

YOUTH MOVE NATIONAL™

PEER CENTER ISSUE BRIEF

Nonbinary Youth in Mental Health Systems and Best Practices to Support Them

Part Two of Two

[Find Part One Here >>](#)

INTRODUCTION

In my research specific to nonbinary youth and mental health experiences, the only study I found that provided findings specific to nonbinary youth was the previously-referenced [2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#) by the Trevor Project, which concluded that 53% of nonbinary youth surveyed had considered suicide in the past year, and 19% had made attempts. In addition, 79% of nonbinary youth experienced anxiety, and 65% experienced depression. Physical harm or threats of harm were experienced by 32% of nonbinary youth, and 67% experienced discrimination due to their gender identity.

Unfortunately, research studies (including this survey outside of those 6 statistics) almost exclusively group all transgender and nonbinary identities together when gathering and publishing data. I struggled to find any research studies, or any articles that were specific to nonbinary people within mental health services, finding research related specifically to nonbinary youth and young adults was even more challenging!

This is an issue, since we know nonbinary youth's experiences are different from many of their transgender peers' experiences. In order to understand more fully the challenges and strengths within nonbinary communities, we have to ask about them specifically. In conclusion, we need more research!



CONSIDERATIONS FOR SERVING NONBINARY YOUTH IN MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS

In regards to the LGBTQ+ acronym and unique experiences within that umbrella:

- Have you found that acknowledging the "LGBTQ+ community" as one group is still beneficial to determining how best to support folks who fall under that umbrella?
- Do you think that folks in the LGBTQ+ community who are members due to their sexual orientation/attraction have the same experience or face the same barriers as folks who are members due to their gender identity?
- What about folks who are binary trans people versus nonbinary trans people? Would the same considerations for best practices be applied to both?
 - *As an example, think about how a young binary trans person (say they identify as a woman) entering an inpatient mental health treatment unit might feel about their placement in the "girl's side" or the "boy's side." If they are respected and have their gender identity acknowledged and honored in the space, they may be assigned to the "girl's side" (seems like the ideal, right? And I think it is, in this context)*
- Now think about a young nonbinary person, who doesn't identify as a woman or a man (or may not exclusively or always). What kind of similar approach could be helpful?
 - *If a single room—how might that be harmful? Potentially re-traumatizing?*

Broadly in regard to engaging with nonbinary youth:

A nonbinary person may also use enby or NB to describe themselves.

- How might you convey to a new person served, or a new person in your life, that you are aware of, open to, and knowledgeable about the existence of genders beyond men and women? And if you're a nonbinary young person yourself, what do you think would be helpful to show you that?
 - *Introduce with pronouns*

Broadly in regard to engaging with nonbinary youth continued:

- How might you convey to a new person served early on in your work together that you are aware of and knowledgeable about systemic sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia? How might you convey to them that you are not overtly biased against nonbinary people?
 - *Safe space stickers, acknowledgment in bios, bringing it into conversation/talking about it!*
 - *Welcoming discussions about these topics, not silencing them due to them being controversial, because they are, right? But they're also directly impacting people every day. And if we don't normalize discussions about discrimination and oppression, then change can't happen!*
 - *Genderless language or separation (no "hello boys and girls" or "you guys", or "girls on this side, boys on that side")*
- How might you create space for the people you serve (or people in your life!) to explore their gender identities and expressions?
 - *Ask questions! Welcome self-expression! Normalize acknowledging the expansiveness of gender and eliminate any reference to or acknowledgment of that outdated gender binary.*
- Have you ever been in a situation in which you were unaware of another person's gender? If so, what was that experience like for you? What internal reactions did you have? How did you respond to that person? What might you do if you are unsure about a person's gender?
 - *Try to use non-gendered language as much as possible*
 - *Ask for pronouns! Ask about how they'd like to be referred to in the space. It may not be necessary for you to know a person's gender identity at the end of the day as well. If it is, it's important not to make assumptions, and to be open! Again, gender identity is infinitely expansive.*
- How does your approach to engagement change working with (or interacting with) people of different genders? Do you notice any differences?

In Acquiring and Spreading Awareness (For people serving nonbinary youth):

These are questions geared more towards folks serving nonbinary youth, but if you are someone with lived experience yourself or in your personal life, we'd love your feedback on what you believe would be most helpful! Email us at info@youthmovenational.org.

- What are some ways in which you could obtain ongoing information to continue to develop your knowledge and awareness of gender-based discrimination and gender privilege?
- How are organizations signaling their support to their communities externally? What messages are you putting out and how?
- Are you seeking feedback from the non-binary youth you serve? What does that look like? How are you building trans and non-binary inclusion into your technology platforms? Your data collection?

WAYS TO SUPPORT NONBINARY YOUTH IN MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS

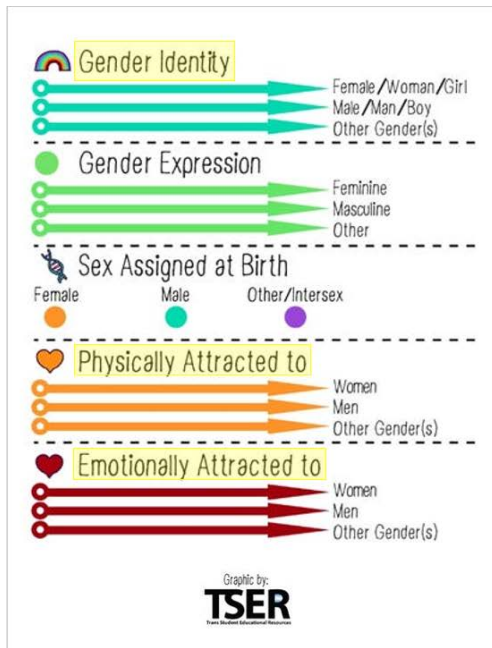
- Foster gender identity discovery and adjustment
- Recognize and validate the impact of gender minority stress and ongoing societal exclusion & oppression
- Facilitate emotional awareness and acceptance
- Empower assertive communication and self-advocacy
- Validate unique strengths of gender non-conforming youth
- Foster supportive relationships and community
- Welcome and affirm diversity of gender expression
- Learn and teach others to use gender-inclusive language as much as possible
- Offer “All Gender” restrooms and spaces that are welcoming of all bodies



If you would like to request technical assistance and consultation from Youth MOVE National, you can submit your request [HERE!](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Youth MOVE Change Initiative](#) >>
- [The Family Acceptance Project](#)[®] >>
- [PFLAG](#) >>
- [The Center of Excellence on LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health Equity](#) >>
- [GLSEN](#) >>
- [GLAAD](#) >>
- [2022 U.S. National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health by State - The Trevor Project](#) >>



Gender vs Attraction

Gender:

A set of socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate

Gender Identity:

A person’s deeply held core sense of self in relation to gender (see *Gender*). Gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex.

Ex. Nonbinary, Two-spirit, Demigender, Agender

Attraction/(A)Sexual Orientation:

Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people or no people.

Ex. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Asexual, Biromantic, Aromantic

Source of Definitions: <https://pflag.org/glossary>