



UMB News

Institute Launches National Online Resource to Help LGBTQ Youth, Families

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As the Covid-19 pandemic stretches into another year, the toll on children, youth, and families has escalated.



Artist and founder of Provoke Culture created these murals and memes that will be used as part of the Family Acceptance Project initiative.

Artwork by Sam Kirk / @jamsamkirk

Last month, leading national child and adolescent medical groups designated a national emergency for children and adolescent mental health in response to soaring rates of mental health challenges that disproportionately impact communities of color and call for trauma-informed services to reduce risk and support family resilience. The impact on LGBTQ young people has been significant.

In response, The [Institute for Innovation & Implementation](#), together with the Family Acceptance Project has launched a [new national online resource](#) that provides access to accurate information and affirmative services to increase family and community support for LGBTQ children and youth, to help decrease mental health risks and to promote well-being.

Visit the resource at <https://lgbtqfamilyacceptance.org>

Research over a period of years has documented high levels of risk for suicide, substance abuse, depression, and homelessness for LGBTQ youth, related to social stigma. Before the pandemic, LGBTQ youth were 4-6 times more likely to attempt suicide compared with non-LGBTQ peers.

During the pandemic, stress, attempted suicide, and emergency department visits have ballooned for children and youth, overall. Of particular concern, lack of services for families with LGBTQ children have been an ongoing problem and is a major gap in prevention and care for diverse LGBTQ children, youth, and families, nationwide. This has become more urgent given the early ages when children and

adolescents self-identify as LGBTQ today – increasingly in childhood and pre-teen years – as a result of widespread access to information and positive images of LGBTQ lives, inconceivable for earlier generations of LGBTQ people who came out as adults and often led closeted lives.

Said Christine Moutier, Chief Medical Officer of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: "The Family Acceptance Project's work provides critical information to help parents and caregivers learn to support their LGBTQ children and to help youth and families find access to urgently needed resources. Their research has shown that when adults learn and demonstrate specific supportive behaviors in

the home and community, LGBTQ youth not only feel more connected, but their health outcomes, including suicide risk, can be improved. A critical component of FAP's work is providing evidence-based guidance to decrease family rejection and increase acceptance in ways that are culturally and linguistically relevant."

Caitlin Ryan, director of the Family Acceptance Project, noted: "Although awareness has increased significantly of the risks that LGBTQ youth experience, there is still widespread lack of understanding of the essential role of family support in protecting against mental health risks and increasing well-being for LGBTQ youth. Our social media and online resources will help educate parents and caregivers on the compelling impact of family rejecting and accepting behaviors on their child's risk for suicide, drug use, and other serious health risks. Simple changes in how families respond to their LGBTQ children can make a powerful difference in preventing risk and building healthy futures. As families gather for the holidays this year, we are releasing this new resource to help decrease isolation and increase support for both LGBTQ youth and their families."

Historically, services for LGBTQ youth have been provided to LGBTQ youth alone, like adults, or through peer support since parents and families were seen as rejecting and incapable of learning to support their LGBTQ children. The perception that parents and caregivers are unable to learn to support their LGBTQ children – particularly in families that are culturally and religiously conservative – has impeded the development of family-based services and care to help diverse families learn to support their LGBTQ children.

Twenty years ago, when the Family Acceptance Project (FAP) initiated the first research on LGBTQ youth and families, when conflict erupted, LGBTQ youth were routinely removed from their homes and placed in custodial care since providers did not believe that it was possible to increase family support. Moreover, providers saw their role as helping to protect LGBTQ young people from their families, not to promote family connectedness.

This perception began to change as the [Family Acceptance Project](#) (FAP) started to publish the first research on LGBTQ youth and families and showed that families play a critical role in contributing to health risks, including suicidal behaviors, and helping to protect against risk and promote well-being. FAP's research identified more than 100 specific family rejecting and accepting behaviors that increase risk for suicide, depression, drug use, HIV and other health risks, and promote well-being. These behaviors provide a foundation for FAP's behavior-based family support model that helps diverse families learn to support their LGBTQ children in the context of their families, cultures, and faith traditions – even when they believe that being gay or transgender is wrong.

Recognizing the growing crisis in adolescent mental health for youth of color and LGBTQ youth, [The Upswing Fund for Adolescent Mental Health, a collaborative fund powered by Panorama](#), was launched in 2020 to provide resources for frontline services and to support organizations that work to transform mental health systems of care. Supported by this fund, this new website - which is the first targeted resource for LGBTQ youth and families - includes a national searchable map of community support services that affirm LGBTQ young people and help to increase family support, along with multilingual and multicultural evidence-based resources to increase family support for LGBTQ children and youth.

Resources accessible through the new online site include: support services for LGBTQ youth; peer support for parents, caregivers, and families; LGBTQ community centers; LGBTQ health clinics; gender clinics; school supports; affirming faith-based organizations and resources; and a national list of culture-based resources for ethnically and racially diverse LGBTQ communities.

Cultural leaders and community members from diverse backgrounds have helped FAP to develop culturally grounded educational resources for families, youth, providers, and religious leaders that show how specific family rejecting and accepting behaviors affect LGBTQ children and adolescent risk and well-being in 11 languages with a specific version for American Indian families and communities. This new web resource will provide a series of webinars and family guidance materials that range from integrating FAP's family support model into Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to guidance from Asian parents on supporting their transgender children. The website will be updated over time as new resources are added.

This initiative includes an ongoing social media component, disseminating graphics that illustrate how family accepting and rejecting behaviors impact health and well-being for LGBTQ children and youth, featuring the work of multidisciplinary artist [Sam Kirk](#). Founder of [Provoke Culture](#), Kirk is a young queer artist whose murals and visual narratives explore culture, diversity, and identity and vitalize communities across the U.S. Family accepting and rejecting behaviors studied in FAP's research have been transformed by Kirk's art into social media memes that are being deployed across platforms to connect LGBTQ youth, parents, caregivers, and others with critical family support messages and resources through the website to decrease isolation, increase connectedness, and provide access to affirming services.

[The Institute for Innovation & Implementation](#), founded in 2005, is a part of the University of Maryland School of Social Work. The Institute is committed to building research-based, inclusive, culturally responsive, and transformative child-, youth-and family-serving systems and services, and to developing the capacity of the workforce within these systems. We do this work in partnership with government agencies, health care providers, youth and their families, and community-based organizations in order to improve outcomes for and with children, youth, and their families.

The [Family Acceptance Project](#) is a research, intervention, education and policy initiative, affiliated with San Francisco State University, that is designed to: 1) prevent risk, including suicide, substance abuse, and homelessness, and promote well-being for LGBTQ children and adolescents in the context of their families, cultures, and faith communities; and 2) implement and disseminate the first research-based, family model of wellness, prevention, and care to build healthy futures for LGBTQ children and youth.

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