

Coming in . . .

**A support booklet for young people who
think they may be lesbian, gay, bisexual
or unsure of their sexuality**

Written by the people of Allsorts Youth Project



Christy: Allsorts

Who am I?

If you are beginning to think about who you are and how you fit in at school or with your friends this booklet may be for you. You may be feeling confused. You may be thinking 'I don't fancy anyone of the opposite sex yet!'. You may feel attracted to a friend who is the same sex as you. Inside you may be saying 'Help! I'm scared!'. It may seem that there are no pathways forward, or that there are so many you don't know which one to take.

You're ok ...

This booklet has been put together by a group of young people who are all under 25 and either lesbian, gay, bisexual or unsure of their sexuality, and they all attend a youth-group in Brighton called 'Allsorts'. With art, poetry and stories they want to let you know that there is hope, and support if you look for it, and that you will have hidden inner resources which you can use too.

Members of the Allsorts Youth Group want to take this chance to say ...

DON'T Panic!!!!...We've felt like that too!

Other people who can use this book ...

This resource isn't just for LGBU (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or unsure) young people - you may be a teacher or youth-worker, wanting to understand how a young (LGBU) person may feel so that you can support them in your work. You may be not be gay yourself but have a friend or brother or sister who you think may be LGBU, and you may feeling unsure of how you can help. Or you may be a parent looking for information to enable you to better support your son or daughter.

How to use this booklet???? - It is split into 5 parts

- Part 1 = Joining an LGBU Youth Group
- Part 2 = Coming Out = Stories, Q&As, Dos and Don'ts etc.
- Part 3 = Coming In = I'm not sure, my safe space, support
- Part 4 = Helping someone who may be gay
- Part 5 = Contacts and Resources

Part I- Joining an LGBU youth group...

A youth worker at Allsorts says...

Every week young people contact us at Allsorts Youth Project. Many find themselves fancying a friend of the same sex and think 'I'm a lesbian!' or 'I'm Bisexual!' or 'I'm Gay!'. Others are confused and just not sure what they feel. Some are bullied at school and are fed up of having to pretend to be something that they are not. Nearly all of them at some stage feel scared, confused and isolated.



It takes Allsorts...

If you are feeling lonely and isolated because you think you could be lesbian, gay or bisexual, then one good way of meeting like minded people is to go to an LGBU Youth

group like Allsorts. Allsorts is not the only lesbian and gay youth group about - there may one that's closer to you (see our contacts page at the end).

VOX POP -

EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE JOINING ALLSORTS

"It took me a long time to build up the courage to come along - I never knew any gay people before. I was worried about meeting lots of people I didn't know"

"I was scared to become a part of it in case I wasn't gay"

"People can be themselves and don't have to hide away something inside of them...Allsorts makes me feel safe and secure and more confident"

"At school they assume you have a different sex partner. At Allsorts they don't assume. You have a choice. It makes you feel more open to answer. It's a lot easier to talk about relationships and anything"

"Allsorts has helped me talk to my parents about my girlfriend. I can stand up for myself now and am a lot more confident"

"I walked in the first time and saw that the place was not full of stereotypes. I thought to myself, 'oh my God, gay people are attractive!"

A WELCOME MESSAGE FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE THINKING OF JOINING AN LGBU YOUTH GROUP . . .

Come to our youth group and you will feel right at home. The staff and the people are gay and friendly. We all have the same problems as you. You will get fed and meet lots of gay and lesbian friends. You can come in and go on the internet. We do lots of activities and go away on residential. We had lots of fears and doubts like you. Come and mix in. You will become more confident. It is heaps of fun x



"I WOULD SAY TO NEW PEOPLE COME IN AND HAVE A CUP OF TEA"

IN OUT, IN OUT . . . SHAKE IT ALL ABOUT . . .

Some of the young people are openly 'out' (they have told someone they are lesbian, bisexual or gay) with friends or family. Others are waiting for a time in the future they feel safe to do so. Some just enjoy coming in to a safe space where they can meet like minded people, relax and be themselves. Remember there is no right or wrong way to be, everybody is different !



