



VOX

“let us share our
voices of experience
in mental health”

LGBT VOX Guide

A handy guide from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people
with lived experience of mental health problems

Words that hurt, silence that heals

We're all hurting
some hurts are deep and fresh
others go back, far back
We're all hurting
but words are stones, labels, sticks
and some wounds are slow in healing
We're all hurting
Yet seek a way to love
And be the only selves
Our spirits tell us to be
We're all hurting, yet
some have sought to change us, ✓
Our inner nature, our deeper essence
With chapter and verse
Electric shocks, breaking rocks
Barbed wire, pink cloth triangles
Prisons, visions, books
Closed minds, filthy looks
Blame and shame,
name games, the stigma of the other.
(Poem by LGBT VOX Member)

LGBT VOX is a group of people who identify as LGB and/or T (People who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender) who ALSO identify as having a lived experience of a mental health problem (Any kind of mental health problem, whether in the past or present).

LGBT VOX is part of VOX-Voices Of eXperience: the national mental health member lead organisation, working to strengthen the voice of people with lived experience of mental health problems.

To find out more about VOX visit: www.voxscotland.org.uk

One of the aims of LGBT VOX was to develop this lived experience resource for mental health service user groups, front line health, mental health practitioners, social care staff and others to offer an insight into the group members lived experience, helping to support them in their work with LGBT people with lived experiences of mental health problems.

The resource is: a collection of lived experiences by LGBT people with mental health problems around six main themes/issues. It also offers insights, suggestions and examples of good and bad practice.

In developing this resource the group not only shared their own experiences and knowledge but have consulted with a number of other LGBT people who also identify as having lived experience of mental health problems to enrich and build this resource.

Our Experience Shared

We would like to acknowledge that the views and experiences shared here are those of the LGBT VOX group and those of the LGBT people who responded to our survey. We do not assume to represent the lived experience of all LGBT people with a lived experience of mental health problems.



The LGBT VOX group highlighted some key issues to share their experience on, which are;

Assumptions, Stereotypes and Stigma,

Openness and Privacy,

The Diverse Identities of LGBT People,

The Cost of not being inclusive

Assumptions, Stereotypes and Stigma

We are starting from the point that we as people all experience periods of positive and negative mental health, just as we all have good and bad periods of physical health.

There can be much stigma and negative attitudes towards having a mental health problem. We also know that there can be stigma and negative attitudes aimed at people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.

So imagine how severely the combination of stigma and negative attitudes towards both mental health problems and LGBT people can affect those of us who have these two intersecting identities and experiences.

“A big factor in my initial mental health difficulties has been due to stigma and isolation”

“My family rejected me when I came out and felt totally alone which led me to a deep depression”

“I see and experience a lot of stigma and prejudice even from the Gay community, just because I don’t fit that image, you end up feeling isolated and shunned from every angle”

It is very important not to simply rely on what you think you know about LGBT people. Instead it is key that you really listen to what each individual is saying and accept it as how they feel.

It is only in the early 90's that the (WHO) World Health Organisation agreed to no longer classify homosexuality as a mental health problem. There are still cases that emerge every so often in the media about professionals still attempting to "reverse peoples sexual orientation" so you can imagine what this might do in terms of trust for LGBT people in seeking help from mental health practitioners.

Stigma is even more prevalent against transgender people: '62% of people that had used Gender Identity Clinic services experienced one or more negative interactions, 63% in general mental health services, and 65% in general health services. For nearly 30% of respondents, a healthcare professional had refused to discuss a trans-related health concern.' (P87 STA 2012 Report)

Below is a collection of examples where people feel that they have not been listened to or asked for their views, but where assumptions have played a negative role in their wellbeing and recovery.

"I am Gay and have a mental health problem, it so happens that I am also diagnosed as being HIV+, I have difficulties accessing mental health support, not because it is not available but because when I try to seek help I am automatically referred to the HIV specialised team, when believe it or not my mental health problem that I need help for is not related at all to being HIV+",

"I will not be your victim, the way you treat people will have consequences for all of us"

"Just because I am LGB or T it does not mean that I can't be a good parent"

It is important to avoid assuming that all LGBT people's mental health problems are because they are LGBT. Like the rest of society, LGBT people can have mental health problems that are completely unrelated to our sexual orientations and gender identities. However, the increased discrimination, family rejection and isolation we experience can result in increased risk of mental health problems among LGBT people. For those of us who are transgender we can experience depression, anxiety and distress about aspects of our physical bodies and about others not recognising and respecting our gender identities. However, our sexual orientations or gender identities are not in themselves mental health problems.

Avoid making assumptions about possible partners, friends and family. For example do not assume that someone is being accompanied by a same sex friend or sibling as they could be a partner. Similarly, do not assume that a mixed sex couple is not LGBT. One or both of them could be transgender or bisexual.

“Being LGBT is not that big a deal, it is just part of us focus on gender neutral language such as you have a partner”

Services should keep in mind that stigma and prejudice can also happen within communities, towards members of the same community. Both LGBT identities and mental health problems experience stigma and discrimination. Therefore an LGBT person with lived experience of mental health problems can experience stigma from multiple sides and be left with no safe or understanding spaces or services that get the complexity of the issues.

