

## Facts & Myths

**Myth:** All lesbians are "masculine" and all gay men are "effeminate".

**Fact:** While some lesbians appear masculine and some gay men effeminate, lesbian and gay appearances are as varied as straight appearances, often representing fashion or interests.

**Myth:** Gay men are predominately white males.

**Fact:** The homosexual community is completely diverse, consisting of males and females from all ethnic origins. Homosexuality exists worldwide.

**Myth:** People can choose to be gay or straight.

**Fact:** A complex set of factors combines to determine whether a person will develop a heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual orientation. It is generally accepted that there is some sort of predisposition or genetic relationship involved, but not everyone agrees with this analysis. Additionally, questioning why an individual is, is unhelpful.

**Myth:** AIDS is a homosexual disease.

**Fact:** Untrue. AIDS is not a 'homosexually-spread disease'. It is a syndrome spread by unprotected, unsafe sexual behaviour, both homosexual and heterosexual. Lesbians are the least at risk of infection with HIV, the virus associated with AIDS.

**Myth:** Gay men are more likely to be child molesters.

**Fact:** Paedophilia, sexual attraction to children, should never be confused with homosexuality. Many studies have documented that the overwhelming majority (some say 90%) of child molesters are heterosexual men who abuse young girls. The overwhelming majority of gay men have no interest in preadolescent children whatever.

## More information

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## Advice and Support for Parents, Carers & Professionals about Sexuality



## Need to know...

- **Suicide:** Young gay and bisexual guys are seven times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers and young lesbian and bisexual women are eight times more likely to have tried.
- **Bullying:** 65% of young lesbian, gay and bisexual people experience homophobic bullying in school.
- **Mental Health:** People who are gay, lesbian and bisexual have higher rates of anxiety and depression than the general population. Young lesbian and bisexual women are ten times more likely to self-harm compared to other teenagers.
- Gay young people are more likely to experience drug and alcohol addiction due to discrimination.
- Sexual orientation is just one component of a person's identity.
- Sexual orientation develops across a person's lifetime.
- Sexual behaviour does not necessarily equate to sexual orientation.
- The experience of gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents is often one of isolation, fear of stigmatisation and lack of peer or familial support.
- The need for gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents to "come out" (disclose their sexual orientation to others) is the expression of a normal tendency to want to share personal information about oneself with important others. This process is often difficult for gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents, because there is a strong and well-founded fear of being rejected by others.
- There is a need for gay, lesbian and bisexual young people to be given correct sexual health information that will enable them to identify risks and to take action to protect themselves, before they reach an age when they will become sexually active.

## Factors that Help Disclosure

- High degree of self-esteem
- Positive prior family relationship
- Accepting and supporting family members
- Having positive support systems in place

## Creating a Safe Environment

Because of their legitimate fear of being harassed or hurt, gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents are less likely to ask for help. Thus it is important that their environments are as open and accepting as possible, so they will feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts and concerns. To be able to provide an accepting environment, primary carers need to understand the nature of sexual orientation development and be supportive of healthy development of all youth.

## Early Awareness

This usually begins around ten years old. This awareness can include same sex attraction and feelings of difference.

## Identity and Confusion

This usually begins in adolescence. Behaviours in this stage can include closeting (hiding) behaviour, guilt, shame, denying, repressing, inhibiting or accepting homosexuality.

## Identity assumption

In this stage the adolescent integrates homosexual identity and begins limited disclosure.

## Identity consolidation

In this stage the adolescent recognises and accepts homosexuality and incorporates homosexuality identity into various aspects and increase disclosures.

## Helpful Hints...

Point out positive and successful gay role models from the media. How many can they think of...?

Consider how negative language or attitudes may impact on gay young people... e.g. in the home, school, media or faith groups.

Point out the positive changes in society and the law, such as civil partnerships.

Ask for help if you need it.