Gay people are all different

While you may be full grown, the seed of your uniqueness may still be dormant inside of you. Or it may be that there is a persistent weed in your garden that manages to come back over and over again. You try to kill it: It's weird and strange. You've been taught it doesn't belong in a proper garden, but still it returns. If one day you discover that seed or weed and you cultivate it, clearing away all the other flowers and accumulated garbage, you just might discover that this plant will provide for all your needs and bring your life peace and harmony. For most, there was much agony before they finally resolved to be that which they are. As long as you are alive, that which is your uniqueness is also alive. All of the pain you are going through, all of your past mistakes are fertilizer that will make your plant bloom stronger and brighter. The great sadness is dying, never having enjoyed the happiness of being yourself.

From "Being Happy, Being Gay" - by Bert Herrman



Part 2 - Coming out

If you have nurtured your lesbian gay or bisexual 'seed' you may now feel sure of your sexuality, and ready to tell people. (If you don't feel confident enough to, that's ok - just turn to our 'coming in' section.) So you have decided its time to tell, but how do you go about coming out? Well, that's entirely up to you - everyone is different! You may have identified some safe people who you know will support you (friends/family or a teacher). You may have got some of your confidence to come out from a youth group like Allsorts. You may tell one closest friend - or you may choose come out to a lot of people at once - it really depends on how safe and comfortable you feel.

However you probably have loads and loads of questions about what's going happen to you when you do come out to someone.

Allsorts young people have come up with some questions that they have wanted answering...

Qs



Her ...

- What will my first kiss be like?
- How should I dress?
- Will I like sex with a girl?

Him ...

- Do I have to be like one of the fit muscular gay guys I've seen in mags?
- What's it like kissing a boy?
- What should I wear?
- How do I pull another guy?

Him and Her

- What is being lesbian/gay/bi all about?
- Should I tell someone? How? Who? When?
- Is there a lot of homophobia?
- How do I meet other lesbian/gay/bi young people?
- How do I see my identity and how do I tell other people?
- Do I like boys or girls or both?
- What will the gay scene be like?
- If other people find out what will this mean? Will I be safe?
- Will I lose my friends and love of my family?
- Will I fit in?
- Are others like me?
- Will I get support?
- I'm scared. What will people think?
- Will my friends still want to go round with me?
- What will my Mum and Dad say?
- Will anyone speak to me?
- Will I get bullied?

Him ...

- What is sex with a guy like?
- What is safer sex and how do I do it?
- I just want to kiss and cuddle is that ok?
- Where can I get condoms from?



