Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth

These 5 terms are often shortened to GLBTQ and relate to sexual orientation or sexual identification. Sexual orientation means whether a person is attracted to a person of the same sex or different sex.

COMMON TERMS USED TO DESCRIBE SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- **Straight or heterosexual**: A person who has sexual or romantic feelings for people of the opposite sex. This means men who are attracted to women and women who are attracted to men.
- **Gay or homosexual**: A person who has sexual or romantic feelings for people of the same sex. This means men who are attracted to men and women who are attracted to women.
- **Bisexual or bi**: People who have sexual or romantic feelings for people of both sexes.
- **Lesbian**: A woman who is gay.
- **Transgender**: Transgender is a term that describes people whose views of themselves as male, female, both, or neither do not match their assigned gender. Assigned gender is the identification as female or male based on the genitals present at birth.
- **Questioning**: A person who is not yet sure of his or her sexual orientation.

The reasons that people are of different sexual orientations and identifications are unknown and clearly complicated. Factors may include genetics or biology. It is likely that the origins of all people’s sexual identity and attraction involve multiple factors. People of all ages, races, family backgrounds, and body types are GLBTQ.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY CHILD IS WORRIED ABOUT HIS OR HER SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR IDENTIFICATION?

If your child is confused or worried, it is important that he or she talk about these feelings. Your child may feel comfortable talking with one or more of these people:

- His or her pediatrician.
- A close friend.
- An adult relative.
- A teacher, school counselor, coach, minister, or other adult mentor.
- A local gay, lesbian, and bisexual support group.

As a parent, supporting your child is the most important and essential thing you can do. Even if you do not agree with the choices your child may be making, your support of your child as a person is critical. Rejecting your child during this important time puts him or her at risk for running away, substance use, and even suicide. There are resources for parents available, such as PFLAG (www.pflag.org).

SUPPORTING YOUR GLBTQ CHILD

GLBTQ youth face many challenges, including family and peer rejection, bullying, harassment, trauma, abuse, poor housing, legal problems, lack of financial support, and educational problems. A review article in the Archives this month describes current information about how health care providers can provide the best care for transgender youth. Parent support is very important for all youth regarding their sexual orientation or sexual identification. There are many excellent resources for parents to learn more about how to provide support for their children’s sexual orientation and identity.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Academy of Pediatrics
Education for Parents

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To find this and other Advice for Patients articles, go to the Advice for Patients link on the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine Web site at http://www.archpediatrics.com.

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