Gay male sexuality

Summary

- There is nothing wrong with feeling or being gay.
- You don't have to deal with your feelings about being gay alone. There are confidential telephone support services you can call if you need someone to talk to.

Many men report that they had experiences with people of the same sex when they were young. This is often a normal part of exploring their sexuality. Men who go on to describe themselves as 'same-sex attracted' or 'gay' have a strong physical and emotional attraction to men that they don't usually feel for women.

Being a gay man is natural

There is a lot of pressure from society for young men to be heterosexual or 'straight'. This can often cause feelings of isolation for young men who are gay and make them scared to show their sexuality.

It is important to remember:

- There are gay men in every culture and every country.
- Being gay is just a form of sexuality. Unfortunately, many people find this hard to understand.

Why some men are gay

There is no real explanation as to why some men are gay and others are not. Although there is no right or wrong answer to the question, two of the possible reasons suggested by researchers are:

- We are born with our sexual orientation.
- Some people become gay because of some childhood experiences.

The most important thing to remember is that being gay is not a disease to be ‘cured’ or 'fixed'. It is just part of the wide variety of human sexuality.

Knowing whether you're gay

There is no test or questionnaire you can complete that will answer this question for you. If you think you might be gay, it is important that you:

- Don't deny your feelings.
- Take your time to explore your sexuality and what being gay might mean to you.
- Remember you are not alone. There are confidential services you can contact if you feel concerned, such as Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800.

For some men, feelings that they are attracted to people of the same sex emerge when they are quite young and continue into adulthood. For others, these feelings don't actually start until later in life. Some men who are attracted to other men, are also attracted to women. This is called bisexuality. You may find you don't identify with any labels, and that's also okay.

Telling people you are gay

Before you decide to 'come out', you should consider who you will tell and what their reaction may be. Coming out is a long process. Be prepared for both positive and negative reactions. For some people, coming out is a positive step. For others, it is an unnecessary complication. Decide on a time and place when you can speak openly and honestly, and when there are no distractions around.

Knowing whether someone else is gay
You probably won’t know if a man is gay until he tells you. There is no way you can tell if a man is gay just by looking at him. How you dress and behave is about your personal identity, not about your sexuality.

**Gay relationships**
The major difference between gay and straight relationships is that there are two men instead of a man and a woman. Gay men fall in love and form committed relationships. Like all relationships, there will be both good and bad times. There are no rules you have to follow in gay relationships. Everyone is free to make up their own rules.

**Safe sex**
Sex can be a big step for a young gay man. First of all, make sure you are ready to become sexually active. You shouldn’t feel forced into it, and you should feel happy with your reasons for wanting to have sex.

Before you become sexually active, you must also consider how to do this in a safe and honest way. Talk about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs). Always use protection during sex and sex play to prevent contact with body fluids that could transmit a sexually transmissible infection.

The best protection against sexually transmissible infections is to use barrier protection such as condoms and dams (a thin piece of latex placed over the anal area during oral sex). Condoms can be bought from supermarkets, chemists and other outlets. Latex free condoms are also available from some outlets. Male condoms, dams and lubricant are available free from the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre and many other sexual health clinics around Australia.

**Finding more information**
You can get more information from:

- The Gay and Lesbian Switchboard – this service is anonymous and will not show up on your telephone bill. You can chat to someone about your feelings and they can answer many of your questions and tell you about support groups and social functions.

- Visit reputable websites – such as twenty10 or Reach Out

- Gay and lesbian newspapers – every state has a gay and lesbian newspaper. This will tell you what is on and how to access support and social groups. You can also subscribe to national magazines.

**Where to get help**

- Switchboard (Gay and Lesbian) Tel. (03) 9663 2939 or 1800 184 527
- Kids Help Line Tel. 1800 55 1800 (24 hour telephone counselling service for young people aged 5-18)
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14 (24-hour counselling service)
- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Tel. (03) 9341 6200 or 1800 032 017 or TTY (for the hearing impaired) (03) 9347 8619
- HIV Sexual Health Connect Tel. 1800 038 125
- QLife – a national counselling and referral service for people of diverse sex, genders and sexualities Tel. 1800 184 527 or chat online between 5.30 pm and 10.30 pm