

## SUPPORTING MILITARY-CONNECTED LGBTQ+ YOUTH: TIPS FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

Although military-connected youth typically possess unique strengths, they also face stressors, such as frequent relocations, parental deployments, and family separations, which have been shown to contribute to their emotional distress. Youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or who are questioning their sexual or gender identity (LGBTQ+) may face harassment and discrimination, which are

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associated with an increased risk for depression, anxiety, and suicide. Given the intersection of these risk factors, military youth who identify as LGBTQ+ may be at especially heightened risk of negative mental health outcomes. This fact sheet raises awareness among helping

professionals (e.g., educators, health care providers, community support personnel) who work with military youth.

### Addressing Potential Questions from Military-Connected LGBTQ+ Youth

- Military-connected LGBTQ+ youth whose families are relocating to a new geographic area may ask:
  - » “Will the new community be accepting and supportive?”
  - » “Will there be a healthcare provider who will continue to provide gender affirming care?”
- Military-connected LGBTQ+ youth whose supportive parents are deployed may wonder:
  - » “Will I be able to cope when my supportive mom/dad is away?”
  - » “Will my school still be helpful if my supportive parent isn’t here?”

### Recommendations for Helping Professionals

Helping military-connected LGBTQ+ youth involves being present in their lives in an understanding and supportive manner. Educators, health care providers, and community support personnel can start by accepting and acknowledging what these youth say about their lived experiences. For example, if a young person discloses that they are LGBTQ+, professionals can be helpful by:

- Letting them know you are there to listen
- Offering support without assuming they need help dealing with their identity
- Asking questions that demonstrate understanding,

acceptance, and compassion, such as whether they have been able to tell anyone else, or if they feel supported by adults in their life

- Avoiding dismissive language, such as “you’re just confused” or “it’s just a phase”

Helping professionals should also consider any biases or preconceptions they may hold toward LGBTQ+ persons so that they can deliver appropriate and compassionate care and reduce the risk of harming military-connected LGBTQ+ youth. Risk of suicide and other negative health outcomes in LGBTQ+ youth can be reduced by providing easy access to culturally-responsive care and connectedness to safe schools. The support from healthcare professionals and educators can be of considerable help.

The following resources are available to assist professionals providing support to military-connected LGBTQ+ youth.

### Resources

#### LGBTQ+ Military-Specific Resources:

- LGBTQ | Military Kids Connect
- Modern Military Association of America

#### LGBTQ+ Youth Resources:

- LGBTQ Youth Resources | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health | CDC
- American Academy of Pediatrics — LGBTQ+ Health and Wellness