



Cultivating
Positive
Mental
Health



Rainbow Pride
Youth Alliance



Cultivating Positive Mental Health

RPYA is a grassroots California non-profit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 2001. We provide support services to LGBTQ+ youth, as well as their parents and caretakers, including workshops, support groups, and linkage to resources.



RPYA

For crisis support, visit our peer crisis counselor program, Unity Hope.
unityhope.org



Unity Hope

RPYA Behavioral Health Department
Parker@rpya.health

Text, Research
Ruth Madrid

Design, Illustration, Research, Editing
Zeferino LLamas
zeferino.mx

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Cultivating Positive Mental Health



No one escapes childhood without some trauma. As children, we adapt to our environments and develop our long-term behaviors accordingly. Often, these behaviors, which served us in childhood, no longer serve us in adulthood, and can even limit us.

Luckily, despite childhood trauma and inherited generational trauma, we can cultivate resilience & positive mental health practices as adults that will help us end negative patterns, and show up more authentically & responsibly in our lives.

This process can look like: (1) recognizing the roots of our trauma, (2) developing a sense of awareness around how we respond to stress, (3) cultivating positive ways to cope & heal, and (4) seeking help when we need it.

Common Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) among LGBTQ+ Youth

LGBTQ+ people experience ACEs at higher rates than straight people due to anti-queer sentiment that can be felt and heard at all levels of society, often beginning in the home, at school, or in religious contexts. Common examples include:



1. Emotional Abuse



2. Rejection - Neglect



3. Religious Trauma

4. Inadequate Healthcare

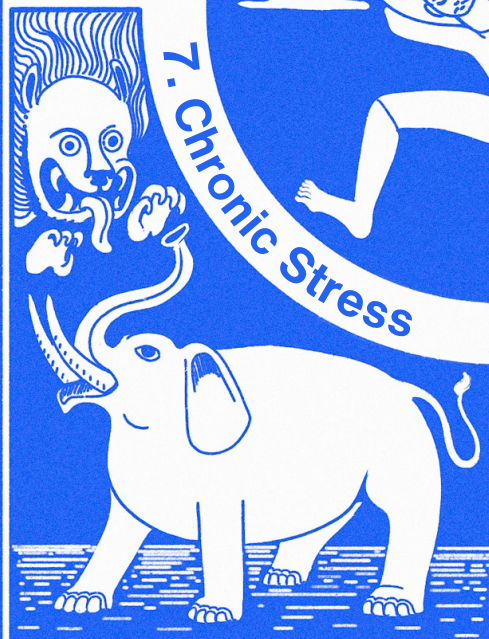
The healthcare system currently lacks a general capacity for LGBTQ+ affirming care, affecting queer people from a young age.



5. Bullying



6. Isolation



7. Chronic Stress



8. Minority Stress

Constantly anticipating danger creates a demand on the brain's regulatory system that can be damaging over time.

The long-term stress of dealing with stigma & prejudice experienced by minority groups in society.

Trauma Responses

As human beings, connecting with others and developing relationships within which we feel safe is key to our mental health. As children, if a parent or caregiver abuses you emotionally or physically, you may think, *“I’m an awful person. I must be, otherwise why would anyone treat me like this?”*

Chronic childhood trauma means that, even as adults, we will continue to organize the world in our minds as if the trauma were still happening. This disrupts the development of positive mental health like being able to connect with others, developing a positive sense of self, and being able to regulate stressful emotions.

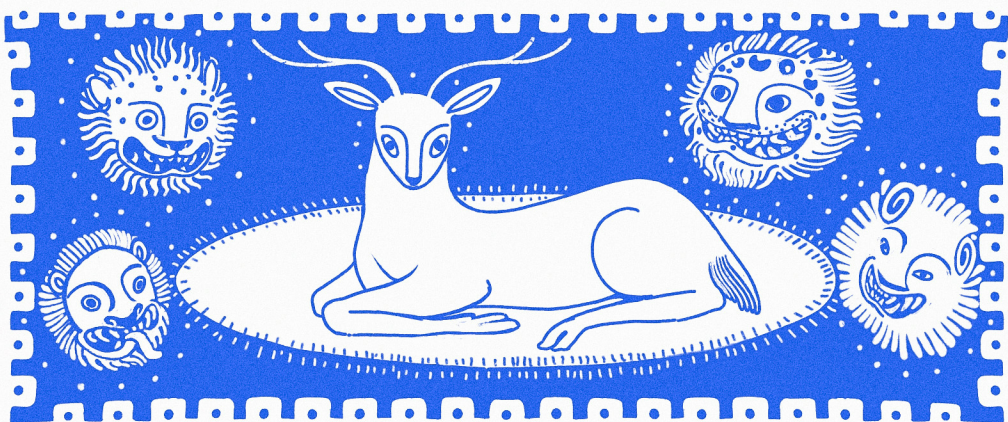
Recognizing our own trauma and the patterns that develop as a result is the first step toward cultivating positive mental health. First, let’s look at some common ways that a person responds to conflict with others who they might perceive as dangerous or a threat due to their past trauma:



Fight: Facing any perceived threat aggressively.



Flight: Running away from danger.

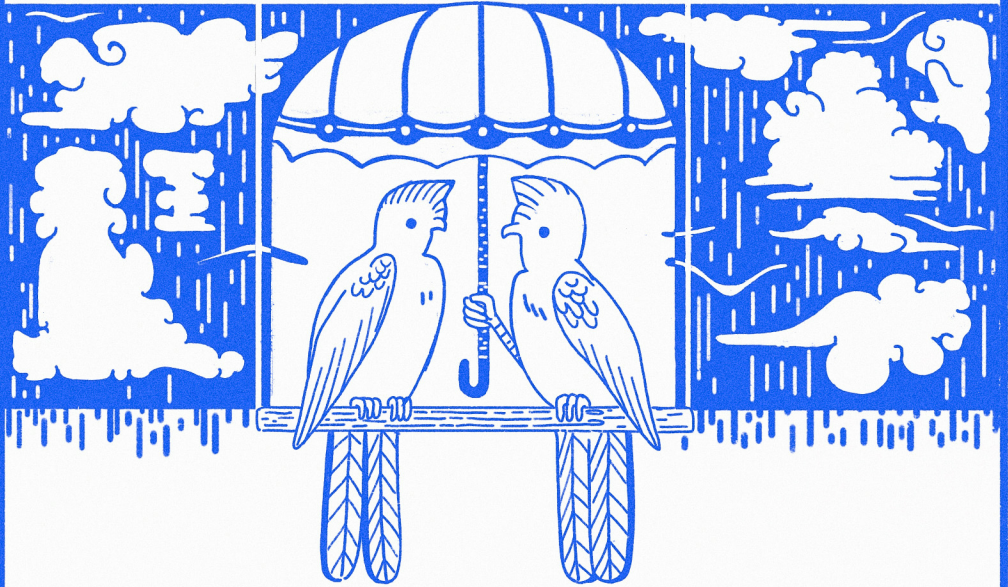


Freeze: Unable to move or act against a threat.



Fawn: Immediately attempting to please to avoid any conflict.

Developing Coping Skills



Our lives are constantly changing and we are always adapting to new circumstances. Once we start to recognize the roots of our trauma, we can slowly make positive changes that help us to heal and adapt to the stressors of life.

Progress is not linear; it will involve ups and downs, setbacks and breakthroughs. Once a person decides to begin the journey of healing from their past, there are many approaches that have proved useful.

These approaches can be organized in two broad categories: top-down and bottom-up.

“Top-down” refers to healing the rational, cognitive brain; the part of our brain that helps us to understand the world around us, to reach our goals, manage time, and so on.

Top-down approaches to mental health will include things like talk-therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and mindfulness exercises.



“Bottom-up” refers to healing the emotional side of the brain, as well as the way the body reacts to and stores stress. Bottom-up approaches to mental health will include soothing and regulating the body’s response to stress, and can look like: developing a meditation practice, movement routine, and grounding exercises.



Grounding. Being "grounded" involves a coming together of the outer and inner world. This means that you can sense your body, perceive the subtleties of your environment, and recognize what kinds of emotions you are experiencing.

Crisis Intervention

A mental health crisis is any situation in which a person's behavior puts them at risk of hurting themselves. Someone experiencing a mental health crisis can't always clearly communicate their thoughts, feelings, needs or emotions. They may also find it difficult to understand what others are saying. It's important to empathize and connect with the person's feelings, stay calm, and try to de-escalate the crisis.

