



# There's No Place Like Home...

FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION

## Sexual Orientation

*A topic many parents are reluctant to approach*

### Inside

What's Taught at Your School?	2
Teen Perspective	2
Resources	4

### A sexually literate person...

Has an accurate, well-informed, age-appropriate understanding of all aspects of sexuality—biological, cultural, social and ethical.

Possesses a strong sense of personal values about sexuality and sexual health.

Demonstrates respect for the values of others.

One of the most difficult sexuality-related topics for many parents is sexual orientation. Parents often feel ill-equipped to talk about the subject when their children bring it up or it is mentioned on a TV show their children are watching. They may feel they don't have the knowledge to speak accurately or they may feel conflicted about how they view different sexual orientations. For many, sexual orientation was not something that was talked about in their youth, but now seems to be constantly in the news, on TV, and is being discussed in schools and places of worship. Even more difficult for many parents is when their children disclose that they are gay or bisexual. They may not know what to think, how to feel or where to turn for help.

All people are sexual beings. Engaging in sexual activity is a normal and natural way for humans to express their feelings, feel comforted and



learn something about themselves. Sexuality is also a personal issue, and as such, each of us has different sexual feelings and different ways of expressing our sexuality.

Different terms that are used when communicating about sexuality can be confusing. When people talk about their sexual identity, they are referring to how they **feel** about their sexuality, how they think of themselves sexually and who they are sexually attracted to. They could be attracted to men, to women, or to both—or they may not feel sexual attraction at all. Sexual behavior,

on the other hand, refers to how we **act** upon our sexual feelings. A third component, our sexual orientation, is how we **label** ourselves, whether we consider ourselves heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual.

Heterosexuality is the sexual attraction to members of the other gender, while homosexuality refers to sexual attraction to the same gender. A homosexual man may be called gay, while a homosexual woman may be called lesbian. Bisexuality is defined as attraction to both genders. Those who are not attracted to either gender are referred to as asexual. All of these orientations are normal and have no known cause.

Heterosexism is the belief that heterosexuality is better than homosexuality or bisexuality.

*(Continued on page 3)*

Comprehensive sexuality education programs... help young people learn communication skills that are needed to help them become sexually healthy adults.

## What's Taught at Your School?

Do you know what is being taught about sexuality in your children's schools? Now that school has started, this would be an ideal time to find out what your children learn about sexuality in school. Ask teachers, principals and school board members about the sexuality education programs in their schools.

Research shows that sexuality education programs that are comprehensive allow students to gain the knowledge and skills they need to make good decisions about sexuality throughout their lives. Comprehensive sexuality education provides developmentally-appropriate information on many sexuality-related topics, such as reproduction, relationships, body image, gender

roles, birth control and abstinence. Furthermore, it helps young people learn decision making and communication skills that are needed to help them become sexually healthy adults.

*Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Kindergarten–12th Grade* can help you evaluate the sexuality education program at your children's schools. It identifies six key concept areas that are included in comprehensive programs, as well as providing age appropriate information. This publication is available on the internet at <http://www.siecus.org/pubs/guidelines/guidelines.pdf>.

Planned Parenthood of Indiana believes that comprehensive sexuality education is the best way to give Indiana students the



tools they need to make sound decisions about their own bodies and health, and become sexually literate adults. Planned Parenthood leads the **Truth For Youth Indiana!** coalition to raise awareness of this important issue and make comprehensive sexuality education the norm in Indiana. For more information about the coalition and its mission, or to find out how you can help, please contact our **Truth For Youth Indiana!** coordinator, Jen Jorczak (317-637-4362) or e-mail [truthforyouth@ppin.org](mailto:truthforyouth@ppin.org).

## Teen Perspective: What Would You Say?

We asked a teen from our Peer Education program in Bloomington the following question: What would you suggest a parent do or say when their teen "comes out" as gay, lesbian or bisexual?

