

## **BECAUSE I LOVE YOU I WANT YOU TO KNOW**

This is a booklet written to assist those who may be questioning their sexual orientation. The booklet gives tips regarding some issues, common concerns and questions that those who are in the process of "coming out" often ask themselves.

I wouldn't suggest this booklet has all of the answers but it's a start for those who are beginning this long journey of self awareness and honesty.

Good luck and don't be rushed into making hasty decisions.

### **Introduction**

This can be a time of fear, excitement and confusion regardless of age. Fear of wondering why you feel different to friends, and confusion about why you are feeling as you do. Sometimes people believe if they try very hard to behave as society and family expect they will be o.k. and stay straight. Being gay or lesbian can be hard and many don't understand homosexuality. It's hard having to tell family and then fearing their reactions. And, sometimes you don't even know another gay person so it can be a very lonely confusing time, full of fear and apprehension. Some even believe if they are homophobic and say terrible things about gays and lesbians it will make them straight or at least give them a cover and not be recognised as being gay themselves.

### **Am I gay?**

Who knows! No one can tell you if you are or not. It seems that the younger the person is the more isolating and fearful this question can be. For some it's just a slow realisation over a long period of time. And for others it takes a long time to come to accept your sexual diversity yourself. But just be patient and don't rush the process of deciding yes or no. Some realise from an early age that they are "different" but just can't quite understand what the difference is. For some

the realisation may be a simple trigger; for example seeing a gay character on a Soapie.

### **Are you sure?**

It is best to be confident and comfortable with your decision before you disclose your sexuality to family. If you are uncertain, especially if you're very young this can confuse the issue more. It's a common belief that young people are just experimenting and so your disclosure may not be taken seriously. Most parents don't want to hear the news at any age and look for any reason to discount what you're telling them. It can also make it more difficult for some parents to actually come to the realisation that you are gay, because they cling to the hope that you're still confused. They don't understand that you were just being honest with them about your feelings.

### **What does it feel like?**

You don't have to feel any different to what you do now. Being gay is no different than being straight; except the possibility of stress from feeling the need to disclose your sexual orientation to loved ones. And, you feel attracted to the same sex not the opposite.

### **What do I have to do to be sure I am gay?**

Absolutely nothing! Straights don't do anything to prove their sexuality and you don't have to either. Being gay is not about having partners, and hanging out at bars and nightclubs. Just be your self, take your time and things will evolve naturally for you.

### **Is it just a phase?**

No. If you've come to the decision you're gay then there is very little likelihood that you will change and become straight again.

Statistics show that straights become gay, but very rarely do gays become straight. This has to do with concealing true identity until the person can no longer keep the secret.

## **How do I know and what are the signs of being gay?**

This is the most common question asked. Many who are questioning their sexuality hope there is a recipe to clarify their feelings. It isn't as simple as suggesting "if I have a tidy home and have a toned body, then I must be gay"

There are no factual signs. A male does not have to have effeminate actions or females masculine traits to be gay. Lesbians and gays work in all industries, with a variety of interests and should not be stereotyped.

It should not be assumed that a gentle male is gay. There are many gentle straight males in the world.

## **Best to be sure before disclosing?**

It is best to be certain of your feelings before disclosing. You don't have to have had partners, but just be comfortable in yourself. So that when the questions start (and they will) you can be confident with your decision and answers.

Unfortunately, there is no GOOD time, just better times than others to tell family members about being lesbian or gay.

## **When not to tell**

Never tell at family functions, during celebrations, or if there are other problems happening in the family.

Never tell if you are uncertain about your feelings.

Never tell if you're financially dependent.

Never tell if you have no outside emotional support

Never tell if you have nowhere to stay, just in case the process goes badly

Never tell during an argument or in anger, because they won't believe you.

## **How to tell**

Sometimes a **letter** is a good idea because all of your thoughts and emotions can be stated without concern of being sidetracked by questions and emotions from family members.

Sometimes a **phone call** is good if you want them to know but can't actually face them or are in fear of a bad reaction.

