

you are telling and want to become closer to him/her. If you are financially dependent on your parents, you may want to wait to come out to them. It is possible that they may react poorly and try to force you out of the house. You may want to wait until you are more independent. If you do come out, it's a good idea to start by telling someone who you are pretty certain will have a positive reaction. Be sure to have literature available to help respond to the questions you will most likely face. (PFLAG NYC can provide you with information to offer your family and friends.) If and when you do decide to come out to your parents and others, remember that PFLAG is here to help. See details about our helpline and monthly meetings on the back panel.

What will my future be like? Can I live a normal life?

Discrimination against gay people still exists, but attitudes towards homosexual, bisexual and transgendered orientation are starting to change as society becomes better informed. There are many places where you will be accepted for who you are and where you will be able to live in relative safety.

Many churches have begun to welcome gay people as members of their congregations, and some religions have begun to recognize gay unions. In addition, more and more employers offer benefits to domestic partners. Many gay couples also choose to raise children, and several states allow gay couples to adopt.

Ask for our special brochures for young people— *Be Yourself: Questions and Answers for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth* and *Read this Before Coming Out*.

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Additional brochures available from PFLAG National at www.pflag.org:

- *Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality* (American Psychological Association)
- *Be Yourself!* (for gay youth)
- *Faith in Our Families*
- *Is Homosexuality a Sin?*
- *Our Daughters and Sons*
- *Our Trans Children* (for parents of transgendered children)
- *Read This Before Coming Out To Your Parents* (for parents and children)
- *Opening the Straight Spouse's Closet*
- *Recommended Reading List*



PFLAG
NEW YORK CITY

Our main monthly meeting is on the second Sunday of every month from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at St. Bartholomew's Community House 109 E. 50th St. (between Park & Lex) New York, NY

For other meeting locations throughout the city, see our website.

All are welcome, including parents, friends, family members and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, with or without their families.

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Answers to Common Questions About Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth

**Parents, Families and Friends of
Lesbians and Gays of New York City**
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Tough Times for Teens

Being a teenager can be rough. Not only are you changing, but your relationships are as well. You're starting to exercise your independence from your parents and are beginning to plan for life after school. Your focus is changing and, all of the sudden, you're thinking more about something that didn't mean much to you a few years ago—sex. It's a natural development, but if you're gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, it can be doubly confusing to discover that you're attracted to someone of the same sex. This brochure is designed to answer some of your questions about what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered.

Note: From this point on, we will use the word "gay" to refer persons who are not heterosexual, both male and female.

I think I might be gay, but I'm not sure. How do I know?

Some people say they've always known that they were "different" in some way. When they eventually realized they were gay, many of the things they had felt growing up seemed to make sense. For others, the realization is triggered by the many changes that accompany adolescence. Some don't recognize their sexual orientation until adulthood.

It is important to remember that, just because someone has had a crush on, or has had a sexual experience with someone of the same sex, that does not necessarily mean that s/he is gay. Think of sexuality as a spectrum.

Heterosexuals—people who are only attracted to people of the opposite sex—are on one end. Homosexuals—people who are only attracted to people of the same sex—are on the other end. Bisexuals—people who could be attracted to people of either sex—are in the middle. Transgendered people—whose gender identity differs from the physical sex they were assigned at birth—may consider themselves hetero- or homosexual. Everyone falls somewhere on this spectrum.

The important thing to remember is to figure out that there is no rush to find out if you are gay or straight. Take your time and don't put any pressure on yourself. Just know that whoever you turn out to be is okay.

How can I be sure I'm gay if I haven't had sex?

It is possible to know you're gay even if you're a virgin or haven't had a same-sex physical relationship. Being gay isn't just about sex; it is about emotion. Just like straight people, gay people fall in love and have long-lasting, meaningful relationships. Physical attraction is just one indicator of sexual orientation.

Isn't being gay abnormal?

Being gay is completely normal and healthy. No one is sure what causes people to be gay, but most scientists agree that it is most likely the result of a complex interaction between biological and environmental factors. According to the American Psychological Association, "...Homosexuality is not an illness. It does not require treatment and is not changeable." By some estimates, one of every ten people is gay.

How can I be gay? I don't fit the stereotypes.

It is a common misconception that all gay men are effeminate and all lesbians are masculine. Though there are some men and women who fit these stereotypes, there are many who don't. The important thing is that you be yourself.

Should I worry about HIV and AIDS?

Everyone should be informed about HIV and AIDS, not just gay people. It's not your sexual orientation that puts you at risk for HIV infection, it's your behavior. HIV is transmitted in three main ways: (1) through unprotected sex with an infected person; (2) through sharing needles or syringes with an infected person; and (3) the virus can be passed from an infected woman to her baby during pregnancy. Be sure to educate yourself regarding not only HIV/AIDS, but also other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). PFLAG NYC can provide you with contact information for organizations that educate people regarding HIV/AIDS and STDs.

Should I "come out"?

Telling other people that you are gay is called "coming out." Deciding whether to come out is a very personal decision and one that should not be made too quickly. You should only come out if you want to and if you are ready. Coming out is a big decision because, although you hope that your friends and family will support you, it is possible that they won't. There are many issues to consider before making the decision to come out. You should never come out in anger or frustration, but instead because you love the person