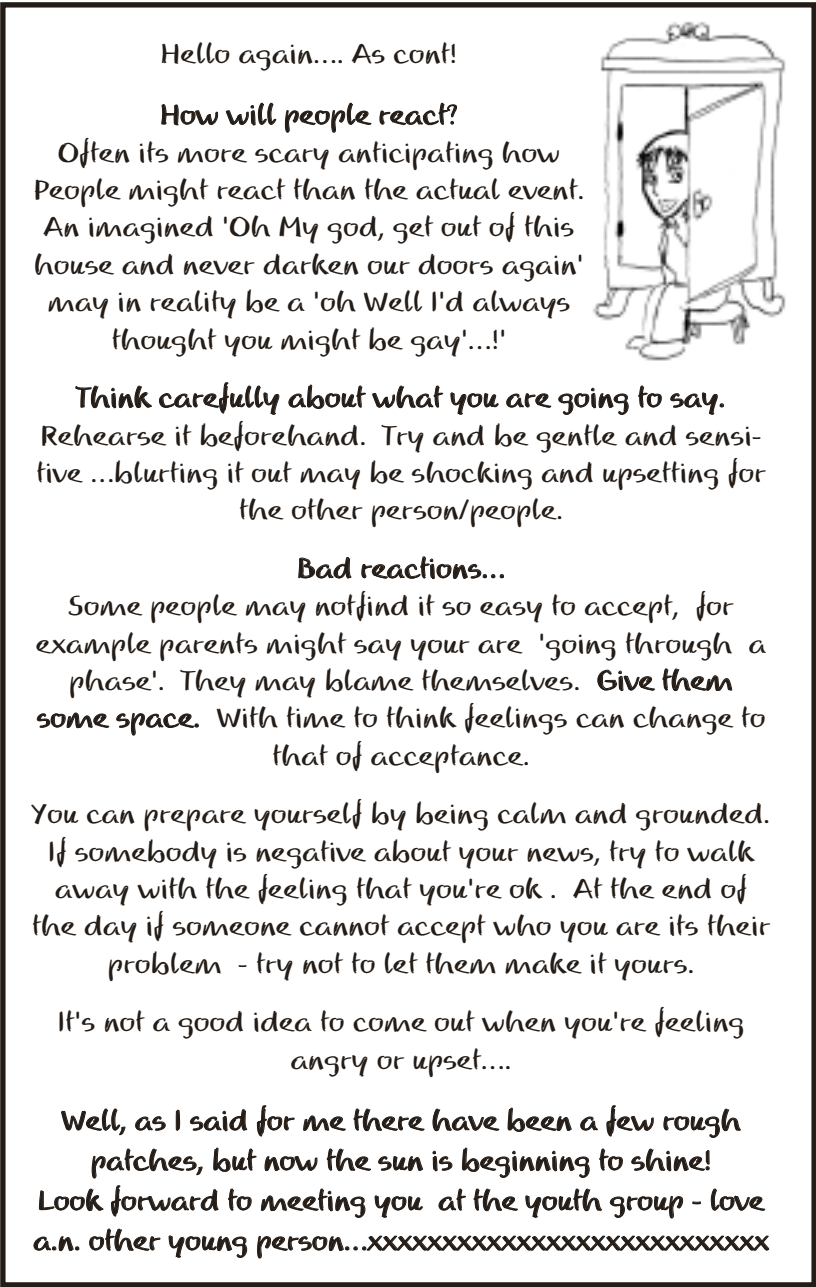
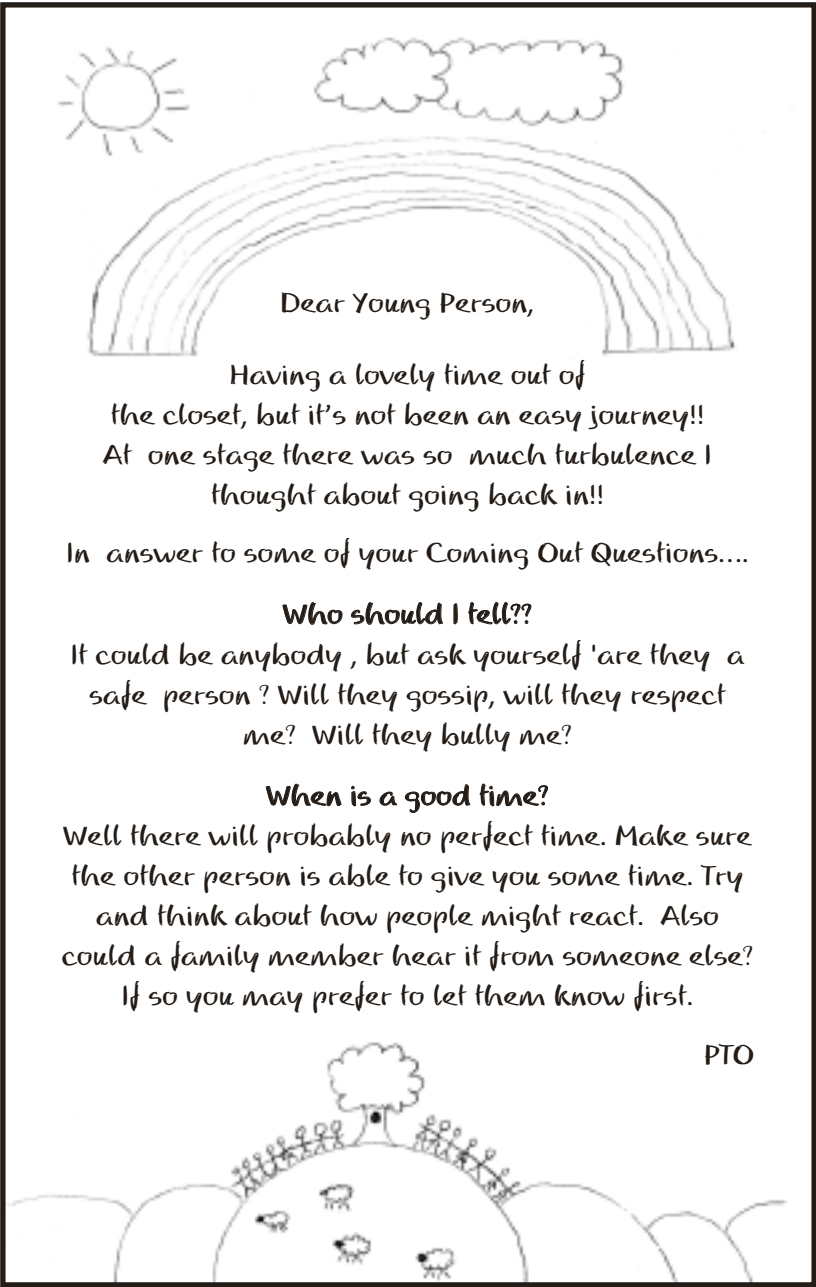
No hurry ...
"I want to come out Now, Now Now!"