I think that parents who have just been told by their teen that they are gay, lesbian or bisexual should express their support to them. For some people it may be a very difficult task. I believe that the best words parents could say to their teen in this situation is "I accept that you are gay/lesbian/bisexual and I still love you." I believe that many teens fear that after

"coming out," their parents may be very upset, or even worse, not want to be associated with them any more. I believe it is crucial to let them know that this is not the case at all.

For those parents who do not accept what their teen has told them, I think that instead of getting angry, the parents should express

their concerns and doubts and ask questions. I believe that it is important for them to understand how their teen is feeling and what they've been going through. I think it is important for the parents to understand that their teen did not choose their sexual orientation and they will always want approval from their parents.

~Shahana

## Sexual Orientation *(continued from page 1)*

Some questions to ask yourself when considering your own sexuality are:

- To whom am I physically attracted?
- With whom do I enjoy sex?
- Do I consider myself heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual?

Asking yourself these questions is a good beginning to understanding your own sexuality. Your children are asking themselves these questions, too. They are growing up in a society that may be much different than the one you grew up in. Communication about different sexual orientations is more open. Everyone is no longer assumed to be heterosexual or expected to limit sexual activity to



heterosexual behavior. Therefore, your children may feel much more comfortable exploring and experimenting with their sexuality. For those who consider themselves homosexual, they may be more likely to express themselves than have young people in the past.

It is helpful for parents and other adult caregivers to recognize sexual differences in young people and accept that their children may not fit in to the traditional heterosexual model. When adults who care for them do not accept their different sexual orientation, kids often feel frustrated and may resort to dangerous extremes. Gay and lesbian teenagers may feel forced to leave home because of conflicts over their sexual orientation. A large number of homeless young people are members of sexual minorities. Feelings of isolation and not being accepted in homosexual and bisexual youths can lead to many dangerous activities, including attempted suicide.

“Coming out,” or deciding to be open about one’s sexual orientation, is usually a long, thought-out

process. Young people can be especially emotional, vulnerable, and afraid of rejection at that time. They may be hesitant to come out to parents because they are unsure of how their parents will react or their parents may have made it clear that they will not accept a sexual orientation that they do not consider normal. By being open-minded about sexual orientation, adults can develop a more understanding, supporting and comfortable relationship with their children.

While it may be difficult for parents to accept their child’s sexual orientation if it is different from their own or what they consider the ideal, there are places they can go for information and support. Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is a well-known and respected national support, education and advocacy organization for gay, lesbian, bisexual people, their families and friends, with more than 500 affiliates across the country. It has helped many families successfully adjust to learning that their children have different sexual orientations and is easily reached through its Web site at [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org).

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*There's No Place Like Home... for Sexuality Education* is a publication for families by the staff of the Education and Training Department at Planned Parenthood of Indiana, Inc.



Real life. Real talk.

Planned Parenthood strives to ensure that sexuality is understood as an essential lifelong aspect of being human, and that it is celebrated with respect, openness and mutuality.

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## Resource on Sexual Orientation

Parents and teens may find the following materials helpful when trying to better understand sexual orientation.

### Videos

*It's Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in School.* Debra Chasnoff and Helen Cohen. Women's Educational Media. 1997. 78 minutes.

*Lipstick.* Scenarios. 2003. 10 minutes.

*On Being Gay.* Brian McNaught. TRB Productions. 1996. 80 minutes.

### Books

*Free Your Mind: The Book for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth – And Their Allies.* Ellen Bass and Kate Kaufman. HarperPerennial. 1996.

*Getting Ready for Benjamin: Preparing Teachers for Sexual Diversity in the Classroom.* Rita M. Kissen. Rowman and Littlefield. 2002.

*GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens.* Kelly Huegel. Free Spirit Publishing. 2003.

*Homosexuality/Heterosexuality: Concepts of Sexual Orientation.* David P. McWhirter, Stephanie A. Sanders, and June Machover Reinisch. Oxford University Press. 1990.

*Now That You Know: A Parents' Guide to Understanding Their Gay and Lesbian Children.* 3rd edition. Betty Fairchild and Nancy Hayward. Harcourt Brace. 1998.

These resources can be found at the Planned Parenthood Resource Center in Indianapolis. Contact us at 317-637-4377.