expressing affection when the child tells the parent/guardian or when the parent/guardian learns the child is gay or transgender• Supporting the child's LGBT identity even though the parent/caregiver may feel uncomfortable• Advocating for the child when he or she is mistreated because of their LGBT identity• Welcoming the child's LGBT friends to the home• Believing the child can have a happy future as an LGBT adult |

Health and Mental Health of Young Adults Based on Levels of Rejection

Compared with gay and transgendered young adults who were not at all or only a little rejected by their parents and caregivers because of their gay or transgendered identity, gay and transgender teens who were highly rejected by their parents and caregivers because of their gay or transgender identity are:

- More than **8** times as likely to have attempted suicide
- Nearly **6** times as likely to report high levels of depression
- More than **3** times as likely to use illegal drugs
- More than **3** times as likely to be at high risk for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases

Suicide Attempts

- LGBT adolescents from highly rejecting families were more than **8** times as likely to try to take their own lives by the time they were young adults, compared to young people from families that were low or not all rejecting.
- In families that were moderately rejecting (had some negative reactions to their gay or transgender child, but also had some positive reactions) those young people were only about twice as likely to try to kill themselves.

Illegal Drug Use

- Gay and transgendered young people with high levels of family rejection were more than **3** times as likely to use illegal drugs compared with young people from families with little or no rejection.
- When families are moderately rejecting, use of illegal drugs is cut in half, to **1.5** times as likely

Risk for HIV Infection

- LGBT young people from highly rejecting families are more than **3** times as likely to be at high risk for HIV and for sexually transmitted diseases as young people from families that are not rejecting
- Their risk is cut in half when families are moderately rejecting

Beliefs about the Future

- LGBT youth who were accepted by their families were much more likely to believe they would have a good life and would be a happy, productive adult.

UNRESTRICTED

- LGBT young people who are accepted and not rejected by their families are much more likely to want to have a family themselves, have much closer relationships with their families, and are much more satisfied with their lives, compared to LGBT people who are not accepted by their families.

LGBT Youth Beliefs about their Future and Levels of Acceptance and Rejection

| Degree of Family Acceptance | LGBT Youth’s Belief They Can Be a Happy LGBT Adult | LGBT Youth Want to Become a Parent |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Extremely Accepting | 92% | 69% |
| Very Accepting | 77% | 50% |
| A Little Accepting | 59% | 35% |
| Not At All Accepting | 35% | 10% |

Source: The Family Acceptance Project, “Supportive Families, Healthy Children: Helping Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Children.” 2010