
Sexuality explained

Summary

- Sexuality is diverse, and there are many different types. It can take time to figure out the sexuality that fits you best. And your sexuality can change over time.
 - Coming to terms with your sexuality can be a very liberating, exciting and positive experience.
 - Sexuality is an important part of who you are. There is no right or wrong, it's about what's right for you.
 - Some people have a hard time accepting others who are different to themselves. If someone gives you a hard time about your sexuality, it's good to talk to someone about it. You don't need to deal with it by yourself.
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Sexuality is not about who you have sex with, or how often you have it. Sexuality is about your sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions and behaviours towards other people. You can find other people physically, sexually or emotionally attractive, and all those things are a part of your sexuality.

Sexuality is diverse and personal, and it is an important part of who you are. Discovering your sexuality can be a very liberating, exciting and positive experience.

Some people experience discrimination due to their sexuality. If someone gives you a hard time about your sexuality, it's good to talk to someone about it.

Different types of sexuality

Sometimes, it can take time to figure out the sexuality that fits you best. And your sexuality can change over time. It can be confusing; so don't worry if you are unsure.

You might be drawn to men or to women, to both or to neither. There is no right or wrong – it's about what's right for you. And while there are common terms to describe different types of sexuality, you don't have to adopt a label to describe yourself.

Heterosexual and homosexual

Most people are attracted to the opposite sex – boys who like girls, and women who like men, for example. These people are heterosexual, or 'straight'.

Some people are attracted to the same sex. These people are homosexual. Around 10 per cent of young Australians experience same-sex attraction, most during puberty.

'Lesbian' is the common term for people who identify as women and are same-sex attracted. 'Gay' is the most common term for people who identify as men and are same-sex attracted, although women identifying as lesbian also sometimes use this word.

The Better Health Channel has more information on [lesbian sexuality](#) and [gay male sexuality](#).

Bisexual

Sexuality can be more complicated than being straight or gay. Some people are attracted to both men and women, and are known as bisexual.

Bisexual does not mean the attraction is evenly weighted – a person may have stronger feelings for one gender than another. And this can vary depending on who they meet.

There are different kinds of bisexuality. Some people who are attracted to men and women still consider

themselves to be mainly straight or gay. Or they might have sexual feelings towards both genders but only have intercourse with one.

Other people see sexual attraction as more grey than black and white. These people find everyday labels too rigid. Some prefer to identify as 'queer'. And others use the term 'pan', or 'pansexual', to show they are attracted to different kinds of people no matter what their gender, identity or expression.

There are many differences between individuals, so bisexuality is a general term only. You can read more about it at the Better Health Channel's page on [bisexuality](#).

Asexual

A person who identifies as asexual ('ace' for short) is someone who does not experience, or experiences very little, sexual attraction.

Asexuality is not a choice, like abstinence (where someone chooses not to have sex with anyone, whether they are attracted to them or not). Asexuality is a sexual orientation, like homosexuality or heterosexuality.

Some people may strongly identify with being asexual, except for a few infrequent experiences of sexual attraction (grey-asexuality). Some people feel sexual attraction only after they develop a strong emotional bond with someone (this is known as demisexuality). Other people experience asexuality in a range of other ways.

Discrimination based on sexuality

Equality and freedom from discrimination are fundamental human rights that belong to all people.

In most states in Australia, including Victoria, it is against the law to discriminate against someone because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or lawful sexual activity. However, discrimination can still occur.

If you think you have been **discriminated against** or victimised because of your sexuality (**or a range of other reasons**) contact the **[Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](#)**.

For information on the legal obligations of employers regarding discrimination based on sexual identity, see the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission webpage on [equal opportunity practice guidelines](#).

Better Health Channel has more information about [gay and lesbian discrimination](#).

Sexuality and mental health

LGBTI people have an increased risk of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, homelessness, self-harming and suicidal thoughts, compared with the general population. This is particularly true of young LGBTI people who are coming to terms with their sexuality and experiencing victimisation and bullying at school.

Some of the stressful experiences that can affect the mental health of an LGBTI person are:

- feeling different from other people
- being bullied (verbally or physically)
- feeling pressure to deny or change their sexuality
- feeling worried about coming out, and then being rejected or isolated
- feeling unsupported or misunderstood.

These pressures are on top of all the other stuff people have to deal with in life such as managing school, finding a job, forming relationships and making sense of your identity and place in the world.

Helping someone struggling with their sexuality and mental health

If you are worried that someone you know has a mental health problem, look out for changes in their mood, behaviour, relationships, appetite, sleep patterns, coping and thinking. If these changes last more than a couple of weeks, talk to them about getting help. A good place to start is their doctor, or a phone or online service such as [QLife](#), [beyondblue](#) or [ehespace](#) (for young people).

If you are struggling with your own sexuality:

- Get support if you're finding it hard to cope. Try talking to someone you trust – a friend, relative, doctor or counsellor, or use a helpline such as [QLife](#), [beyondblue](#) or [eheadspace](#).
- Don't hang around someone if they are abusive to you.
- Remember, there is no rush to figure out your sexuality. Take your time. And don't feel pressured to put a label on it.
- If you think you're gay but you don't want to 'come out', it's okay. If you want, you can read more about [coming out](#).

Where to get help

For information about your rights:

- [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](#)

If you want to talk to someone, chat online, or find out more about LGBTI issues:

- [QLife](#) (counselling and referral service for LGBTI people) – Tel. **1800 184 527**
- [headspace](#) (mental health service for ages 12–25) – Tel. **1800 650 890**
- [ReachOut](#) (youth mental health service)
- [beyondblue](#) (for anyone feeling depressed or anxious) – Tel. **1300 22 4636**, and [Youthbeyondblue](#)
- [Lifeline](#) (support for anyone having a personal crisis) – Tel. **13 11 14**
- [Kids Helpline](#) Tel. **1800 55 1800**
- [Switchboard](#) Tel. **1800 184 527** (telephone counselling, information and referrals)
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) Tel. **1300 659 467** (for anyone thinking about suicide)
- You may also be interested in visiting these sites:
 - [ACON](#) (for LGBTI health and HIV prevention and support)
 - [PFLAG Australia](#) (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)

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