A key tip is not to assume that the person has an established support network because you know that there are LGBT or mental health specific services out there. Single strand services may not understand the complex experiences and issues here unless they specialise in dealing with LGBT people with lived experience of mental health issues. It is very important to show that you are inclusive of both LGBT people and people with lived experiences of mental health issues.

Building trust, avoiding assumptions and using a person centred approach are what is important here. Do not be afraid to ask respectful, relevant questions so that you can better understand each person’s issues and needs. If you are not sure how to proceed ask LGBT and mental health groups that specialise in LGBT mental health for advice.

Openness and Privacy

Being or coming out is not always a choice for every one - some people just don’t have that as an option.

“Do you disclose or not disclose, do you need to?”

We have the right to choose whether or not to be open about our sexual orientation or transgender identity. Equally it is our right to decide what, if anything we share with others about our lived experiences of mental health problems. Our decisions about privacy must be respected.

There are many factors that influence our decisions about openness. And not all people who face LGBT issues or participate in LGBT associated behaviours self-identify as “LGBT”. Therefore it is important to remember that some LGBT people will use your services without ever sharing certain information with you.

Just because someone chooses to be open about their identity or experiences in one context does not mean they will be comfortable with the same levels of openness in another context. So it is essential to never pass on information about people’s identities or experiences without express permission.

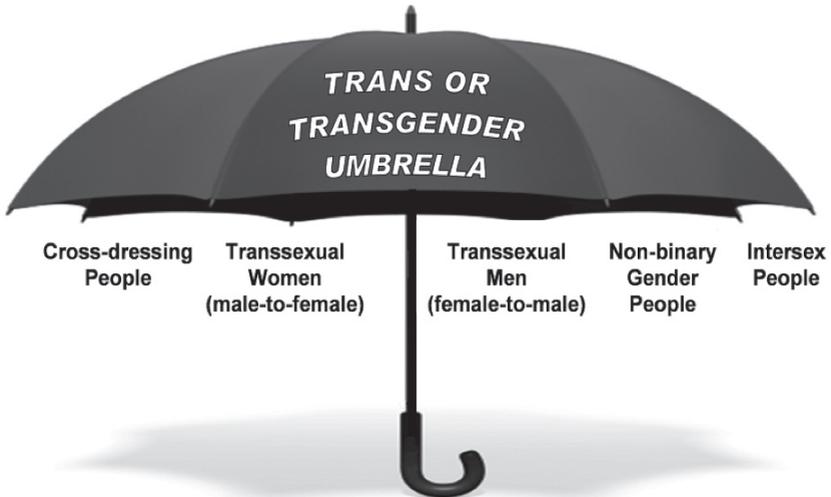
The risk of being treated badly can be a major reason someone fears being open about their identity or experiences.

If we do not feel safe to be as open as we would like to be this can be harmful to our mental health. Services have a duty to ensure that those of us who decide to be open are respected, supported and safe.

The Diverse Identities of LGBT People

LGBT refers to a very wide range of diverse people. It is important to remember that sexual orientation and gender identity are two different aspects of identity. While sexual orientation is about your personal view of who you are attracted to gender identity is about your personal view of your own gender.

Below is a useful tool from Scottish Transgender Alliance that outlines some of the different terms that some of your trans service users may use.



For more information about these terms see www.scottishtrans.org

There is some overlap of issues between all LGBT people but when looking at the inclusion of LGBT people it is important to flesh out the different needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and to remember that transgender people can be LGB or heterosexual.

It is important to remember that our sexual orientations and gender identities are only part of what makes up an individual, and is not our whole identities.

“Being Gay is an important part of my Identity but not the whole”

We are also from different ethnic backgrounds and religions, are of different ages and are disabled in a variety of ways. Again, a non-judgemental person centred approach to all service users and avoiding assumptions are good ways of helping your service be responsive to all your users.

The Cost of Mental Health Services Not Being Inclusive

Not addressing the needs of people who are LGBT can increase their risk of alienation, self-harm and for some even suicide.

It is vital in our lived experience view that people get support as early as possible, support that is understanding, appropriate, person centred and non- judgemental.

The cost for services in the long run is that many untreated mental health issues become worse over time and much more complex to deal with. More time, more support needs, diverse expertise required and ultimately translating into much more money and resources being spent.

In 2006 the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) estimated that the cost of mental health problem in Scotland alone was £8.6 Billion pounds, which at the time was more than the National Health Service’s whole budget in Scotland. SAMH have since updated that figure in 2010 to £10.7 Billion. It is more than likely that the cost will only keep on rising both in terms of financial costs and human lives.

The Scottish Transgender Alliance’s Trans Mental Health Study 2012 found that 35% of respondents had attempted suicide at least once and 84% had suicidal thoughts. Suicide risk reduced for people after transition, with 63% thinking about or attempting suicide more before they transitioned and only 3% thinking about or attempting suicide more post-transition. 7% found that this increased during transition’ (p59, STA 2012 Report)

These are clear indicators that services need to be knowledgeable, accessible and available for transgender people.

