

# Find out about Anxiety with BARBRA

People who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or who have a diverse sexuality or gender identity, like Barbra, are more likely to experience anxiety than heterosexual and cis-gendered people as a result of discrimination, homophobia, transphobia and assumptions of heterosexuality and gender.

However, you can find your resilience and enhance your skills to have good mental health and wellbeing.

**Stress and worry** is a normal part of our lives and anxiety can be helpful, it can get us out of a harmful situation, motivate us for change and help us get things finished when we need to.

However many LGBT people still experience direct and indirect discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, harassment and violence as a response to their sexuality or gender identity,

These experiences convey to us that we are worthless, not valuable, bad or wrong and even though people may know this is not correct, it can be hard not to listen to the range of messages in our society, so over time it some people take on these messages and start to feel that they are true about themselves.

There are some situations that may LGBT people experience that may place them at a higher risk of anxiety, including:

- Those who experience numerous, repeated and long term experiences with difficult social situations, such as being outed without their consent, non-acceptance of a partner and rejection from peers.
- Those who may choose to hide their sexuality or gender identity may find they having intrusive thoughts about their secret, and feel fear and worry of exposure.
- Those who have experienced direct discrimination as a result of their sexuality or gender identity, may feel worry that this may always happen and fear future discrimination.
- Those who have experienced violence, abuse or assault on the basis of their sexuality or gender identity.
- Those who have being rejected, disowned or excluded by their family as a result of reveling their sexuality or gender identity.
- Those whose sexuality or gender identity does not correspond with their personal values, religious, or cultural expectations.

This can result in LGBT people experiencing a level of anxiety that can be harmful, including feeling stress and worry when there is no apparent reason or continue after the stressful event has passed, and struggle to bring anxious feeling under control.



Even though LGBT people are resilient, these experiences can lead to greater vulnerability to emotional distress, including anxiety. Symptoms can develop gradually over time in response to a number of smaller incidents that we may not even recognise as having an impact on us.

Anxiety can present in many different ways including feeling fearful in social situations, feeling anxious or for no particular reason, having a phobia of an object or task, having overwhelming feelings of panic, feeling the need to control your environment through specific behaviours, not being able to feel like to move on from a traumatic event.

Anxiety can stop us from doing things that we really want to do, such as having friends, attending events, starting relationships, going to public places just to name a few!

This can then lead to other behaviours that impact on our mental health, such as risky sexual behaviours, drug abuse, excessive alcohol use, smoking, over eating and self-harm.

This all places our mental health and wellbeing in a vulnerable place.

Having an anxiety, which is more than just feeling stressed, it is a serious illness that impacts on your physical and mental health. It is also the most common mental health concern in Australia.

Fortunately there are a range of treatments for anxiety available. It is best to consult with your GP about the options that are best for you.

It is important to remember that LGBT people have needed to be strong to survive all of this, we all have resilience in us, we may just need to find it again!

We also all have the ability to enhance our skills for improving and maintaining our mental health and wellbeing – including anxiety!

### **Indicators that anxiety is impacting on you:**

First it is important to recognise when our mental health and wellbeing isn't doing so well. Some of these may be normal reactions to stressful life events (such as a death, a relationship break-up, coming out, etc.) but if they arise and persist for no identifiable reason, and it, the following may be signs that your mental health may need some attention, especially if they interfere with normal work, social and family functioning:

- Feeling stressed, nervous, worried or very anxious most of the time.
- Finding it difficult or not being able to calm down.
- Feeling overwhelmed or frightened by sudden feelings of panic.
- Having recurring thoughts that cause you worry.
- Avoiding situations (such as attending community events, social activities, visiting close family and friends) that cause you anxiety.
- Losing interest or pleasure in activities that you used to enjoy.
- Increased drug and alcohol use.
- Having disturbed sleep or feeling tired for no good reason.
- Feeling hopeless, worthless or excessively guilty.
- Decreased interest in sex or intimacy.
- Finding it hard to concentrate, make decisions and feeling like everything is an effort.
- An increase or decrease in your appetite.
- Having thoughts of death or ending your life.

## Strategies for maintaining a healthy level of anxiety

You have the ability to enhance your mental health and wellbeing by learning and adopting some new skills and strategies that have been shown to help. Here are some strategies that you can use:

- Relax and be gentle with yourself and do things that help you feel calm.
- Be mindful and practice meditation. This can help you acknowledge and accept your ups and downs, and realise that your anxiety is not permanent and will change over time.
- Find an LGBT friendly doctor, come out to them, and talk to them about your anxiety.
- Keep in contact with your friends and social networks and make the time and effort to see them in person.
- Talk to your friends about your thoughts and feelings.
- Keep active, exercise, eat well and get enough sleep.
- Reduce your drug and alcohol intake.
- Find an LGBT knowledgeable counsellor who can help you identify the causes of your anxiety and support you to address your anxiety.
- Ask for help when you feel you may need it. There are a range of LGBT friendly support services available.

Find your resilience and enhance your skills for mental health and wellbeing for people in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans community



### Healthy Communities Client Support Service - Feel good INSIDE and OUT!

[www.gahc.org.au/InsideOut](http://www.gahc.org.au/InsideOut) (07) 3017 1777

Healthy Communities Client Support is made possible through funding provided under the Mental Health Disaster Recovery Package, which is a joint initiative of the Australian and Queensland Governments under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.