Top Ten Physical and Emotional Health Concerns of LGBT students

IN COLLEGE, LGBT students are in a unique position, undergoing numerous transitions in their lives—moving away from home, academic challenges, making new friends—while also exploring issues around their sexuality. It is common for LGBT college students to experience a range of feelings during this time in their lives. Below are their top ten physical and emotional health concerns.

1 Access, Comfort, and Trust—It is important to feel welcomed and supported on campus, whether you are in the Admissions Office, the Counseling Center, or a faculty member’s office. LGBT students notice and appreciate when programming is directed toward and/or involves them and when policies on discrimination are in place to protect their rights.

2 Coming Out—Many LGBT students “come out” at college, contemplating, discovering, accepting, and revealing to others their sexual orientation or gender identity. There is no correct way to come out. Coming out is an ongoing process of decision-making. LGBT individuals are always weighing the risks versus benefits of publicly identifying oneself as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

3 Healing from Oppression—Experiencing anti-LGBT discrimination, violence, and hate can lead to physical and mental health problems. Even in the absence of experiences of overt discrimination, LGBT students are at risk of feeling negative social attitudes.

4 Coping with Stress, Anxiety, and Depression—Gay and bisexual men and women are more likely to experience depression and anxiety than are their heterosexual counterparts. These emotions might include intense sadness, anxiety, loneliness, discomfort in social situations, and feeling overwhelmed.

5 Surviving Suicidal Thoughts, Plans, or Attempts—Decades of research have consistently documented a link between LGBT youth and suicide (thoughts, plans, and/or attempts). College students who report having gender traits more often associated with the other sex appear to be at greater risk for suicidal symptoms, regardless of sexual orientation.

6 Sexual Health Concerns—Rates of gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis have increased in the populations of men who have sex with men. Despite myths that sex between women carries no risks, women can transmit HPV, herpes, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, gonorrhea, and chlamydia when having sex with other women.

7 HIV/AIDS—Rates of new HIV infection among men who have sex with men have recently increased after thirteen years of decreasing. In 2007, 61% of HIV diagnoses in men came from men who have sex with men.

8 Smoking—The tobacco industry aggressively advertises toward LGBT communities. Over 23% of young gay men and lesbians ages 18–24 smoke, in comparison to 17% in the rest of the population.

9 Drinking and Other Drug Use—Twenty to 25% of gay men and lesbians are heavy alcohol users. Greater marijuana and cocaine use has been found in lesbians than in heterosexual women. Gay and bisexual men are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to have used or be addicted to a range of drugs, including marijuana, sedatives, cocaine, ecstasy, ketamine, and GHB.

10 Body Image—Bisexual and lesbian women’s experience of body image can be complicated. Women in the gay community might reject concerns about weight, which can be detrimental to their physical health. Gay and bisexual men may struggle to achieve an exaggerated sense of male beauty, as they are often expected to be fit, muscular, and impeccably dressed.

Source: The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students by Shane L. Windmeyer