



# The Mentoring Effect: 2SLGBTQ Youth



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## The Mentoring Effect: 2SLGBTQ Youth

Supportive relationships with adults, including mentoring relationships, foster young people's positive development and can provide significant psychological protection in the face of adverse life circumstances.<sup>1</sup> In the winter of 2020, Mentor Canada surveyed 2,838 young adults between the ages of 18 to 30 in Canada to learn more about how mentors supported them when they were growing up. In total, 20% of survey respondents identified as 2SLGBTQ:<sup>2</sup>

- 20% of respondents identified as a sexual minority;
- 4% as transgender; and
- 3% as gender diverse (e.g., identified as non-binary, two-spirit).<sup>3</sup>

Nearly half (48%) of sexual minority respondents and 57% of transgender youth reported having faced at least two risk factors during their teen years compared to 39% of all respondents. Furthermore, survey respondents who identified as 2SLGBTQ reported lower rates of high school completion, lower rates of pursuing further education or training after high school, and lower rates of being currently employed or studying than non-2SLGBTQ respondents. They also reported lower rates of mental well-being, social capital, and self-worth. Survey findings also point to increased inequities for transgender respondents compared to cisgender respondents.

Mentoring relationships can play an important role offsetting some of the adverse life circumstances 2SLGBTQ youth may face such as stigma and bias, bullying, family rejection, and homelessness. However, many sexual and gender diverse respondents did not have a single mentor between the ages of 6 and 18: 44% of sexual minority youth, 32% of transgender youth, and 45% of gender diverse youth did not have access to mentoring. Early intervention to help more 2SLGBTQ young people access informal and formal mentors in their communities and through safe, inclusive, and affirming mentoring programs is critical.

# What is the effect of mentoring for 2SLGBTQ youth?

The Mapping the Mentoring Gap study determined that survey respondents who were mentored growing up were statistically more likely to report several positive outcomes as young adults compared to their peers who did not have access to a mentor.<sup>4</sup>

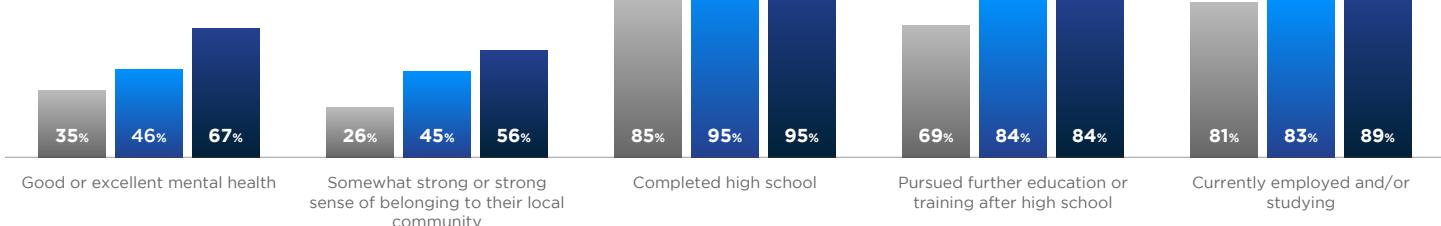
Close to two-thirds (68%) of transgender youth, 55% of sexual minority and 55% of gender diverse respondents had at least one mentor at some point between the ages of 6 to 18. While sexual and gender diverse youth participated in formal mentoring programs in proportions similar to all survey respondents (approximately 16%), nearly 40% of transgender respondents to the survey reported that they had accessed

formal mentoring through a program at some point during their childhood or adolescence. Transgender respondents were over three times more likely to have participated in a mentoring program compared to cisgender respondents.

2SLGBTQ youth who were mentored growing up reported positive outcomes related to mental health, education, and employment in greater proportion than their peers who were not mentored. However, in many instances, sexual and gender minority youth report these positive outcomes in smaller proportions than all survey respondents who had access to mentoring.

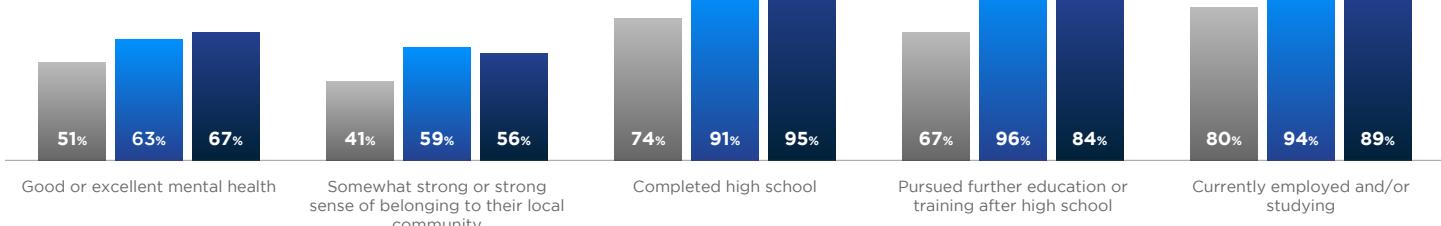
## Sexual minority youth

- Non-mentored sexual minority youth
- Mentored sexual minority youth
- All mentored youth<sup>5</sup>



