



# Research Brief: “You are Beautiful”: Advice and Encouragement For LGBTQ+ Young People From LGBTQ+ Young People

LGBTQ+ young people advise their peers to accept themselves, avoid negativity, find community, and practice perseverance.

December 2024

## Background

LGBTQ+ young people face unique challenges,<sup>1</sup> often relying on support from others to navigate these stressors.<sup>2</sup> Support from fellow LGBTQ+ youth is particularly common, given that friends often share similar experiences and can be more supportive than families. Peer support is associated with lower levels of emotional and behavioral distress among LGBTQ+ young people. However, not all LGBTQ+ young people have consistent access to peer support, especially LGBTQ+ young people who hold multiple marginalized identities.<sup>3</sup> Given that LGBTQ+ young people are facing an unprecedented number of systemic stressors (e.g., a record number of anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced in 2024),<sup>4</sup> hearing words of encouragement and advice from fellow LGBTQ+ young people has never been more needed. The following brief uses data from the [2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#) to highlight words of encouragement and advice from LGBTQ+ young people. This brief offers peer-shared insights about resilience and provides important guidance for those seeking to create more supportive environments in schools, families, and communities.

## Results

The 2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People concluded with the open-ended prompt: “We would love for you to share a message of advice or encouragement to other young people in the LGBTQ community.” A majority of survey participants provided responses (n = 10,628, 57% of the full sample). From this, a subsample of 100 responses reflecting the racial demographics of the full survey sample was selected for thematic analysis, resulting in the following key themes.

### The Power of Self-Acceptance

Many respondents encouraged LGBTQ+ young people to embrace their LGBTQ+ identity, despite challenges or opposition from others. For example, one respondent wrote:

***“Be yourself always. You may lose connections along the way but trust, there’s someone out there who will love you.”***

Others wrote more simply, *“Be true to yourself”* and *“You’re you. NO ONE can change that.”* Several respondents additionally encouraged LGBTQ+ young people to be kind and gentle with themselves on their journey of self-acceptance. One respondent wrote, *“Wake up everyday [sic], and tell yourself you love yourself- Until, one day, you believe it.”* Another encouraged, *“[Whatever] you do, have grace for yourself.”* Several respondents also encouraged patience during the exploration of their sexual orientation or gender identity, reminding LGBTQ+ young people that it is normal to take time to understand themselves. For instance, one respondent said, *“Don’t stress about having the ‘right’ label”* and another explained, *“Don’t rush finding your identity. Take your time to explore, and don’t be afraid to take up labels if they feel right at the time.”* Some addressed the pressure to be out: *“It’s okay to not be out. There’s no shame on your part in having to hide who you are. You’re not lying to the people around you or being deceitful in [any way]. Sometimes you just have to put yourself first.”* Taken together, these responses demonstrate that while self-acceptance of one’s identity can be challenging for LGBTQ+ young people, it is also a source of strength.

### **Protect Yourself from Negativity**

Many LGBTQ+ respondents offered advice to their LGBTQ+ peers on protecting oneself from negativity related to their identity. They emphasized not letting others negate their LGBTQ+ identity, including close friends and family members. One respondent explained:

***“Don’t let the people around you tell you that you can’t love who you want and feel what you want to feel.”***

Another simply stated, *“Go for it, [who] cares what others think?”* To those facing anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments, a respondent advised: *“Don’t let those bigots get into your head-you are so much more than them!”* One respondent shared, *“People will always be mad over who you are and they don’t matter.”* Several respondents encouraged LGBTQ+ young people to cut ties with those who are unsupportive, with one recommending, *“Don’t be afraid to cut people out of your life who do nothing but make you angry and demean you.”* Another explained, *“Ignore the Idiots and cut people off if [you] have too [sic]. Life is too short to care what people think about you and they don’t even have to live your life and experience the things you do.”* These responses illustrate how LGBTQ+ young people cope with anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes and behaviors: to be yourself, unapologetically.

### **The Promise of Community**

LGBTQ+ young people wrote movingly about the importance of finding affirming people and building supportive communities. One wrote, *“Just look for the people who love you no matter what.”* Many emphasized that supportive communities are within reach, even if they do not have that community right now. One respondent exclaimed:

***“Know that there are people out there who will love you no matter what!”***

Another offered practical advice, *“Finding a sense of community helps so much, whether it's online or in person. Just find a place where you can ask questions and read about other peoples experiences.”* LGBTQ+ young people also fostered a sense of affirming community within their responses by offering love, affirmation, and encouragement. Simple yet powerful statements like *“I love you”* and *“You are beautiful”* were common. Others reminded their peers, *“You are so strong and you are deserving of love always.”* Many offered words of support and encouragement such as, *“You got this”* or *“You can do this”* while another stated, *“I believe in you!!”* These affirming statements served to reinforce the importance and promise of affirming community to LGBTQ+ young people.