If you want to tell parents **face to face** wait until the house is quiet and stress free. You also need to decide if you want to tell them both at the same time or individually. Plus, if possible don't ask one parent to keep the secret of your sexuality for long from the other parent. This can cause incredible stress, especially if parents have a normally good relationship where information flows freely between them.

Plus, **avoid having your partner with you when you tell.** So often the parents shock or anger can switch to your partner and he/she can be blamed for your homosexuality. Which of course we know is not true, but sometimes parents aren't rational at this time.

If you do feel the need to have someone with you for support, try to get a person that you all trust and who will be of emotional support to parents.

It can be very reassuring for some parents if you have phone numbers and information they can access quickly. This helps to hasten the understanding of your sexuality and it lets them see that you were serious and have researched the issues concerning them and yourself.

If parents suggest you need counselling make it that they go along with you to the sessions. This should help them understand sooner, plus it gives them an objective person to discuss feelings with. Just make sure the counsellor is "gay" friendly, but not necessarily gay.

**An important thing to remember when telling parents, or anyone else for that matter, is to not apologise for being gay, you can't help being gay and you have done nothing wrong.**

### **Who do you tell?**

This answer depends on many things for example your age, how long you have known about your sexuality and whether you still live with family.

Generally, I would suggest if still at high school to keep this disclosure to your self. Friends can be fickle and gossip can spread quickly.

If at university or college there is more freedom to disclose to friends without fear of consequences, plus it can be good to start forming networks. This can be especially helpful if parents don't take the news well. Perhaps you can always stay with friends for a while.

If you are in full time work who you tell is entirely up to you, because you're independent and probably self sufficient.

However, under normal circumstances it is good to inform parents pretty early and then for most it doesn't matter who knows about your sexual orientation after that. But if you want to be the one who informs other family and friends after telling Mum and Dad it is best to "come out" to everyone else as soon as possible. This eliminates gossip and allows you to get on with your life as openly as possible with a minimum of explanation.

Plus most feel Mum and Dad are the hardest to inform because you care about what they think most and everyone else is relatively easy.

### **Parents emotions.**

All families are unique and how they handle the news is varied but be prepared for tears, anger, disappointment, disbelief, shock, blame, fear and shame which can last just a few weeks to a couple of years.

Also be prepared for many questions. Occasionally, parents will just pretend that what they've heard didn't happen. Others say that they don't know what questions to ask. Some will use the excuse that they think you don't want to talk, while others will ask many questions, and often repeatedly.

My personal belief is if parents don't talk about your sexuality or your life then perhaps it's a good idea to mention what you're doing in general conversation. Eventually, it desensitises them and makes them more comfortable with you and your life.

Parents need time to come to terms with your news and so give them a little time before you introduce your partner and friends. Remember you probably took a long time to feel comfortable with your sexuality and so will they.

Usually the first emotions are **tears and shock**, and this is a time that sometimes parents say things they later regret.

Some parents get angry and say "how dare you do this to us" as if you have done a deliberate thing to upset them. If parents are angry let them be angry, if

they cry let them cry. Sympathise with them but let them know it isn't easy for you either.

Talk with them about your feelings also. They need to understand you can't change your sexuality, just like they can't change theirs. One consolation from this is even though your parents are upset at the moment at least you can now be honest with them about your life. Let your parents know your intention was not to cause pain, even though the news can be initially painful, but to be honest and now there will be no need for secrets.

**Denial** is another defence mechanism for parents many say "oh well, it's his/her choice and then pretend nothing has changed. Some refuse to acknowledge your sexuality and others keep changing the subject every time you try to talk to them.

**Blame** is common. Many choose to blame friends, partner, themselves and each other to explain why you are like "this".

You just need to explain to parents that you "came out" to them because you love them, don't want to be dishonest with them and you don't want to live your life a lie.

Encourage family to seek support if they continue to struggle with your sexuality. PFLAG is a great support for parents. You need to keep reminding yourself that your sexuality is the norm for you, it's just with your parents being heterosexual they just don't understand and probably the only information they know about homosexuality is the myths and stereotypes.

