**Substance Use, Disordered Eating & Mental Health**

**Why This Guide Matters**

LGBTQ+ people face higher rates of substance use, disordered eating, and mental health challenges than the general population. These issues are not personal failings—they are often responses to oppression, stress, and marginalisation.

Common causes include:

* Minority stress: the strain of being part of a marginalised group
* Discrimination, bullying, and hate
* Family rejection or estrangement
* Internalised stigma around sexuality, gender identity, or body image

This guide aims to support you, or those you work with, in accessing safe, informed care.

**Substance Use in LGBTQ+ Communities**

**What We Know:**

* Gay and bisexual men are more likely to use GHB, mephedrone, and crystal meth, especially in chemsex contexts.
* Trans people report higher rates of tobacco and alcohol use.
* Lesbians and bisexual women have higher levels of heavy drinking and drug use than straight women.

Many use substances to:

* Cope with trauma or isolation
* Feel confident in social/sexual situations
* Manage dysphoria, anxiety, or stress
* Fit into social norms in queer nightlife culture

**What Is Chemsex?**

Using drugs (commonly G, meth, mephedrone) to enhance sex—often in group or party settings. Risks include:

* Unsafe sex or STIs
* Dependency
* Overdose or hospitalisation
* Consent complications

**Safer Use Tips:**

* **Never use alone** and don’t mix drugs unless you're informed
* Test drugs when possible
* Carry naloxone (for opioid overdose)
* Plan exits and check-ins if attending chemsex events

**Support Services:**

* **LGBT Foundation Drug & Alcohol Support**: [https://lgbt.foundation](https://lgbt.foundation/)
* **Club Drug Clinic (London)**:<https://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/club-drug-clinic>
* **We Are With You** / **Turning Point**: Local inclusive drug services

**Disordered Eating and Body Image**

**What It Looks Like:**

* Trans youth fasting to suppress puberty or avoid curves
* Gay men fixating on muscle gain or leanness
* Restricting or bingeing in response to dysphoria or trauma
* Eating disorders co-occurring with substance use

**Pressures:**

* Body ideals shaped by media, dating apps, fitness culture
* Transphobia and lack of representation
* Gender norms and lack of inclusive services

Disordered eating is not always about weight. It can be about control, dysphoria, or coping.

**Resources:**

* **BEAT Eating Disorders (LGBT+ info)**: [https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk](https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/)
* **Gendered Intelligence**: [https://genderedintelligence.co.uk](https://genderedintelligence.co.uk/)
* Local ED services—ask if they are LGBTQ+ competent

**Mental Health Impacts**

LGBT+ people are more likely to face:

* Anxiety and depression
* Self-harm
* Suicidal thoughts
* PTSD from rejection, hate crimes, or assault

**High-Risk Groups:**

* Trans and non-binary people
* LGBTQ+ youth
* People experiencing racism, ableism, or homelessness

**Why Services Fail:**

* Misgendering or deadnaming
* Assumptions of heterosexuality or cisgender identity
* Lack of understanding around dysphoria or queer trauma

**Support Services:**

* **MindOut** (LGBT+ mental health): [https://www.mindout.org.uk](https://www.mindout.org.uk/)
* **Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline**: 0800 0119 100 / [https://switchboard.lgbt](https://switchboard.lgbt/)
* **Galop** (LGBT+ domestic abuse & hate crime): [https://galop.org.uk](https://galop.org.uk/)
* **IAPT** (Ask your GP for a therapist who has LGBTQ+ training)

**Intersectional Considerations**

Every LGBTQ+ person has multiple identities. Experiences differ based on:

* Race and ethnicity (e.g., cultural stigma, racial profiling)
* Disability or neurodivergence (e.g., sensory or access needs)
* Faith background (e.g., navigating queer identity in religious spaces)
* Class and immigration status

Cultural humility means listening and learning—not assuming one-size-fits-all solutions.

**Barriers to Accessing Help**

You are not alone if you’ve avoided help because of:

* Fear of discrimination or misgendering
* Previous bad experiences with professionals
* Lack of LGBTQ+ knowledgeable providers
* Outing risk when disclosing to parents or GPs

**Affirming Help-Seeking**

**How to Find Safe Services:**

* Ask: “Have your staff received LGBTQ+ training?”
* Look for identity-affirming language on websites
* Trust your gut—if it feels unsafe, you can walk away

**What Good Care Looks Like:**

* Respects your name, pronouns, and identity
* Listens to your experiences without judgment
* Offers informed options, not pressure or shaming

**Questions to Ask:**

* Do you have experience supporting LGBTQ+ clients?
* Are you trans/non-binary aware?
* Do you know about chemsex, dysphoria, or community norms?

**Recovery & Resilience**

**You are more than your pain.** Queer people have always found ways to survive and thrive.

**Resilience Looks Like:**

* Finding community: trans sober spaces, queer ED groups
* Building support systems, even online
* Naming your struggles, but also your strengths

**Joy is Resistance:**

* Expressing your identity freely
* Reclaiming your body
* Resting without guilt
* Creating art, dancing, laughing, connecting

**Support for Practitioners & Allies**

If you support LGBTQ+ people, get informed and stay curious.

**Tips:**

* Avoid assumptions—ask pronouns, listen
* Learn about LGBTQ+ trauma and how it shows up
* Understand how oppression affects body image, coping, and addiction

**Training Opportunities:**

* **MindOut Practitioner Training**: [https://mindout.org.uk](https://mindout.org.uk/)
* **LGBT Foundation Training**: <https://lgbt.foundation/training>
* **NHS Pride in Practice** (for GP surgeries)

**Quick Access**

**🌈 Crisis Helplines**

* **Samaritans**: 116 123 (24/7)
* **Switchboard**: 0800 0119 100
**MindOut Out-of-Hours Webchat**: [https://www.mindout.org.uk](https://www.mindout.org.uk/)

**🛏 Emergency Support**

* **Shelter**: 0808 800 4444 / [https://shelter.org.uk](https://shelter.org.uk/)**akt (16–25 LGBTQ+ housing)**: [https://www.akt.org.uk](https://www.akt.org.uk/)

**🏳️‍⚧️ Find Inclusive Services**

* **LGBT Switchboard Directory**: [https://switchboard.lgbt](https://switchboard.lgbt/)
* **LGBT Foundation Service Finder**: [https://lgbt.foundation](https://lgbt.foundation/)