

Darien Student Survey Findings: Mental Health & Substance Use Trends



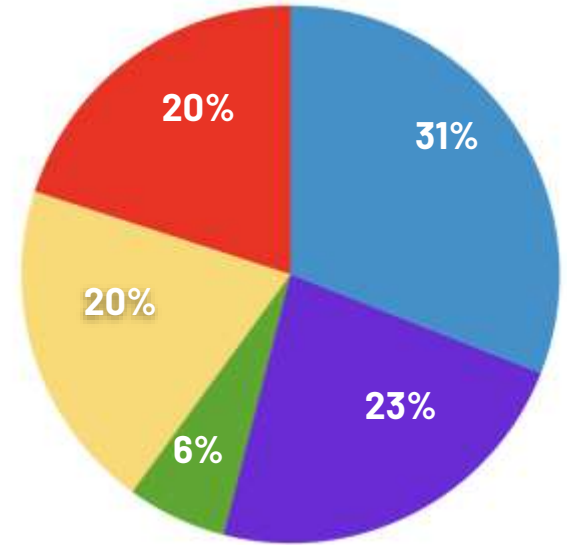
THRIVING YOUTH TASK FORCE

Convened by The Community Fund of Darien

Student Mental Health Clusters

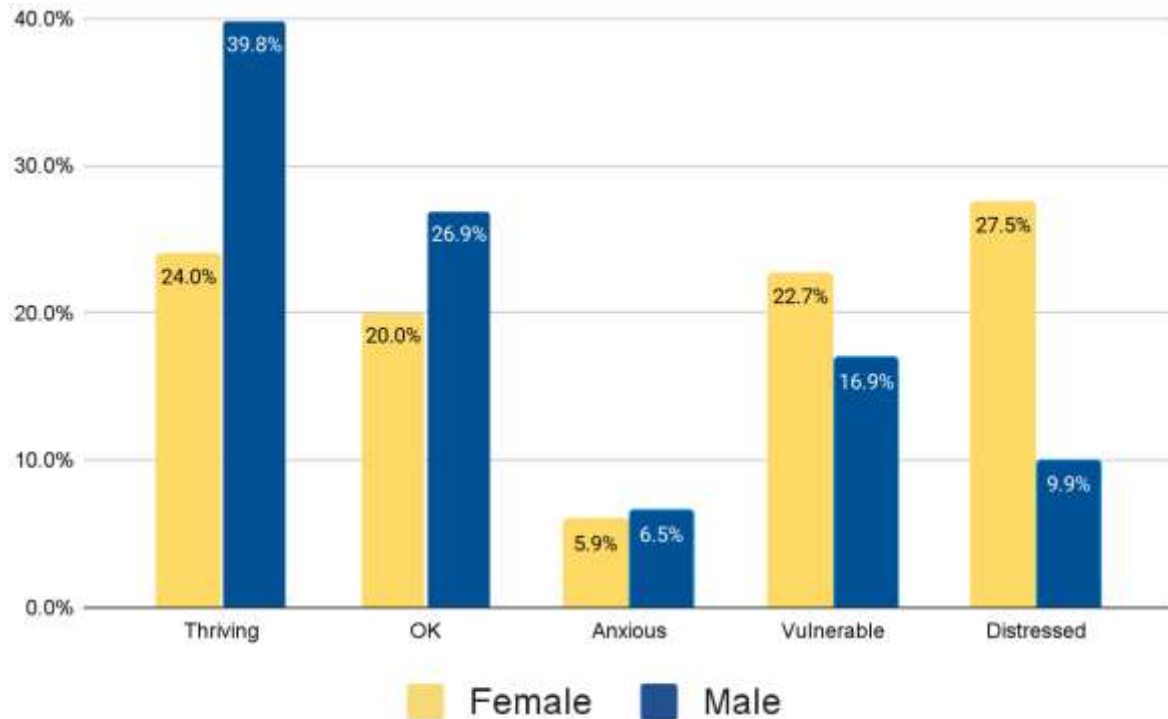
Five categories based on student responses to several questions about how they're feeling

