



Macra na Feirme



# **LGBT People in Rural Ireland**

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## ***Promoting Positive Mental Health***

Ireland has experienced great progress for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people over the last 20 years. There has been huge legal and social change. Many **LGBT** people are more open about their sexual orientation or gender identity with their families and friends, and in their communities. There have been over 1,000 Civil Partnerships across every county in Ireland since they first became available in 2011, which have done much to increase the visibility and status of lesbian and gay couples and their families.

**GLEN – The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network** and **Macra na Feirme** have come together to ensure that this visibility and positive change is equally enjoyed by those who are LGBT in rural Ireland. This booklet focuses on mental health because LGBT people in rural areas can experience isolation and lack of support. This booklet has been developed to promote positive mental health and highlight the community and support services available for LGBT people living in rural Ireland.

### **‘Mental Health’ – what does that mean?**

Good mental health means you can cope with the normal stresses of life, you realise your abilities, you can work productively and are able to make a contribution to your community. Your mental health is an important part of you; it's an important part of everyone. It's about how we see and feel about ourselves and those around us – our family, friends, classmates and people in our communities – people we see every day. When our mental health is good we can enjoy day to day life and we can get the best out of things. Good mental health also helps us deal with problems and tough times in our life.

### **Supporting LGBT people's mental health**

Negative life experiences can be stressful and this stress can affect our mental health. Negative experiences because a person is LGBT can lead to specific stresses and can also have a negative impact on our mental health. This can include discrimination, social exclusion and harassment, or even violence, and for some, isolation. GLEN and Macra na Feirme have joined together to produce this booklet to provide information on good mental health for LGBT people in rural Ireland.

## Looking After Yourself

We all need to look after our mental health and just like physical health it needs to be maintained. Looking after yourself is the best way to maintain good mental health. Here are ten things you can do to look after your mental health:

### 1. Accept Yourself

Accepting yourself as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender can sometimes be made more difficult because of a fear of how people will react to you, or because of your experiences of homophobia and transphobia. Try not to be too hard on yourself, and if you are finding things difficult, seek support, for example the LGBT Helpline or from other resources listed in this booklet.

### 2. Get Involved

Having things to do which occupy your mind or that get you involved with people is good for your mental health. Getting involved in new things can make all the difference – for you and for others. Join a club or group, like Macra na Feirme, or meet up with friends. Being involved with others will make you feel better.

### 3. Keep Active

Regular exercise can really give your mental health a boost. Find something active you enjoy and decide when you are going to do

it. It might be an effort but it will be worth it. The more fun it is, the better effect on your mental health.

### 4. Eat Well

Having a balanced diet will not only help the way you feel, but it will also help the way you think. Try to eat regularly and aim to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Good food is essential for your mind and body to work properly.

### 5. Keep in contact

Friends are important, so it's good to keep up contact with them. This is especially true at those times when you don't feel like being in touch with anyone. So send a text, make a call or log on to social media, or even better, meet up with a friend. Getting involved in social activities or a group, such as your nearest Macra na Feirme group, is a great way of meeting new people.

## **6. Relax**

Relaxation is good for your mental health, so doing things that make you feel calm are helpful. Fit things into your day and week that help you unwind, such as listening to music or watching a film.

## **7. Don't binge drink**

Drinking alcohol to deal with problems will only make things worse. It is best to drink in a safe way, in moderation and avoid binge-drinking. Overdoing it can damage your health and won't help you deal with the cause of your worries. Alcohol is a depressant and overdoing it can increase anxiety and lead to depression.

## **8. Talk about it**

You don't have to appear to be strong and struggle on your own. When you're upset or feeling low, talking about how you feel will help. Talk to someone you trust, an ally, or call the LGBT Helpline for support. People will listen and give you support if you let them know how you're feeling.

## **9. Ask for help**

When you are feeling down or anxious it can be hard to open up and let people know. But asking for help in tough times is a sign of strength. You might worry about how people will react, but when you let someone know you need their help, they usually respond positively. Take the step to let someone know you need help. As the saying goes, a problem shared is a problem halved.

## **10. Do something you enjoy**

Whether it's watching your favourite film, cooking a nice meal, sports or a hobby, we all have things we love to do. Doing something you enjoy if you're not feeling great will help you feel better.

## Challenges facing LGBT people

Being LGBT can lead to specific stresses and this can have a negative impact on your mental health. Most people know that they are LGBT for some time before they tell others, which can be a lonely and worrying time. This can put a strain on our mental health. Young LGBT people have to deal with the normal stresses of growing up as well as other stresses like isolation, name-calling and homophobic or transphobic bullying.

### Coming out

For many LGBT people coming out, at whatever age, can be a challenging time. It is common for LGBT people to be afraid that family and friends might reject them when they find out their sexual orientation or gender identity. This can put a strain on your mental health. But coming out can also be an exhilarating and rewarding experience which in itself can improve your mental health. Most people have a positive experience when they come out to family and friends. It is a good idea to prepare before coming out to a family member or friend. See the resources section for further information. There is also support available if a friend, sibling, child or parent comes out to you – call the LGBT Helpline for further information.

### Isolation

LGBT people in rural Ireland may feel isolated as there may be less

social opportunities to meet other LGBT people or fewer community or support services available nearby. However, there are groups in many parts of Ireland now - the resources section gives some of the main LGBT groups and there are many more listed in Gay Community News (GCN). The LGBT Helpline can also help even if there are no groups nearby.