### **Practice Perseverance**

Many responses from LGBTQ+ young people highlighted the importance of perseverance, or holding on in tough moments in hope of a brighter future. Participants encouraged their LGBTQ+ peers to *“Keep pushing,” “Keep going for another day,” “Just keep going, please,”* and *“Please keep strong.”* The tone of these comments differed from the messages offering general encouragement described above. Responses about perseverance demonstrated a more serious tone, reflecting the challenges LGBTQ+ young people face. One noted, *“My message would be that everything is temporary and that it's not worth living on a single thought when there are still more things to be found out.”* Several responses acknowledged the harsh realities LGBTQ+ youth navigate, including unsupportive friends and family and a hostile political climate. One respondent described, *“[It's] very easy to think that the entire world hates you for who you are when your home environment conveys that.”* Despite these challenges, many encouraged hope for a better future. For instance, one participant wrote about finding community, *“I know things look down right now and it's hard to see past the hate that's being spread but it always helps to remember that most people don't hate us and that there are tons of us out there that are willing to help.”* Another echoed:

***“You might not feel safe and happy now, but hopefully, there will come a day when you find your home.”***

One advised, *“Find your group and work towards where you wanna be in life and you'll make it there.”* Several of the responses linked perseverance with LGBTQ+ history, and the community's collective efforts to fight

back against anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs and policies. One respondent reminded their peers, “*We’ve always been here. And we always will be. They cannot erase us.*” Another explained, “*Existence is resistance.*” One response encapsulated the overlap between perseverance and fighting back against anti-LGBTQ+ oppression: “*Keep moving forwards. If they bite you, bite back.*” The practice of perseverance was considered an essential piece of advice for many LGBTQ+ young people, which was grounded in reminders about their shared LGBTQ+ community and an optimistic future.

## Looking Ahead

These data illuminate the wisdom that LGBTQ+ young people wish to share with their peers. When asked what advice or support they would offer to other LGBTQ+ young people, respondents reminded their peers about the power of self-acceptance. They counseled being kind to oneself and not feeling rushed to figure out the exact right label for one’s sexual orientation or gender identity. They also offered practical advice about how to avoid negativity about one’s LGBTQ+ identity and highlighted the importance of removing negative people from their lives, when possible. Participants also reassured LGBTQ+ young people that even if they do not have a supportive community in their life right now, affirming communities exist and can be found. Displaying this sense of community, respondents offered love, affirmation, and encouragement to LGBTQ+ peers. Finally, LGBTQ+ young people reminded their peers about the importance of perseverance. They encouraged their peers to not let present hardships distract them from a better future. They also reminded their peers about how the LGBTQ+ community has always fought for change and invited them to be a part of that history.

The high number of responses (n = 10,628, 57% of the full sample) to this open-ended prompt near the end of a lengthy survey demonstrates the enthusiasm and desire that LGBTQ+ young people have to provide support to their LGBTQ+ peers. Given that peer support is associated with better mental health among LGBTQ+ young people,<sup>3</sup> there is an urgent need for opportunities for LGBTQ+ young people to connect with one another. Adults working with LGBTQ+ young people can facilitate spaces where they can connect, offer support, and share advice. Schools in particular should consider starting or supporting a Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) group or similar club, which have long served as important sources of support and peer community for LGBTQ+ young people.<sup>5</sup> LGBTQ+ adults can also be an important source of support and mentorship for LGBTQ+ young people.<sup>6</sup> Adults in a variety of settings, such as faith communities or sport teams, can ensure that LGBTQ+ youth in their spaces feel comfortable and affirmed and introduce them to LGBTQ+ adults. For those working with LGBTQ+ young people of color or with other marginalized identities, it is essential to be attentive to intersectionality and ensure that LGBTQ+ young people of color have access to peers of similar identities and experiences whenever possible.<sup>3</sup> Finally, supportive online spaces

are also an important source of peer support and community for LGBTQ+ young people, especially for those who hold multiple marginalized identities or who live in rural or underserved communities.<sup>7,8</sup>

The Trevor Project is dedicated to supporting all LGBTQ+ young people through our crisis services, research, and advocacy efforts. LGBTQ+ young people seeking to connect with their peers should check out [TrevorSpace](#), an affirming online community for LGBTQ+ young people between the ages of 13 to 24 years old. Young people can explore their identities, find peer support, and make friends in a moderated community designed for them. At The Trevor Project, our education team equips adults to better support LGBTQ+ young people across all identities, our advocacy team is actively working to promote access to affirming, supportive environments, and our research team remains committed to continuing to publish research focused on the mental health of LGBTQ+ young people. Resources available on our website include: [Finding Support & Building Community After the 2024 Elections](#), [Creating Safer Spaces in Schools for LGBTQ Young People](#), and [How to Signal You are an Ally in Hostile Environment](#).

## Methods

Data were collected through The Trevor Project's [2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#). From a total sample of 18,663 LGBTQ+ young people between the ages of 13 to 24, 10,628 provided open-ended responses to the prompt, "As one of our final questions, we would love for you to share a message of advice or encouragement to other young people in the LGBTQ community." A subsample of 100 responses were selected for coding and analysis. The racial demographics of the subsample reflect the demographics of the full survey sample: 61% White, 13% Hispanic or Latinx, 12% Multiracial, 8% Black or African American, 6% Asian-American Pacific Islander, 1% Middle Eastern or North African, and 1% Native or Indigenous. Coding techniques aligned with the methodology of Thematic Analysis.<sup>9</sup> First, responses were open coded and codes were documented in a codebook.<sup>10</sup> One response was excluded from analysis because the response did not address the prompt. Then, the sample was re-coded to ensure that codes added later in the process had not been missed. Finally, two authors independently grouped codes into themes, compared, and integrated their thematic lists to finalize the themes presented in the findings.<sup>11</sup> Responses have been edited for grammar and clarity, words that have been changed are indicated in brackets.

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