Warning Signs

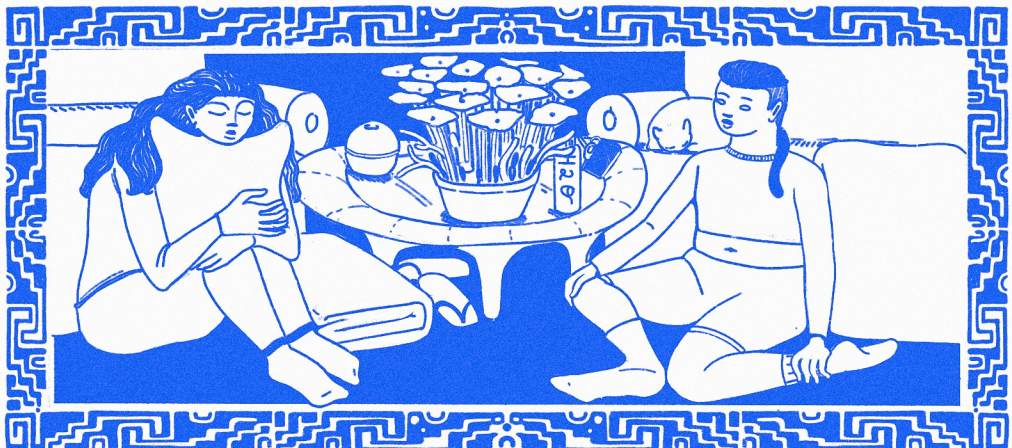
There are not always warning signs when a mental health crisis is developing. However, some signs to be aware of are:

- Trouble with daily tasks like bathing, brushing teeth, changing clothes
- Sudden, extreme changes in mood
- Abusive behavior to self and others, including substance misuse or self-harm.
- Isolation
- Paranoia

If there is no immediate danger, try to deescalate:

- Keep your voice calm
- Remove triggers or stressors
- Create a safe environment, such as removing potentially dangerous objects or car keys
- Listen intentionally
- Honor their experience
- Offer support
- Encourage treatment
- Avoid touching the person unless they give you permission
- Be patient

For more information, visit nami.org





Police Intervention

The lack of mental health crisis services across the U.S. has resulted in law enforcement officers serving as first responders to most crises. However, this can unduly escalate a situation. Below are some resources that include information about "Crisis Intervention Teams" (CITs) in SoCal.

If the situation does escalate such that the safety of either party is in jeopardy, dial 911 and report the situation as a "51/50" which means that the person is a danger to themselves or others. It is very important to give as much context to the operator to ensure the safety of everyone involved.

CIT Resources

San Bernardino



**NAMI Services in
the SB Area**

Riverside



**RUHS Behavioral
Health Dept**

San Diego



**SD Mobile Crisis
Response Team**

Los Angeles



**LA Dept of
Mental Health**

National

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
Helpline: 800-950-6264 or text "HelpLine" to 62640

We can prevent suicide

Suicide doesn't just *happen*. It's often the end of a long road of suffering. We can't prevent suicide entirely, but we can keep an eye out for **warning signs** and offer support to loved ones who may be thinking that there is no other way out for them.



Sleep. Disturbances in sleep or insomnia. Acting different in other ways like uncharacteristic irritability or impulsivity.



Isolation. There is a causal relationship between loneliness & isolation and suicide. It can also be signs that a person is not feeling emotionally supported or lacks connection.



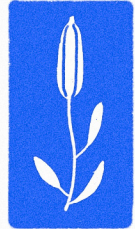
Giving away possessions. This can also include saying goodbye to important people in their lives. *"You're my best friend, I'll miss you."*



No interest in anything. This can also include expressing hopelessness or putting themselves down excessively.



Speech. Not speaking of future plans or goals. Implying that they will harm themselves.



Resources

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
988lifeline.org/Dial or text 988

The Trevor Project LGBTQ+ Crisis Counselors
Text 'START' to 678-678 or call 1-866-488-7386





Community Care

Community Care is the cultivation of mutual support, an idea that has always been practiced in BIPOC & LGBTQ+ communities. Marginalized communities often cannot rely on institutions for support, so we create internal systems of support as a way to bridge those gaps. For example, the *abuela* who practices traditional healing using plants & herbs provides healthcare for minor ailments. Below are a few examples of ways that community care can be cultivated:

Spirituality

Traditional religious settings are enriching for some people, whereas for others they can be triggering. Other ways to cultivate a spiritual life include meditation & yoga. Some cultural traditions use psychedelic plant medicine to help treat trauma, develop a more authentic sense of self, and to help individuals feel more connected with others. However, use of plant medicine should always be done with the guidance of a person who specializes in this kind of treatment, not in a recreational setting.

