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Health

Life Lines

Improving your quality of life, one step at a time



Supporting Your Mental Health as a 2SLGBTQIA+ Person

Your identity can be a powerful source of strength, connection, and pride. At the same time, other factors outside of you may shape how you experience the world around you. These factors are known as *social determinants of health*, and include social attitudes, workplace environments, cultural expectations, and access to supportive resources that can influence your health and mental well-being.

Many 2SLGBTQIA+ people move through experiences that can place additional pressure on their mental health. These reflect the impact of stigma, discrimination, and barriers to care that many people still encounter. Psychologists often describe this as **minority stress**—the ongoing strain that can come from navigating environments where acceptance, safety, or understanding cannot always be assumed. Over time, experiences such as discrimination, fear of rejection, or the need to conceal parts of yourself can take an emotional toll.

In Canada, studies show that more than half of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth report elevated mental health concerns, and many experience periods of significant distress compared to heterosexual peers. Behind these numbers are real people navigating complicated situations at work, at home, in relationships, and in their communities. At the same time, these experiences don't define the full story. Many 2SLGBTQIA+ people build strong networks of support, develop deep self-awareness, creative forms of expression, and create communities that celebrate authenticity and belonging.

Mental well-being is shaped by many factors, including identity, culture, family relationships, workplace experiences, and community connections. Your experiences are unique, and there is no single way to care for your mental health. Building a toolkit that helps you stay grounded, connected, and supported can make it easier to care for your mental well-being over time.

Understanding Stress, Identity, and Intersectionality

Experiences within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community don't exist in isolation. Many people hold multiple identities at the same time, and these can shape how you move through the world and how others respond to you. This is referred to often as intersectionality. For example, the experiences of sexually and gender diverse people can differ significantly if they belong to other marginalized groups as well (people of colour, people with disabilities, those living with HIV, neurodiversity, income, among others).

Many may encounter layers of stress that others do not experience. These pressures can appear in workplaces, families, healthcare settings, and social spaces, sometimes in subtle ways that build over time.

Some common sources of stress include:

- Fear of discrimination or rejection
- Pressure to hide or downplay aspects of your identity in certain environments
- Experiences of bullying, harassment, or exclusion
- Limited representation or role models
- Cultural or family tensions related to identity
- Barriers to accessing affirming healthcare

Experiences like these can build up and affect emotional well-being. Over time, this pressure can also show up in everyday ways, such as struggling to sleep, feeling tense or constantly on edge, second-guessing yourself in social situations, or feeling emotionally exhausted.

Your identity may also intersect with other parts of who you are, such as culture, race, Indigeneity, disability, religion, immigration status, or age. These overlapping identities can influence feelings of belonging, access to support, and experiences with discrimination or acceptance. Because of this, finding spaces where you feel respected and supported can make a meaningful difference for your mental health. Supporting your mental health involves more than managing stress. It also includes nurturing relationships and environments that allow you to feel safe, valued, and fully yourself.

Everyday Practices That Support Your Mental Well-being

Mental health is shaped by daily experiences and habits. Small, consistent actions can create a sense of stability and self-trust over time.

Supportive connection is one of the most important protective factors for mental health. Spending time with people who respect and affirm your identity can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and stress.

You may find these connections through 2SLGBTQIA+ community groups, online forums, Pride events, advocacy organizations, or informal gatherings with friends. Even one supportive relationship can make a meaningful difference. In many of these spaces, support is shared and built collectively. Many 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals also support and advocate for one another. Practicing allyship within communities, workplaces, and social circles can help strengthen collective well-being. Sometimes, simply being around people who “get it” without needing to explain your experiences can feel deeply validating.

Your relationship with your identity is also important. Identity exploration can be a lifelong process. Some people feel clarity early in life, while others discover new aspects of themselves gradually. Allowing space for that process without pressure can support self-acceptance and confidence.