The report goes on to recommend ‘that there is a need for enhanced support during the process of transition, and prior to undergoing these processes.’ (p48, STA 2012 Report)

To Read the full SAMH “What’s it worth” 2006 and “What’s it worth now” 2011 report visit;
http://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/pdfs/samh_whats_it_worth.pdf
http://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/pdfs/what's_it_worth_now_exec_summary.pdf

To read the full STA Trans Mental Health Study 2012, visit the link below;
http://www.scottishtrans.org/Uploads/Resources/trans_mh_study.pdf

Useful Recommendations

In addition to the suggestions made in previous parts of this booklet we would like to encourage professionals and services to utilise the recommendations of the “There’s More to Me” report published in 2010, led by SAMH and the Glasgow Anti Stigma Partnership and the STA’s Trans Mental Health Study 2012.

We recommend that NHS, voluntary sector, health professionals and community mental health services work with LGBT and trans organisations to build links and share knowledge and best practice.

Some of the recommendations from the reports;

- There is a need for services to support transgender people at a much earlier stage as well as a need for more training and understanding of transgender issues in general.
- Targeted interventions are vital for reducing the exceptionally high prevalence of suicide and suicidal ideation amongst trans people.
- Trans mental health needs should be written into suicide prevention policies and addressed at a local and governmental level to ensure a comprehensive and uniform strategy is introduced.
- Couples therapists should be explicit about the fact that their services are open to all couples.
- Health professionals should consider how to non-judgementally incorporate sexual orientation and gender identity into discussions on mental health.
- NHS, voluntary sector and local authority mental health services should learn from sexual health services in finding ways to ask about sexual orientation. They should provide visible resources such as leaflets featuring same sex couples.
- Community mental health services should develop good relationships with local LGBT and transgender resources and be able to refer people to them. There is not necessarily a need for LGBT specific mental health services but existing services must be able to refer to LGBT and transgender services for additional support.
- Community mental health services should make clear to local LGBT services that they are LGBT friendly.
- Mental health professionals should have an awareness of LGBT issues and how they might impact on mental health.
- Mental health services should work to ensure that it is safe for staff and service users to be open about their sexual orientation and gender identity if they wish to do so.

To see the full reports and recommendations;

http://www.samh.org.uk/media/1154/SAMH_LGB_Report_FINAL.pdf

http://www.scottishtrans.org/Uploads/Resources/trans_mh_study.pdf

Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in schools are also major negative factors that affects young LGBT people’s mental health, for more information see LGBT Youth Scotland’s ‘Dealing with Homophobia and Homophobic Bullying in Scottish Schools’ Toolkit for Teachers: www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/files/documents/Toolkitforteachers.pdf

Contacts for Support and Advice

If you are an LGBT person experiencing mental health difficulties or have concerns about your mental health here is a list of contacts you might wish to try although we recommend that your GP should be considered as the first point of call for support;

Breathing Space

<http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk>

0800 83 85 87

Monday-Thursday 6pm-2am

Friday-Monday 6pm-6am

Rape Crisis Scotland

www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/

Phone the free Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline

Every day, 6pm to midnight on:

08088 01 03 02

Gay Men's Health

www.gmh.org.uk/

Aberdeen: 01224 930355

Edinburgh: 0131558 9444

Glasgow: 0141 552 0112

Edinburgh Crisis Centre

www.edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk

Free phone 0808 801 0414

You can now Text on 07974429075

Email crisis@edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk

LGBT Health and Wellbeing Centre

www.lgbthealth.org.uk/

Edinburgh: 0131 523 1100

LGBT Helpline Scotland is open every Tuesday and Wednesday from 12.00pm - 9.00pm on 0300 123 2523.

BROKEN RAINBOW UK

<http://www.brokenrainbow.org.uk/>

National LGBT Domestic Violence

Helpline: 0300 999 5428

e-mail: help@brokenrainbow.org.uk

LGBT Youth Scotland

www.lgbtyouth.org.uk

Edinburgh: 0131 555 3940

Glasgow: 0141 552 74 25

Dumfries& Galloway: 01387 255 058

Equality Network

www.equality-network.org

Edinburgh: 0131 467 6039

If you are a practitioner/service provider and want to learn more about LGBT issues or how best to support LGBT people here is a short list of organisations you can contact.

Scottish Transgender Alliance

www.scottishtrans.org

Edinburgh: 0131 467 6039

Stonewall Scotland

www.stonewallscotland.org.uk

Edinburgh: 0131 557 3679

LGBT Youth Scotland

www.lgbtyouth.org.uk

Edinburgh: 0131 555 3940

Glasgow: 0141 552 7425

Dumfries & Galloway: 01387 255 058

LGBT Domestic Abuse Project

<http://www.lgbtdomesticabuse.org.uk>

Glasgow: 0141 548 8121

Thanks

We would like to thank the support of our LGBT members without whom this resource would not have been developed.

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