

# straight and gay:

## Sexual orientation

Being attracted to another person can be both exciting and confusing. And it is a natural and healthy part of life. The emotional, romantic, sexual attraction that you might feel toward someone is called sexual orientation.

Many people are mostly attracted to someone who is the opposite gender than they are. This is called heterosexual, or straight. Other people are attracted to someone who is the same gender as themselves. So, if they are a guy, they are attracted to guys, and if they are a girl, they are attracted to girls. This is called homosexual or gay, or lesbian (a word that describes girls and women). And there are also people who are bisexual, which means they are attracted to both guys and girls. Your sexual orientation is not about whether you have had sex, or with whom. Instead, it is about feelings and whom you are emotionally and physically attracted to.



**Q:** If I am gay, will I be accepted?

**A:** Some people will accept you and some people won't. This can hurt, but after a while it hurts even more to not be yourself. Unfortunately, prejudice and discrimination are a part of our world. People often fear what they do not understand, and hate what they fear. Homophobia is the fear of being gay, and it creates prejudice toward people who are openly gay or bisexual. However, these prejudices are losing their power as more people say, "I'm gay and I'm okay," or "My friends are gay and they're cool."



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**Q:** I sometimes think about how good looking some of my friends are. How do I know if I am straight, gay, or bisexual?

**A:** Some people have known their sexual orientation since they were very young. Others learn later on whom they are most attracted to. And that's OK, too. One of the biggest challenges of being a teen is to just be yourself. Part of that means being gay or bisexual or straight, and finding safe ways to explore your feelings about your sexual identity.

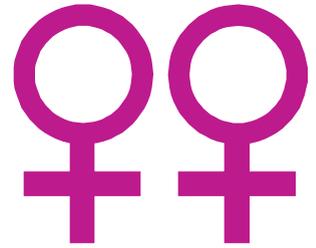


**Q:** If I'm gay, should I come out?

**A:** Coming out means telling other people that you are gay. It should be your choice to come out—only if you want to and only when you are ready. You can come out to only one person, to your friends, to your family, or to everyone you know. Being in the closet means not telling people that you are gay. There can be many good reasons for coming out, and many good reasons for staying in the closet. Before you come out, think about what this will mean for you, and be sure that you are safe. It might be especially helpful to talk with an adult whom you trust.

**Q:** If I come out, will I lose my friends?

**A:** Good friends are true if they can accept you for who you are. Some friends might get scared and leave when they find out that you are gay. This can really hurt. However, others will become even closer friends and truly respect you for being who you are. These are the people who are really your friends. Just like you, lots of other teens are wondering about their sexual orientation, or think they might be gay and are afraid to be themselves. One of the best things you can do is find an adult whom you trust and can talk with in confidence.



Though it is more common to be straight, people who are gay or bisexual are happy, successful in school, find work they enjoy, spend time with good friends, and have normal lives.