Be happy ...
"I'm really happy taking things at my own pace"



As please on a postcard!





Some stories and reflections on coming out

I remember when Stephen Gately came out and the first thing my mum said was 'what a waste.' I must have been about 14 at the time and at an age where I was only beginning to realise my own sexuality, let alone understand

it. I knew I fancied lads but never identified it as being 'gay'. To me, the word 'gay' was a dirty word, and my mates always used the word to describe something abnormal and deranged. They all assured me I was gay, but I always denied it. It was only until I met with gay people I realised they do actually exist. I went along to a local gay youth group, which was the first sign of me recognising I was gay and it wasn't long before I got myself a boyfriend. I told my mum over the phone in a spontaneous moment I was in love and didn't care what she thought. I gathered she guessed already and all she said was she didn't want me moving in with any men and she didn't want to know about it, which suited me just fine. Now I've realised you never stop 'coming out.' Some people can use their intelligence to work it out, while others you have to tell. Whether it is in work, college, or just your social circle, it is something most gay people are expected to do. I had it easy in some respects and hard in others, but it just depends on how you deal with it. You are who you are, and there is nothing nobody can do to change it, just live it and accept it.

By Sam

"Coming out is in a lot of different stages, integrating it slowly into your life. First noticing there's something different, but you can't quite put your finger on it, then realising an attraction, suspecting you may be gay but not accepting, accepting it yourself, wanting to tell people the way you are, choosing who to trust and tell and finding ways to integrate it into your life."

"I came out accidentally - to a lot of people! It was not my intention at all. I had one gay friend, who knew about me. After I had met someone I texted him to tell him all about it. 'Ian - had a fantastic night and met a lovely guy called Harvey. It's fantastic being gay...see you soon'. I clicked 'send' and suddenly realised that I had hit the group button!

The text ended up going to all of my friends. I got a barrage of phone calls. People were saying 'well done mate' - and 'we didn't realise but good for you.' Friends in the street stopped me to say they got my message. Everyone that I accidentally texted were all brilliant about it. I could have died when I sent it, but actually the best thing that happened because I killed 20 birds with one stone!" By Stuart

"I found it difficult to say I was a lesbian. I didn't like using the word"

"Some peoples idea of being gay is so bizarre, so narrow minded"

"I found out what the word 'gay' meant on the internet when I was 15. I'd only heard words being thrown around as insults, such as 'dyke' and 'queer'"

When I first came out I was not sure whether people would accept me for the way I am. Now I really don't care what people think. I simply am what I simply am.

