

## **What does it mean to be gay?**

Men who call themselves gay are sexually attracted to and fall in love with other men. Their sexual feelings toward men are normal and natural for them. These feelings emerge when they are boys and the feelings continue into adulthood. Although some gay men may also be attracted to women, they usually say that their feelings for men are stronger and more important to them.

It is said that one out of ten people is gay or lesbian. This means that in any large group of people, there are usually several gay people present. However, you cannot tell if someone is gay unless he or she wants you to know. Although gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people blend in with the crowd, they often feel different from other people.

Gay teenagers may not be able to specify just why they feel different. All of the guys they know seem to be attracted to girls, so they don't know where they fit in. And, they may not feel comfortable talking with an adult about their feelings.

## **How do I know if I'm gay?**

You may not know what to call your sexual feelings. You don't have to decide how to label yourself right now. Our sexual identities develop over time. Most adolescent boys are intensely sexual during the years around puberty (usually between 11 and 15), when their bodies start changing and their hormones are flowing in new ways.

Your sexual feelings may be so strong that they are not directed toward particular persons or situations, but seem to emerge without cause. As you get older you will figure out who you are and to whom you are attracted.

Boys and men who are gay find that over time their attraction to boys and men becomes more clearly focused. You may find yourself falling in love with a classmate or developing a crush on a particular man. You may find these experiences pleasurable, troubling, or a mix of the two. By age 16 or 17, many gay, lesbian, bi, and trans young people start thinking about what to call themselves, while others prefer to wait.

If you are ready to learn more, start by reading. Please know that not all books about gay people are supportive. You may also call or email the NU LGBT Resource Center where you can talk about your feelings anonymously and where you will receive information about organizations and people who can help.

## **Am I normal?**

Yes, you are normal. It's perfectly natural for people to be attracted to members of their own sex. But it's not something that's encouraged in our society. Many people push away these feelings because of prejudice against gay, lesbian and bisexual people. Most scientific experts agree that a person's sexual orientation is determined at a very young age, maybe even at birth. It's normal and healthy to be yourself, whether you're gay or straight. What's really important is that we learn to like ourselves.

**What is it like to be gay?**

There's no right way or wrong way to be gay. Because of society's stereotypes about gay and bisexual men, you might think you have to be a certain way if you're gay. But gay and bi men come in all shapes and sizes, from all occupations, and with all levels of education.

Because of homophobia and prejudice, some people don't accept lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people. We sometimes suffer from discrimination and violence. That's why there are many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender organizations that work for our civil rights.

**Who should I tell?**

Coming out is the process of accepting yourself as a gay or bi man and figuring out how open you want to be about your sexual orientation. Unfortunately not everyone you know will think that being gay is so terrific. It's hard to know who can handle the information and give you support. Some friends may accept you. Some may turn away from you or tell other people without your permission. Telling family can be very difficult. Some families are very supportive. But some lesbian and gay youth have been kicked out of their homes when their parents found out.

It's important to have someone to talk to because it's not normal or healthy for young people to have to keep secret such an important part of their lives.

**What about sex?**

Naturally, you think about finding an outlet for your sexual feelings. Becoming a healthy sexual person is part of the coming out process. You may be scared at the prospect of having sex. This is normal for everyone. No one should start having sex until they are ready. Until then, you may choose to masturbate or fantasize.

Sex should only happen between mature individuals who care about each other. You will know when the time is right.

We all choose to have sex in different ways, whether we are gay or straight. Gay men choose from a wide range of sexual practices, including masturbation (either alone or with another person), oral sex, anal intercourse, kissing, hugging, massage, wrestling, holding hands, cuddling or anything else that appeals to both partners. You are in complete control over what you do sexually and with whom.

**What about AIDS?**

All sexually active people need to be aware of AIDS as well as other sexually transmitted diseases. Being gay does not give you AIDS, but certain sexual practices and certain drug use behaviors can put you at risk for catching the virus that causes AIDS. AIDS is incurable, but is preventable.

Here's how to reduce your risk of getting AIDS:

- Do not shoot up drugs. Sharing needles is the most dangerous behavior in terms of getting AIDS.
- Avoid anal intercourse or other direct anal contact. Anal intercourse transmits the virus very efficiently. If you do engage in anal sex, use a condom every time.
- Use condoms whenever you engage in anal or oral sex (or vaginal sex if you have sex with women). You should choose latex condoms that are fresh and undamaged. Store them away from heat (your wallet is not a good place to keep them). Use a condom only once. Try to choose condoms with "reservoir tips", and be sure to squeeze out the air from the tip as you put it on. Hold on to the condom as you remove your penis; sometimes they slip off after sex.
- Choose sexual activities that do not involve intercourse: hugging, kissing, talking, massaging, wrestling or masturbating (on unbroken skin).

### **How do I learn to like myself?**

We are all valuable human beings. Developing self-esteem is very important. It's hard for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender young people to feel good about ourselves because all around us are people who believe that we're sick or perverted or destined to live unhappy lives. When we think we have to hide who we really are, we may feel isolated, fearful, and depressed, especially if we've had no one to talk to about our sexual orientation.

More and more, we as young gay and bi men are learning to like who we are. It helps to read good books about gay people - books that have accurate information and are written about gay and bi men who are leading fulfilling lives. The NU LGBT Resource Center has a lending library of many helpful books. It also helps to meet other men like us because then we find out that gay and bisexual men are as diverse as any other group of people.

It can help to say to yourself, "I'm gay and I'm okay. Remember: it's normal and natural to be gay, just like it is normal and natural for some people to be heterosexual.

### **Credits**

From the UCLA LGBT Campus Resource Center ([www.lgbt.ucla.edu](http://www.lgbt.ucla.edu))

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