1. **Thriving:** students feel good about themselves, experience low levels of sadness, anxiety & loneliness
2. **OK:** students feel ok about themselves, but sometimes experience some sadness, anxiety and loneliness
3. **Anxious:** students feel ok about themselves, but experience high levels of anxiety, low levels of loneliness and sadness
4. **Vulnerable:** students aren't feeling good about themselves experience high levels of sadness, anxiety and loneliness
5. **Distressed:** students are feeling BAD about themselves, experience highest levels of sadness, anxiety and loneliness



● Thriving ● OK ● Anxious ● Vulnerable ● Distressed

Gender Differences



Tonight's Presenters



Olivia Bucci, LMSW

She/Her



Renée Reopell, LCSW

They/Them



Andrew Tepper, LCSW

He/His

Key Takeaways about Mental Health in Female Youth

- **Female students reported significantly higher levels of sadness, loneliness and anxiety across all grades, compared to their male peers**
- **More social stress, particularly around social media**
 - Social media use has been found to be linked to increased feelings of depression, anxiety, poor body image and loneliness
- **Higher levels of stress surrounding parent expectations and parent opinions**
- **Protective factors for female youth include:**
 - Feeling valued by others in their environment
 - Feeling a sense of control - inclusion in family decisions & personal decisions
 - Having the ability to discuss sensitive teenage issues
 - Trying out new hobbies and extracurricular activities
 - Involvement in groups

Recommendations from Olivia Bucci, LMSW

- **Encouraging children to be involved and setting clear, realistic expectations - but allowing them autonomy in choosing what they want to do**
 - Part-time job, extracurriculars, academics
 - Explore why they want to take certain courses or look at certain colleges
 - Be curious about their choices and be willing to engage in conversation about them, even if you don't ultimately agree
- **Facilitate conversations with children around sensitive teenage issues**
 - Using more validating language and less directive/solution focused language
 - Asking if the child wants advice
 - Assists the child in navigating issues, especially those that are new to them and more delicate
 - Provide more guidance with younger children and give more autonomy in decision making as they get older and have proven responsibility
 - Encourages the child to make their own choices and promotes confidence in their decision making and problem solving

Recommendations (cont.)

- **Create boundaries around social media and phone use**
 - Being “plugged in” around the clock can be harmful to mental health in children
 - Encourage children to show you aspects of social media that they like to validate the positives and usefulness of social media
 - Outline the negative aspects as well to increase awareness in children
 - Limiting phone use during dinner or family activities
 - Children charging their phones outside of the bedroom
 - Parental modeling of limiting social media
 - Applying the same rules to you as parents
 - Boundaries to ease up as children get older

Key Takeaways about Mental Health in Male Youth

- Many teen boys struggle when it comes to reporting sadness, anxiety and loneliness.
- I believe that young men express academic stress as a safer way of expressing feelings and overall mental distress.
- Adult mentors like coaches are well positioned to model how to express feelings, but are also an initial entry point for talking about feelings on a deeper level in general.
- Non-judgmental opportunities for kids to talk about sensitive subjects is so important to the wellbeing of these teenagers and for relationship building between parents and their kids.

Recommendations from Andrew Tepper, LCSW

- Establish a recurring time when your kids know that they can talk to you about anything that is happening in their lives. I recommend being communicative and honest about what that time is. For example, a parent might say, “At the end of dinner every night I invite you to share what’s on your mind, especially the things that feel too scary to talk about. I’ll always be available, with no distractions, at this time every night if you want to talk about anything at all.”
- Model how to express yourself by using a very simple statement: “When you do [BLANK], it makes me feel [BLANK].” Actively encourage your kids to use this skill with you.
- Ask your kids to identify someone in their life that they feel comfortable opening up to. If they don’t have anyone, encourage them to identify someone with whom they can share openly and honestly. Normalize these conversations by routinely checking in with them about who that person is. And, if they don’t have someone, ask what you can do to help them find that person or be that person.

