

Gay & Lesbian Teens: Q&A

McKenzie Pediatrics, 2010

I think I might be gay. What should I do?

If you've ever wondered if you're gay, lesbian, or bisexual, you're not alone. Many teens ask themselves this question. It is a normal part of life.

Maybe you've been attracted to someone of the same gender or you may have even kissed or had other sexual contact with someone of the same sex. But sexual behavior is not always the same as sexual orientation. Sexual orientation develops as you grow and experience new things. It may take time to figure it all out.

So don't worry if you're not sure. If over time your attraction to members of the same sex continues to grow, it's not a bad thing, it's just who you are.

You are not alone

Some estimates say that about 10% of the population is gay. There are gay people of every race, age, family background, and body type. You can't tell just by looking at someone that he or she is gay. Just because a boy has some feminine qualities or a girl acts a little masculine does not mean that he or she is gay.

You are normal

Homosexuality is not a mental disorder. All of the major medical organizations, including The American Psychiatric Association, The American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics agree that homosexuality is not an illness or disorder, but a form of sexual expression.

No one knows what causes a person to be gay, bisexual, or straight. There probably are a number of factors. Some may be biological. Others may be psychological. The reasons can vary from one person to another. The fact is, you do not choose to be gay, bisexual, or straight.

Talk about it

If you're confused or worried, it's important that you talk about your feelings. Find someone you trust to talk with. It might not be easy but in the end it's better if you do. The following are some people you may want to talk with:

- Parents
- Close friends or family members
- Your pediatrician

- Gay, lesbian, or bisexual friends
- A teacher, school counselor, coach, or other adult mentor
- A minister, priest, rabbi, or spiritual advisor
- A local gay, lesbian, and bisexual support group

Coming out

If you are nervous about “coming out of the closet” or revealing your sexual orientation to others, that’s OK. Not everyone accepts homosexuality so sharing this information may be difficult for you. Some people wrestle with this for years before finally deciding to do it. Others keep their sexual orientation a secret for their entire lives.

Remember that only you can decide the best time to share this information with your family and friends. Do not feel pressured to “come out” before you are ready.

The following are some things that might help as you decide:

- **Learn from others.** Talk to other gay friends about their experiences. This may help you know what to expect. Gay youth organizations also can be a great source of support.
- **Choose a good time and place to tell your family.** If this information comes out during a family conflict or crisis, it may be even harder for them to accept it.
- **Be prepared for a variety of reactions** including shock, denial, anger, guilt, sadness, and even rejection. Remember, you have had time to accept your identity. Give your family and friends time, too. Try to stay open, honest, and patient.