"I used to say 'I'm 17 and I'm gay'. Now I say I'm 17 and I'm a human being"

"Love is love. Its not about what body you're in and what gender you are"





Christy: Allsorts

After careful consideration I decided to tell a good friend, Nikki. I had known her for several years and although she had moved away down to London I still remained good friends. I can remember the night I decided to tell her, it had been a great night down at the pub with her housemates and we both sat alone in the kitchen after everybody had disappeared to their rooms. I had been rehearsing this speech for many years after reading about other peoples coming out experiences. So there I was sat drinking a cup of tea chatting about boy bands and Steps (Arhhh I know that's sad) when I just dropped in the conversation that Lee was very attractive . . . a short silence followed that seemed like years. Nikki replied "I know, he is pretty fit". That evening it really felt

like I had the weight of the world lifted off my shoulders. Nikki treats me no different as before and has remained truthful and a tower of strength.

Once I had moved to Brighton I promised myself that I would be open and truthful about myself. The reality is very different, I still find myself talking about girls down the pub with my workmates. My main problem is I don't fit into any of the boxes people love to place you in. I'm not camp yet not butch, I like car mechanics but also love boy bands. As you can appreciate I often feel like I don't belong.

I've been in Brighton for 4 months now and feel much more enthusiastic about the future thanks to the Allsorts Youth Project, and the many friends that I have made from the group. I now understand that these feelings I have are not unique and that I myself can share in the joy of being young, gay and single.

By Chris

Yes No!

Can I tell this person? I will sit them down, spark up a fag, calm my nerves. I begin to talk, tell them, no, I can't tell them, no I wont. She smiles at me and talks about the graffiti on the wall. Woman don't you know what I'm going to tell you! Let it out, you feel the words come to your mouth, what will she do if I tell her? Will she shriek and run away, will she go silent and have nothing to say, will she fall about laughing, and call me a liar, will she listen and support me. Go on tell her, tell her, you can tell her, go on. I need to tell you something I'm gay!!

For at least 3-4 years I have known that I am gay, on various occasions I will kiss boys but it's not as good, if you know what I mean! Although it was only recently I came out of the closet.

I have told my Mum who said "I understand." I have not told my dad, sisters or my brother, as my dad doesn't believe in being gay; a bit like Queen Victoria really. My sisters because I don't really want to add another problem to their lives because that's what it is - a problem, for them anyway! I haven't told my brother because he is homophobic....

I was bullied about my sexuality at school and have even lost friends that I have known for years, whether it is the fact they thought they knew me or lack of knowledge is beyond me.

People's perspective of me has changed since I've been more open about my sexuality.

By Carole



Christy: Allsorts

Coming in - coming out - how it was for me

Overwhelming desire, fear, excitement, terror. Fighting with myself - my inner feelings. Am I going mad? Am I misreading the signs? What if I make a fool of myself? What if I lose my friends and family?

What if this is what makes me really happy, and I just ignore it?

All of the above are just some of the feelings I went through as I 'came out'.

I'd only ever been in heterosexual relationships before and was single, when I met this completely amazing woman, and suddenly I had all these feelings. Whenever we were together I felt tingly and shy. I'd get very nervous around her. We'd flirt and be very tactile. I felt so confident around her, and before I knew it, I'd told her I'd fallen in love with her. And to my surprise, she felt the same for me! WOW!!!

Excitement, Passion, Desire, Fear, Nerves, Love. All these feelings buzzing around. How will people react? What about my family? Will I lose everything I've worked so hard to achieve?