Mental Wellness Considerations for Transgender, Nonbinary, & Gender Expansive Youth

Renée H. Reopell, LCSW

Child Guidance Center of Southern CT

The Gender Diversity and Resilience Program

Population: CT-based youth (up to age 18yo) who are transgender, nonbinary, or exploring their gender identity, and their caregivers

Services:

- Groups: Parent (any age), Tween/ Younger Teen (ages 11-14), & Older Teen (ages 15-18)
- Individual, family, and parent guidance psychotherapy sessions
- Psychiatric medication management
- Case management
- Gender affirming medical care for ANY AGE

How to refer:

Email GDRProgram@chc1.com or call 203-324-6127

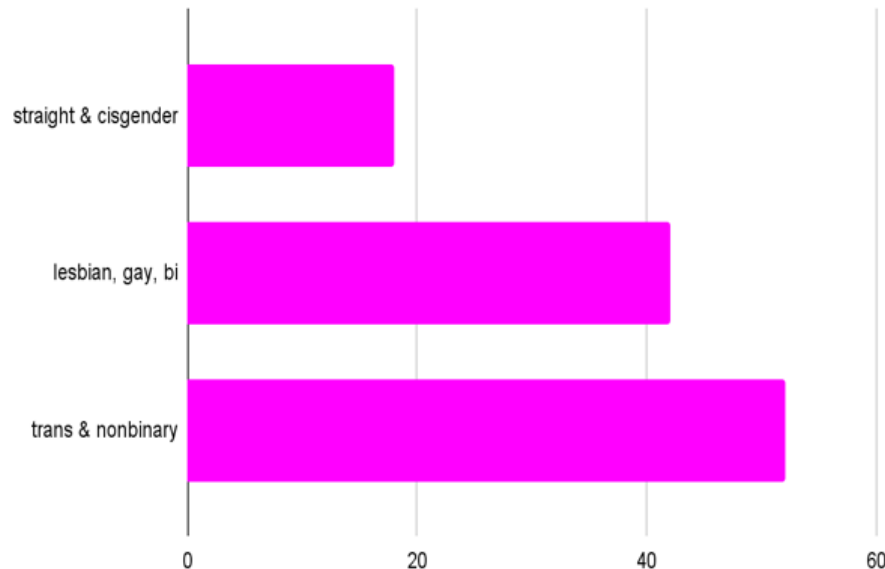
National Rates for Trans & Nonbinary Youth

75% of trans & nonbinary youth reported symptoms of **generalized anxiety disorder** in the past two weeks.

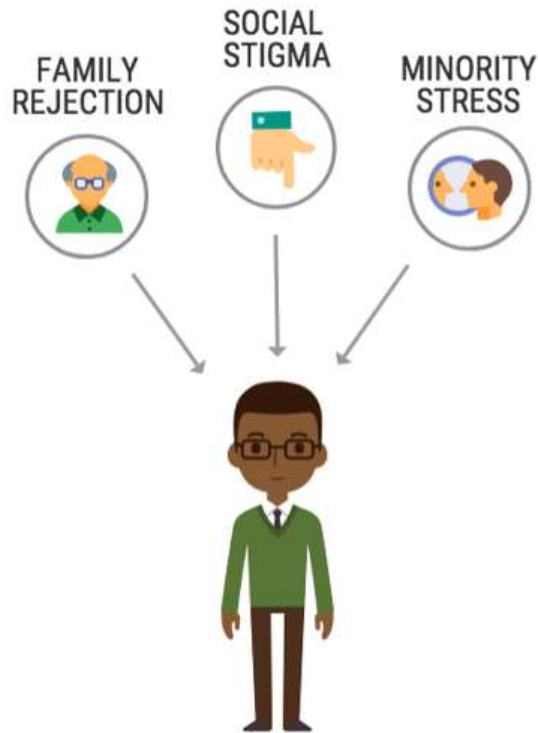
66% of trans & nonbinary youth reported symptoms of **major depressive disorder** in the past two weeks.