Be there for others

No one is an island, meaning that nobody exists in a vacuum; rather, every individual exists in relationship to their environment and their community. When we show interest and offer support to our loved ones, it contributes positively to their mental wellbeing. When people in your social group feel supported in that way, they will have more capacity to support you in turn.

Normalize talking about real issues.

Anglo-protestant cultural norms say that talking openly about issues like mental health is inappropriate. However, collective silence can contribute to negative mental health outcomes. The struggles you face are being faced by others as well. If you approach these conversations in a thoughtful and intentional way, it opens the door to healing on a community level.

Understand systems to help change them

We can engage with institutions like healthcare to understand how they work and thereby navigate them more easily. Understanding a system can help us to identify problems as well, and then pressure the system to change for the better.



Find an Affirming Therapist

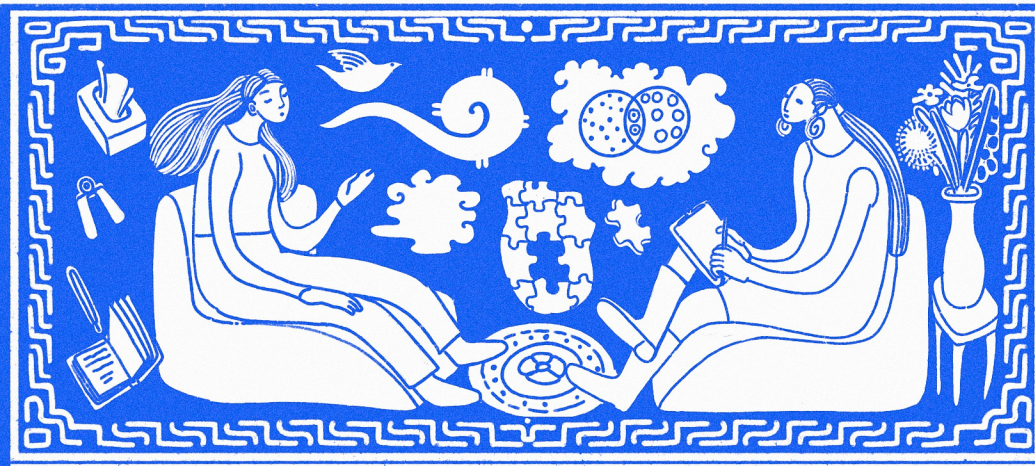
Therapy is one of the most effective tools we have in establishing positive mental health. However, LGBTQ+ people often face homophobia or transphobia in the therapist's office. To avoid this, let's remember that a potential therapist needs to demonstrate that they are culturally competent enough to provide you with quality care. Below are some pointers on finding an affirming therapist. Learn more by searching *#Out4MentalHealth* in your internet browser.

Questions to ask a potential therapist:

- What experience do you have in working with LGBTQ+ people?
- What experience do you have working with the issue I'm coming to therapy for (i.e. depression, anxiety, grief, sexual orientation/gender identity, etc.)?
- What experience do you have in working with people who practice relationship models other than monogamy?

Your provider should NOT:

- focus on your sexual orientation or gender identity, unless that is why you sought care.
- assume that a negative experience made you LGBTQ+.
- expect you to educate them about LGBTQ+ identities, cultures, or experiences.



More Resources



Unity Hope/CalHOPE

unityhope.org/calhopeconnect.org
Unity Hope's crisis counselors are LGBTQ+ affirming, racially diverse, and live throughout SoCal.

Call the CalHope Warmline at (833) 317-HOPE (4673) and ask to speak to a counselor from your community.

CA LGBTQ Health & Human Services Network

californialgbtqhealth.org
A program under Health Access CA providing excellent resources & services to queer people.

AASECT

aasect.org
Find an LGBTQ+ affirming therapist at The American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists.

ZocDoc

zocdoc.com
Free online service that helps users find healthcare easily depending on their insurance and individual needs.

RPYA's list of LGBTQ+ affirming counseling services in SoCal

We made a Google Doc with counseling resources. Check it out following the QR code below.





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