Activities that nurture identity and belonging may include:

- Learning about 2SLGBTQIA+ history and community stories
- Engaging with books, art, films, or media that reflect your experiences
- Celebrating milestones such as Pride or personal moments of self-discovery
- Connecting with communities that share aspects of your identity

Alongside supportive environments and relationships, the ways you respond to stress in everyday life can also play an important role in protecting your mental health. Developing a few practices that help you feel grounded can make it easier to navigate challenging situations when they arise. These can include:

Noticing how stress shows up for you. Pay attention to early signs such as physical tension, trouble sleeping, feeling constantly on edge, withdrawing socially, or feeling emotionally drained. Recognizing these signals early can help you respond with care before stress begins to build.

Choosing environments that support your well-being.

Workplaces, families, social circles, and online spaces all influence how safe and comfortable you feel expressing yourself. When possible, prioritize environments where you feel respected and supported, and consider setting boundaries or limiting exposure in spaces that feel draining.

Supporting your physical health. Regular sleep, nourishing meals, movement, and time outdoors help regulate the body's stress response and support emotional balance. These practices do not need to be perfect to be helpful.

Making time for rest and restoration. Creating moments of calm during busy or demanding periods can help prevent burnout. Activities such as journaling, creative expression, meditation, music, hobbies, or time in nature can help you recharge.

Practicing intentional self-care. This may include setting boundaries with people or situations that drain your energy, being mindful of alcohol or substance use during stressful periods, and choosing activities that help you reconnect with your body and mind, such as stretching, breathing exercises, or physical movement.

Navigating Identity in the Workplace

Feeling respected and included at work often strengthens confidence, belonging, and overall satisfaction. At the same time, some 2SLGBTQIA+ people still encounter challenges such as microaggressions, lack of representation, or uncertainty about whether it feels safe to share aspects of their identity.

If you experience stress related to workplace dynamics, a few strategies may help:

- Look for colleagues who demonstrate allyship or inclusivity. Supportive coworkers can help create safer spaces.
- Explore workplace resources such as employee networks, diversity initiatives, or mentorship opportunities.
- Set boundaries when conversations or behaviours feel uncomfortable. Protecting your emotional well-being is valid and important.
- Document situations that involve discrimination or harassment so you can seek support from HR or leadership if needed.

Many organizations continue working toward more inclusive environments. Progress often happens gradually, and finding supportive spaces within your workplace can make a meaningful difference in your day-to-day experience.

When Emotional Support Could Help

Everyone experiences periods of stress, uncertainty, or emotional fatigue. When challenges begin to feel heavier, reaching out for support can be a healthy and proactive step.

You might consider seeking additional support if you notice:

- Persistent feelings of anxiety, sadness, or overwhelm
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Loss of motivation or energy
- Feeling increasingly isolated or disconnected from others
- Ongoing stress related to identity, relationships, or workplace experiences

Support can take many forms. Conversations with affirming trusted friends or family, peer support groups, and professional counselling can all provide meaningful relief and perspective.

A mental health professional can offer a confidential space to explore concerns, develop coping strategies, and strengthen resilience. For some 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, working with a provider who understands gender and sexual diversity or who practices affirming care can help create a space where they feel respected, understood, and comfortable speaking openly about their experiences.



Support Is Available Through Your EFAP

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) offers confidential support for many of the challenges that can affect mental well-being, including stress, identity-related concerns, workplace pressures, and relationship difficulties

EFAP services are available to you and your eligible family members at no cost. Depending on your needs and preferences, support may include:

- Professional counselling to talk through personal or workplace concerns
- Coaching focused on well-being, resilience, and life transitions
- Self-guided resources and digital tools that help build coping skills
- Referrals to community resources when specialized support may be helpful

Reaching out for counselling support can feel like a big step, especially if you have never spoken with a counsellor before. Many people find that even one conversation can bring clarity, reassurance, and practical strategies for moving forward. **You can also ask to work with a counsellor who has experience supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals or who shares a similar life experience or background.**

You do not have to wait until a situation feels overwhelming. Support is available whenever you want to talk through something, strengthen your well-being, or explore new ways to manage stress.

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