Largely due to sample size limitations, researchers often fail to examine within-group differences among LGBTQ youth, limiting our understanding of within-group disparities. However, existing research points to **increased disparities for bisexual youth, transgender and nonbinary youth, and LGBTQ youth of color**

Suicide Attempt Rate



Risk Factors



At home

- Only **1/3 of LGBTQ youth** found their home to be a safe place
- Trans & nonbinary youth from rejecting homes experiences **6.8x the rates of depression** and are **8x more likely** to attempt suicide

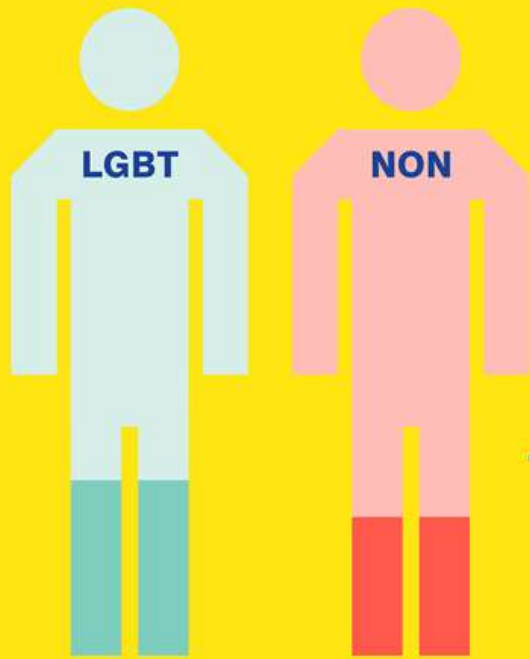
In schools

- **98% of students** hear an **anti-LGBTQ slur** in schools regularly (56% from school staff)
- **56% experience discrimination** in school policies and practices (no same gender prom dates, "inappropriate clothing", etc.)

In community

- **53% of trans & nonbinary youth** report harassment in a public setting
- **98% of youth** report hearing anti-LGBTQ slurs regularly
- **94% of youth** reported that recent anti-trans politics negatively impacted their mental health

Social Stigma



26% of LGBT youth say their biggest problems are not feeling accepted by their family, trouble at school/bullying, and a fear to be out/open. 22% of non-LGBT youth say their biggest problems are trouble with class, exams and grades.



www.hrc.org/youth

#LGBTYOUTH

**Self expression is
a developmental
requirement for
mental health**



Slide credit: Reese Ramponi, Psych APRN
Photo credit: <https://genderphotos.vice.com/>

Concrete steps: Preventing suicide

The Trevor Project found:

- Having **pronouns respected** by most people cut attempted suicide rate by half
- Having **access gender affirming clothing** lowered rates of attempting suicide
- Having **at least one LGBTQ-affirming space** had 35% reduced odds of reporting a suicide attempt in the past year
- Having **at least one accepting adult** can reduce the risk of a suicide attempt among LGBTQ young people by 40 percent



Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, 2021

Photo credit: <https://genderphotos.vice.com/>

Finding Joy: Gender Euphoria

Although LGBTQ youth described a number of challenges in their lives, they also listed hundreds of ways they find joy and strength, including:



- Affirming parents
- Anime
- Art & creative expression
- Celebrities coming out with pride
- Chosen family
- Connection to others who are LGBTQ
- Educational opportunities
- Escaping through reading & writing
- Faith & spirituality
- Feeling seen
- Finding community online
- Having a pet
- Having a supportive partner
- Having supportive & accepting friends
- LGBTQ support in school
- Learning more about LGBTQ history
- Moving away from unsupportive conditions
- Music
- Online LGBTQ chat groups
- Representation in media
- Seeing rainbow flags & stickers in public
- Seeing so much pride from others in being LGBTQ
- Self-identity & finding others who identify in similar ways
- Theatre
- Therapy
- Unapologetic embracing of full self
- Video games
- Watching LGBTQ people on TikTok & YouTube
- Working out

Child Guidance Center of Southern CT

Childguidancect.org

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