### Bullying or Harassment

Anyone can be bullied, but LGBT people can also experience higher levels of homophobic or transphobic bullying and harassment which can cause physical, mental and social pain and can make you feel alone, scared, angry, confused or sad. All of these can affect your mental health. If you experience bullying or harassment, talk to someone about it, whether it's a colleague, family member, friend, local garda or doctor.

### **Lack of Support from family and friends**

Some LGBT people can experience a lack of support from family and friends. This may happen when someone first comes out, when they get into a relationship, start a family or when a relationship ends. Sometimes families, in particular parents, may not know how to adequately support LGBT family members and may need support themselves. Information and support for LGBT people and their parents is available from a wide variety of organisations. (See the resources section on page 6).

### **Relationship Problems**

Sometimes relationships can be a source of pressure for people, pressure to be someone you're not or to do things you are unsure about. This can put a strain on your mental health. When you begin a

relationship with a new partner, it is important to keep working on your existing friendships and family relationships as well as your new relationship. Relationship break-ups can also have a powerful impact on your mental health as it can be difficult to adjust to your new circumstances. It is important to get support to help you through this difficult time.

### **Losing a loved one**

When an LGBT person loses their partner they may not get the same reaction or support that a heterosexual person gets when they lose their spouse or partner. Experiences like this can make grieving all the more difficult for LGBT people. The booklet 'Coping with the death of your same-sex partner' was developed by **GLEN** and **the Irish Hospice Foundation** and is available at [www.glen.ie](http://www.glen.ie)



The poster features a green silhouette of a city skyline with a rainbow arching over it. The text is as follows:

**LGBT HELPLINE**

**1890 929 539**

Supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people

Supported by  The COMMUNITY FOUNDATION for Ireland

Wherever you are, we're just a phonecall away

[www.lgbt.ie](http://www.lgbt.ie)

# Resources

## LGBT Information and Support

LGBT Helpline	1890 929 539	<a href="http://www.lgbt.ie">www.lgbt.ie</a>
LGBT Mental Health	<a href="http://www.lgbtmentalhealth.ie">www.lgbtmentalhealth.ie</a>	
GLEN - Gay + Lesbian Equality Network		<a href="http://www.glen.ie">www.glen.ie</a>

## Mental Health Support

Samaritans Ireland	1850 60 90 90	<a href="http://www.samaritans.org">www.samaritans.org</a>
Mental Health Ireland	<a href="http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie">www.mentalhealthireland.ie</a>	

## LGBT Centres and Groups

Ciarraí Amach	086 0788260	<a href="mailto:ciarraiamach@gmail.com">ciarraiamach@gmail.com</a>
Dundalk Outcomers	042 9329816	<a href="http://www.outcomers.org">www.outcomers.org</a>
LINC-Lesbians in Cork	021 2808600	<a href="http://www.linc.ie">www.linc.ie</a>
The Other Place (Cork)	021 4278470	<a href="http://www.theotherplacecork.com">www.theotherplacecork.com</a>
Outhouse Dublin	01 8734932	<a href="http://www.outhouse.ie">www.outhouse.ie</a>
Outwest Ireland	087 9725586	<a href="http://www.outwestireland.ie">www.outwestireland.ie</a>
sOUTH Waterford	086 2147633	<a href="http://www.southlgbt.com">www.southlgbt.com</a>
Amach! LGBT Galway	<a href="http://www.amachlgbt.com">www.amachlgbt.com</a>	

## Support for LGBT Young People

BeLonG To Youth Services	01 6706223	
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**For a full list of LGBT youth supports throughout the country please see:** [www.belongto.org](http://www.belongto.org)

## Transgender Support - Transgender Equality Network Ireland

TENI	01 6334687	<a href="http://www.teni.ie">www.teni.ie</a>
TENI Helpline	085 1477166	

## Parent Support

LOOK - Loving Our Out Kids	087 2537699	<a href="http://www.lovingouroutkids.org">www.lovingouroutkids.org</a>
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**For up-to-date information on support groups & services across the country see:**

Gay Community News (GCN) [www.gcn.ie](http://www.gcn.ie) Monthly Magazine for LGBT people in Ireland

**For up-to-date information for young people in Rural Ireland see:** [www.macra.ie](http://www.macra.ie)

**For up-to-date list and information on Garda LGBT Liaison Officers see:** [www.glen.ie](http://www.glen.ie)



## Macra na Feirme

**Macra na Feirme** is a voluntary organisation for young people between the ages of 17 and 35. The organisation consists of a nationwide network of clubs with six key areas of activity: agriculture, sports, travel, public speaking, community involvement and performing arts.

**Macra na Feirme** is committed to the personal development of members and puts emphasis on social interaction and participation.

Find us here: [www.macra.ie](http://www.macra.ie)



MacranaFeirme



@MacranaFeirme



**GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network)** is a national NGO working for equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people in marriage, at home, at school, at work and in the wider community. GLEN celebrates 25 years in existence this year and has been instrumental in delivering wide-ranging changes in legislation, policy and service delivery in areas such as civil partnership, health and mental health, education, policing and community safety, workplace equality and community development, ensuring equality for LGBT people in Ireland.

For more information – please visit us at [www.glen.ie](http://www.glen.ie)



GLENLGBT



@GLEN\_News

GLEN's Mental Health Programme is funded by the HSE and the National Office for Suicide Prevention.