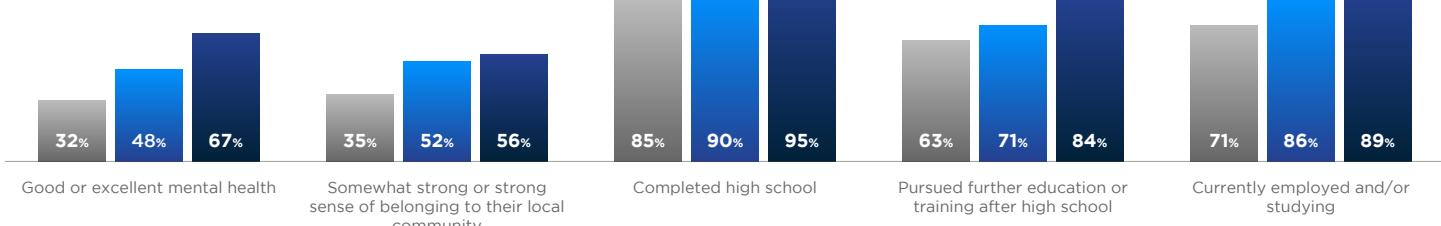
## Transgender youth

- Non-mentored transgender youth
- Mentored transgender youth
- All mentored youth<sup>5</sup>



## Gender diverse youth

- Non-mentored gender diverse youth
- Mentored gender diverse youth
- All mentored youth<sup>5</sup>



# How do mentors support 2SLGBTQ teens?

Just under half (46%) of 2SLGBTQ youth had at least one mentor between the ages of 12 to 18. That proportion was similar to that of respondents who did not identify as 2SLGBTQ. Sexual minority youth's most meaningful mentors during their teen years were often teachers or other members of school staff, adult relatives, elders and aunties, or family friends. Compared to all respondents, a smaller proportion of sexual minority youth's most meaningful mentors shared their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexual minority youth and transgender youth who were mentored reported that their mentors supported several areas of their lives and development in meaningful ways.<sup>6</sup> Their most meaningful mentors helped them manage interpersonal relationships, build connections, acquire essential skills, and navigate the transition to adulthood.

## Relationships

- 51% of sexual minority youth and 54% of transgender youth who were mentored during their teen years discussed their relationships with their parents or guardians with their most meaningful mentor;
- 50% of sexual minority youth and 58% of transgender youth talked about their relationships with their friends with their mentor.

## Skills

- 47% of sexual minority youth and 46% of transgender youth who were mentored acquired academic or school-related skills with the help of their mentor;
- 44% of sexual minority youth and 46% of transgender youth acquired life skills;
- 43% of sexual minority youth and 49% of transgender youth acquired job-related skills.

Spending time together with their mentor and having fun was also an important component of sexual minority and transgender youth's most meaningful mentoring relationship: over half of the respondents reported that having fun was a significant way in which their mentor supported them during their adolescence.

Sexual minority and transgender respondents who had a mentor during their adolescence also reported that their most meaningful mentor had a significant influence on several areas linked to their mental health and resilience:

- 76% of sexual minority youth and 61% of transgender youth reported that their mentor influenced their confidence in their abilities;
- 72% of sexual minority youth and 61% of transgender youth reported that their mentor influenced their hope and optimism for the future;
- 71% of sexual minority youth and 53% of transgender youth reported that their mentor influenced their self-esteem and sense of pride.

**"I do think that I guess similar I guess background and sexual orientation would be preferable because they can relate their experience to them and like they can compare saying that I did this and you don't have to worry if something happens here. We're in the same place together. If you need help, I'll be here to guide you along, which would make sense because you would relate somebody who's similar to you [...]"**

**Interview participant,  
Mapping the Mentoring Gap (2020)**

## Life Transitions

- 39% of sexual minority youth and 37% of transgender youth who were mentored reported that their most meaningful mentor helped shape their job or career aspirations;
- 33% of sexual minority youth and 37% of transgender youth applied to trade school, college, or university with the help of their mentor.

## Connections

- 34% of sexual minority youth and 47% of transgender youth who were mentored connected to services and supports with the help of their most meaningful mentor;
- 36% of sexual minority youth and 46% of transgender youth took part in community events or offerings with their mentor.



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## What prevents 2SLGBTQ youth from accessing mentors?

Over two-thirds (69%) of sexual minority respondents and nearly three-quarters (74%) of transgender respondents could recall a time between the ages of 6 to 18 when they wished they had a mentor but did not have one compared to 54% of all respondents. Sexual minority youth were statistically more likely to report that they had unmet needs regarding access to mentors compared to heterosexual youth.

Over half of sexual minority youth and transgender youth faced barriers accessing mentors during their adolescence compared to approximately 38% of all respondents. The top barriers they faced were:

- Not knowing how to find a mentor;
- Not understanding what mentoring was or the value of having a mentor;
- Not having access to mentoring programs;
- Parents or caregivers not interested in them having a mentor.