**Shame** is very common. How can we tell people? What will they think of us? What will they think of you?

**Guilt** is another emotion parents may use. Some try to use guilt in a thousand ways to try and make you conform. Then other parents may feel genuine guilt themselves because they feel they have let you down.

**Disappointment** is a common emotion for parents. But it could be regarded as a selfish emotion. Parents often feel disappointment because you will not be travelling the traditional path that they as parents automatically assume will happen for you. That is engagements, marriage, mortgage and children.

Some experience **fear**. Fear of what will happen to you. Many parents always assume the worst will happen, whatever that may be in their minds. Some fear

you will move away and leave them. And for some it's just fear of the unknown because of lack of understanding.

Parents' emotions also swing wildly at this time. Many say things that they will later regret, so a little forgiveness is often necessary. Parents often have genuine concerns for their child, not all are motivated by ignorant reactions or selfish intentions. They also need time to digest the news themselves. Most parents have absolutely no idea their child is gay until they "come out" to them. This is a time when the child should try to be supportive of the parents.

You need to discuss your parents concerns openly to put them at eventual ease. They need to understand you won't necessarily disappear from their lives, that you won't necessarily get HIV /AIDS and homosexuality is neither a sin, nor disgusting.

Parents need to understand that homosexuality is not natural to them just like heterosexuality is not natural to you. But this can be difficult to explain if you have been in straight relationships previously. Read as much information as you can to inform your parents about homosexuality yourself, and get as much reading material for them to read on their own later.

### **Parents also need time:**

We need to understand that parents generally need time to understand, accept and support their child. Plus they may also want some time alone to digest the news. Here, the son/daughter needs to show sympathy for their pain, trying to answer their questions honestly without showing anger. This is a time for role reversal when the parent becomes the child and the child the parent.

Another tip is to try to think of questions they may ask about your sexuality. The first question is usually "how do you know?" and second "have you tried it with the opposite sex". It is also harder for parents to understand if you have had relationships with the opposite sex, been married or have children. Many also think homosexuality is a fad or phase you are going through, reassure them that it is not a phase.

Everyone needs to understand that this is a very anxious, stressful time for all involved. We can't control other peoples' emotions and reactions but we can control our own.

### **How and when to introduce friends:**

Generally parents find the first meeting of gay partners or friends very stressful. It is usually a good idea to let parents first settle to the idea of you being gay before you introduce friends as your "gay friends". So, when the time comes for your parents to meet friends it would be preferable to first introduce a friend who is not confrontational or stereotypical in manner. This will make it easier to introduce new friends and encourage parents to be happy to meet more of your friends. Eventually, parents will realise that your gay friends are just like any other group of people, all with a variety of personalities, interests and ideas.

Eventually, most of these fears and feelings disappear over time. Because time helps parents to realise the world hasn't ended, you haven't left them and the family unit is still strong. They soon begin to realise their fears and concerns have not eventuated and so parents begin to feel more relaxed about the whole issue.

### **Your emotions:**

You will probably have realised by now that your emotions are in extreme turmoil. Informing parents about your sexuality is usually the hardest thing you may ever have to do as a gay person.

This is a time when many young people consider running away and some regardless of age feel huge stress and consider suicide or just moving out of the family but DON'T do this. It's a time when you may feel unworthy, alone, a disappointment to family, you may feel shame or fear, or as if you are going against your religion. Some even feel as if there is no hope and you may feel as if the whole world will reject you. But most gays and lesbians move through the experience of "coming out" relatively unscathed even though at the time it's scary.

Of course there will be tough days with family and this is why we suggest to be sure in your self. Have information for them and support for yourself. Be prepared for questions and have answers ready.

Talk to lesbian and gay support groups before you come out. Phone numbers can be found in gay papers. Call the AIDS Council in your state and seek information. Check the internet for information. If you have gay friends confide in them. If you have a straight friend or relative that you can confide in, do so. There are support systems out there and many ways to quietly access information about your feelings and what to expect.



