

Sexual Health

SEXUAL ORIENTATION



creating healthy communities
together

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Sexual orientation refers to the gender (or genders) of the people we have feelings of attraction and affection toward both emotionally and physically. This is an important part of our self-identity; how we see ourselves and how others see us. It is one of the most difficult parts of ourselves to talk about and understand.

The Lingo

Some terms that describe sexual orientation:

Heterosexual is to have feelings of affection and attraction, both emotionally and physically to people of the opposite gender (sex). This is also called “being straight.”

Homosexual is to have feelings of affection and attraction, both emotionally and physically, to people of the same gender (sex). Generally, homosexual males are referred to as “gay” and women referred to as “lesbians.” Gay is also a term used to describe anyone who is not heterosexual.

Bisexual is to be a woman or a man and to have feelings of affection and attraction, both emotionally and physically, to both men and women.

How do I know what my sexual orientation is?

You are the only one who knows what your sexual orientation is. No-one can talk you into being someone that you are not. Understanding your sexual orientation can happen at any time during your life. Feelings of affection and attraction can be very confusing and this is quite normal.

Expectations about who we should be come from family, friends, school, television, videos, movies, magazines, church and society as a whole. We live in a world where it is often wrongly assumed that everyone is heterosexual.

What is homophobia?

Homophobia is a term used to describe extreme negative attitudes and feelings about homosexuality. Homophobia can range from feelings of discomfort to outright hatred and violence.

We take part in homophobia when we laugh at jokes about lesbians and gay men, reject family members or friends who come out as lesbian, gay or bisexual, or deny basic rights such as employment to lesbian or gay persons.

In Canada, homophobia is against the law. Being gay is not wrong; in fact, it is your right to be who and what you are.

What does it mean to be “out”?

“Coming out of the closet” or “coming out” means telling others openly about your sexual orientation. This can be very difficult. Realizing your sexual orientation to yourself may be difficult enough. When people do “come out,” they may only come out to a few very close friends or family members.

If you think you are gay, lesbian or bisexual and are thinking about coming out it may be helpful to talk to someone on a gay youth “help” phone-line. They can help answer questions without anyone knowing who you are.

Who should I tell?

You may want to share your feelings with a trusted family member, friend, counsellor, nurse, teacher or someone at a youth community centre.

The person you choose to tell should be someone that you have shared secrets with before and feel you can trust. It should also be someone who does not talk badly about or make cruel remarks about lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Some people feel threatened by talking about sexual identity. You will have no way of guessing the exact response your friend or family member will have.

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Helpful Resources

The Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line

The Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line is a toll-free Ontario-wide peer-support phone line for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual, 2-spirited, queer and questioning young people. The Youth Line also provides its peer-support service online through messenger and e-mail response. It offers confidential, free, and non-judgmental peer support to youth who are 26 and under who live anywhere in Ontario.

Hours of Operation:

Sunday – Friday from 4:00pm – 9:30pm

Toll-free: 1-800-268-9688

Instant Messaging:

Add askus@youthline.ca to your friends list

E-mail: E-mail questions to askus@youthline.ca

Website: www.youthline.ca

Parents Family Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

PFLAG is a national voice that speaks for a more accepting Canadian society by providing support, education and resources on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. The London chapter which serves Huron County provides telephone support and information to anyone with questions or concerns about sexual orientation and/or gender identity issues.

Contact: Joanne King 519-858-2644 (London)

or Andrew 519-455-9081 (London)

Website: www.pflagcanada.ca

National support line: 1-888-530-6777

Open Closet

A drop in support group in London for youth ages 14-18 years who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, queer, or questioning.

Call 519-434-1601 (London) and ask for Open Closet information.

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