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## Closing the mentoring gap for 2SLGBTQ youth

2SLGBTQ youth face structural inequities which impact outcomes related to education, employment, as well as well-being. Although mentoring alone cannot redress structural inequities, mentors can play an important role in supporting 2SLGBTQ young people's positive development. However, 2SLGBTQ youth face unique challenges accessing supportive formal and informal mentoring relationships:

- Nearly two-thirds of sexual minority youth who faced barriers accessing mentors during their teen years reported that they did not know how to find a mentor;
- Approximately one-fifth of sexual minority and transgender respondents reported that the mentoring programs that were available to them did not seem relevant to their lives;
- A higher proportion of transgender respondents reported that no one was willing to mentor them during their teen years compared to all respondents.

Schools, communities, mentoring programs, and policymakers must work together to address the barriers sexual and gender diverse youth face accessing mentors. Public education campaigns to raise awareness about the value of positive formal and informal mentoring relationships for 2SLGBTQ youth and bringing mentoring opportunities where 2SLGBTQ are at and feel safe (e.g., GSAs) can begin to address some of these barriers.

Existing mentoring programs should also consider how they could improve their practices to respond to the unique needs of 2SLGBTQ youth, including by considering how their practices can promote safe, inclusive, and affirming experiences. Programs designed specifically by and for 2SLGBTQ youth can increase the likelihood that youth will deem the programs to be relevant to their lives.

Empowering more caring adults in communities to step up and mentor the young people around them is critical. However, mentors need to understand how today's 2SLGBTQ young people's experiences are

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### RESOURCE

#### [Sexual and Gender Diverse Youth Mentoring Guide](#)

Alberta Mentoring Partnership



different given advances in protections for 2SLGBTQ people over the last few decades (e.g., employment protections). Mentors need to be attuned to 2SLGBTQ's current experiences to provide relevant and applicable support and advice.

2SLGBTQ young adults who have benefited from the support of a mentor and understand the value of mentoring can play a pivotal role in efforts to increase the number of mentors. Indeed,

- 69% of sexual minority youth and 73% of transgender youth who had a mentor growing up are interested in becoming mentors in the future.
- Over 40% of them have already mentored another young person.

Ultimately, intentional and targeted investment by government, philanthropists and communities in youth mentoring programs designed to respond to the unique goals and needs of 2SLGBTQ youth are necessary to help close the mentoring gap, and ultimately bring more opportunities to 2SLGBTQ young people.

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## Limitations

The quantitative data presented here does not use an intersectional lens. For the purpose of the statistical analysis, respondents and response options were recoded into binary categories. In many cases, these categories generalize the results for the whole group, but subgroups or individuals within these categories likely have different experiences. For example, respondents who identified as bisexual face unique challenges such as biphobia. Given that some respondents who identified as part of a sexual minority also identified as transgender and/or gender diverse, and vice versa, there is some overlap in the data for sexual minority and gender minority respondents. Furthermore, the findings may not be generalizable to all sexual and gender minority youth in Canada, especially for gender diverse and transgender youth given the relatively small sample size of survey responses from these groups.

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## About Mentor Canada

Mentor Canada is a coalition of organizations that provide youth mentoring. We are working together to build sector capacity and expand access to mentoring to empower every young person to reach their potential. *Mapping the Mentoring Gap* is one of three studies conducted by Mentor Canada as part of the State of Mentoring Research Initiative. Between January and March 2020, we surveyed 2,838 young adults aged 18–30 about their mentoring experiences growing up and their current lives.

Learn more about Mentor Canada and our research at [MentoringCanada.ca](https://MentoringCanada.ca).

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### In partnership with:



The leading national organization promoting workplace cultures that are inclusive of 2SLGBTQIA+ people, [Pride at Work Canada/Fierté au travail Canada](#) operates as a [member services agency](#) for employers, offering institutional education and guidance to organizations that make a commitment to building workplaces that celebrate all employees regardless of gender expression, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

1 Resnick, M. D., Harris, L. J., & Blum, R. W. (1993). The impact of caring and connectedness on adolescent health and well-being. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 29(Suppl. 1), S3-S9. Werner, E. E. & Smith, R. S. (1992) *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood*. Cornell University Press.

2 10% of survey respondents identified as bisexual, pansexual, or queer, 3% as gay, 2% as lesbian, 2% as questioning or unsure, 1% as two-spirit, 1% as asexual, 2% preferred to self-describe. Approximately 55% of sexual minority youth were women, 33% were men, and 12% were gender diverse. Approximately 53% of transgender youth identified as men, 29% as gender diverse, and 18% as women. Approximately 65% of transgender youth identified as belonging to a sexual minority.

3 Due to limited sample size for transgender youth (n= 126) and gender diverse youth (n= 81) caution is necessary when interpreting the findings for these groups.

4 Our analysis determined that there was an association between having had a mentor and positive outcomes (correlation) but could not determine if having a mentor caused or led to these positive outcomes. See the [Mapping the Mentoring Gap study](#) for more details.

5 All mentored youth includes sexual and gender minority respondents in addition to all other respondents who did not have these identities.

6 Due to the small sample size, data is not available for gender diverse youth.