When you do “come out” there are many agencies and social groups where you can meet and make friends. Plus, in these groups you will meet people who have all travelled the path of “coming out” ahead of you, and so should be supportive of you.

Often times before coming out people feel isolated and as if they’re the only person who is gay. But remember one in five families have a gay member so you most definitely are not alone. And nearly every person knows a gay person whether they realise it or not.

### **Telling Friends**

It is often recommended to “come out” to family and friends at about the same time. This is done with the intention of diminishing gossip and permitting you to be open with your life sooner.

When informing “straight” friends about your sexuality, be positive and assertive. Let them know you aren’t seeking sympathy or moral support. Let them know you are comfortable with your sexuality. You are just giving them the news. You want them to know the real you and you feel they need to know about your sexuality so an honest friendship can continue and you don’t have to pretend or continue the lie any longer.

Friends may be stunned and shocked at first but give them time to digest the news. Remember, you didn’t come to terms with your sexuality immediately and they may not either. So be prepared to give them time to adjust to the news.

If by chance you lose friendships because of your disclosure it won't be the end of the world. Perhaps they were never really a true friend and never lose sight of your own self worth and the importance of honesty with self. It needs to be remembered when we disclose to friends we aren’t seeking permission, just being honest with them

### **The workplace yes or no:**

When you have come out to family members and friends the next step to consider is your workplace. If it seems too unfriendly maybe you should consider looking for new employment. Initially, people often argue “that it is none of their business”. True, perhaps so why not be honest. Sometimes people keep

themselves unnecessarily in the closet by underestimating the people around them.

If you are waiting for the ultimate work environment, you will wait forever. If you feel comfortable enough and willing to take the risk, maybe you should. There may be the usual shock and dismay and people may need time to digest the news, but ultimately you should be happier long term by being honest with the world.

Some people believe an off handed remark works well with work colleagues when they ask about flatmates, partners or what you did on the weekend. This lets the workmate know without having to make comment.

Good luck and take one step at a time. Be patient, sensible and assertive.

### **The stages of “coming out”**

Acceptance of self – coming to terms with your sexual orientation

Sorting out feelings and feeling good about your self

Telling loved ones

Not caring about who knows your sexual orientation

### **Ask yourself before you disclose**

Are you sure?

Are you comfortable with yourself?

Do you have support if things go wrong when disclosing?

Can you answer the questions you may be asked about homosexuality?

Can you be patient with family members while they come to terms with this information about you?

Why are you “coming out”?

### **The most common questions and statements are**

Are you sure it isn't just a phase?

If you're male “How do you know you haven't had a girlfriend” “You have had a girlfriend”

If you're female – “You haven't had a boyfriend”. “You have had a boyfriend”

You're too young to know

It's your friends who are the problem

Were we bad parents/ what did we do wrong?

Have you seen a doctor or counsellor?

Will you go to a doctor or counsellor?

Don't use shock tactics  
Have info ready

Finally, if you're unsure and have no one to discuss your feelings with don't worry sexuality develops overtime. Don't do anything, don't worry and don't rush the issue.

Remember there are many people who have worked through the same issues before you and many more will travel a similar path after you.

Remember that it's your decision to "come out" don't be rushed by anyone and when you do "come out" don't allow yourself to feel guilty by anyone because of your decision. Initially, try to be sensitive to family's emotions but avoid the trap of being the "keeper of secrets" .

**Anonymous information and/or ongoing support can be accessed through these agencies:**

Open Doors - Ph. 32577660 - An organisation that is supportive for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth under 18years and their families

Sexual Health and AIDS Counselling (SHACS) – ph. 3227-6395

Queensland AIDS Council – ph. 30171777  
Safe sex information, support groups and referrals for social groups

Brisbane Sexual Health Clinic – 3227-8666

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) – 3017-1739  
Emotional support for parents and those in the process of "coming out"

Gay and Lesbian Welfare Association (GLWA) ph. 3252-2997  
Telephone counselling