

Just the Facts about Sexual Orientation & Youth

About Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction that one feels toward men, toward women, or toward both. Although sexual orientation ranges along a continuum, it is generally discussed in terms of heterosexual—attraction to the other sex—homosexual—attraction to the same sex—and bisexual—attraction to both sexes. Sexual orientation has not been conclusively found to be determined by any particular factor or factors, and the timing of the emergence, recognition, and expression of one's sexual orientation varies among individuals.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adolescents follow developmental pathways that are both similar to and different from those of heterosexual adolescents. However, LGB youth must also cope with the prejudice, discrimination, and violence in society and, in some cases, in their own families, schools, and communities.

What is “Reparative Therapy”?

The term “reparative therapy” refers to counseling and psychotherapy aimed at eliminating or suppressing homosexuality. The most important fact about these “therapies” is that they are based on a view of homosexuality that has been rejected by all the major mental health professions. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association, which defines the standards of the field, does not include homosexuality. All other major health professional organizations have supported the American Psychiatric Association in its declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973.

What Do the Experts Say?

Because of the aggressive promotion of efforts to change sexual orientation through so-called “reparative therapy,” a number of medical, health, and mental health professional organizations have issued public statements about the dangers of this approach.

- **The American Academy of Pediatrics** advises youth that *counseling may be helpful for you if you feel confused about your sexual identity. Avoid any treatments that claim to be able to change a person's sexual orientation, or treatment ideas that see homosexuality as a sickness.*
- **The American Counseling Association** adopted a resolution in 1998 stating that it *opposes portrayals of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth and adults as mentally ill due to their sexual orientation; and supports the dissemination of accurate information about sexual orientation, mental health, and appropriate interventions in order to counteract bias that is based on ignorance or unfounded beliefs about same-gender sexual orientation.*
- **The American Psychiatric Association**, in its 2000 position statement on “reparative” therapy, states: *Psychotherapeutic modalities to convert or “repair” homosexuality are based on developmental theories whose scientific validity is questionable... In the last four decades, “reparative” therapists have not produced any rigorous scientific research to substantiate their claims of cure... The potential risks of reparative therapy are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive behavior, since therapist alignment with societal prejudices against homosexuality may reinforce self-hatred already experienced by the patient.*

As these statements make clear, the nation's leading professional medical, health, and mental health organizations do not support efforts to change young people's sexual orientation through therapy and have raised serious concerns about the potential harm from such efforts.

About Just the Facts

First formed in 1998, the Just the Facts coalition produced the original version of “Just the Facts” to respond to concerns that school officials were receiving inaccurate information on the issue of sexual orientation. The coalition developed the current publication, recognizing the continuing concern about the safety and wellbeing of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in school.

Members of the coalition are:

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Association of School Administrators
- American Counseling Association
- American Federation of Teachers
- American Psychological Association
- American School Counselor Association
- American School Health Association
- Interfaith Alliance
- National Association of School Psychologists
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Association of Social Workers
- National Education Association
- School Social Work Association of America

To read the complete resource, please visit

www.glsen.org/thefacts

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Coming Out:

Tips for Allies of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Youth

Did someone just come out to you as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?

Here are 10 tips to help you navigate the coming out process and how you can be a strong form of support for this person in your life.

- 1.** It takes a lot of courage for someone to come out to you—listen to all they have to say without interrupting, judging, tuning out or buying into stereotypes about LGBT people.
- 2.** Tell them how pleased you are that they trusted you enough to share something so personal and congratulate them on the bravery it took to be so honest.
- 3.** Let them know that you feel the same way about them as you always have and that nothing has changed (except that you can be even closer than before).
- 4.** Ask questions and show that you are interested in learning about their feelings and experiences. Be respectful and stay away from personal issues unless they let you know it's okay.
- 5.** If you are feeling uncomfortable or upset, be honest. Let them know you may need some time to process everything, but acknowledge that it is your problem to work out and not their responsibility.
- 6.** Remember that you cannot and should not try to change them—you have an opportunity here to support, not to reform them.
- 7.** Ask what you can do to support them or what they need from you right now.
- 8.** Follow up. The coming out conversation should be the first of many. Continue to check in and ask questions over time.
- 9.** Be open to socializing with their new friends and in a variety of settings, both LGBT and straight. Let them know that they don't have to compartmentalize their lives.
- 10.** Be an advocate. Read up on LGBT issues, wear an LGBT-friendly button or sticker, join a LGBT group, and confront homophobia in whatever ways you can.

For more resources and support, please visit: www.glsen.org



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