We sat down together and spoke about how we were going to tell people. I spoke to my family over the phone and by letter (as this was the safest way for me). Generally, they were shocked and surprised, but mainly supportive. I told my best friends face to face, I was so scared of losing them. But again, they were so supportive. They just wanted me to be happy, and could see, at last, I was.

Out of all my family and friends, only two reacted negatively and both of them have since come round. My advice is to tell people when you're ready to, and if they are true friends, they'll accept who you are, if they don't, they probably weren't worth having around anyway. A big lesson I've learnt is to be honest with not only others but with myself as well.

Gill

Some dos and don'ts of coming out

Do ...

- Take your time
- Try to think rationally before you do it
- Do it when you're ready
- Do it because you want to do it
- Do it when you're sober
- Do it with class



Don't ...

- Feel pressured to do it
- Feel that you have to label yourself
- Do it on TV
- Tattoo it on your forehead
- Announce it in a 6-page ad in the Argus
- Hire an aeroplane and write it on a banner trailing behind
- Send a letter to your granny saying "please tell Mum"
- Tell your parents while they are driving the car
- Come out during a fight with your mum
- Come out in a straight bar with the football on



COMING OUT CHECKLIST

Choose a safe person

Think about what you will say

Choose the right time and place

Pick a time when you know you will not get interrupted

Try not to do it when you're having an argument or disagreement

Be true to yourself

Do it when you're feeling calm & collected



Christy: Allsorts

Be gentle, sensitive and caring

If you still have more questions than answers then there is a good web page on coming out questions from Brighton Switchboard at www.switchboard.org.uk/brighton/youth

So you're out ... now what!
Allsorts Youth have a wall of advice for you ...

Careful on drinks & drugs
Get a good set of friends around you. These are always needed and will be there for you when boyfriends/girlfriends are not
Find somewhere you can go. Always tell or take someone where you are going
BE YOURSELF. TAKE FROM GAY CULTURE/SCENE WHAT FITS WITH YOU, DON'T CHANGE YOURSELF TO FIT WITH IT
GROW SLOW AND DEVELOP AT YOUR OWN TIME
You don't have to declare your sexuality to anyone you don't want to
You're not alone in the world. At this particular moment you may feel you are but eventually you will feel included
a few bad experiences don't mean all heterosexual people will treat you badly
Sometimes it is necessary to stay in the closet to protect your safety but when you're ready it feels good to be honest with people
IT'S YOUR RIGHT TO AGREE OR DISAGREE TO WHAT TYPE OF SEX YOU HAVE

be careful and find out about safer sex
There is help out there
TALK TO PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR WORRIES
Remember there are others like you
Be confident in yourself
Love yourself
BE TRUE TO YOURSELF
Don't worry about who you are
It's ok not to be sure of your identity. You don't have to label yourself or let others label you
Be careful when out clubbing and drinking - keep an eye on your drink in case someone drugs it!

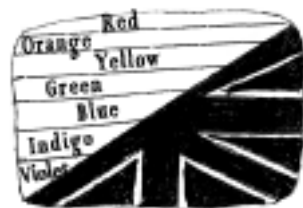
WHAT IF I GET BULLIED?



Schools have a duty to protect you by law if you get bullied because of your sexuality. You shouldn't have to just put up with it.

Things to do if you're getting bullied:

- Tell somebody about the bullying
- Talk to an adult you can trust (a teacher, or a Connexions P.A.)
- Maybe write down what has happened
- Write down who you've told - and what they've said they are going to do about it.
- If nothing is done then tell someone at an LGBU youth group, or an advice agency (see the contacts page)



Add colour to the Minority!

Getting close to someone



After you have come out you may feel that you would like to find someone special and be intimate with them.

You may come out and find that you quickly get yourself a boyfriend or girlfriend.

It can be a confusing and awkward time. How do you tell someone you fancy them? What if you find someone and they want to have sex? What will my first time be like?

Finding other young LGBU people to talk to could really help.

ALLSORTS TIPS

- Don't rush into anything - only have sex when you feel it is right for you
- You can say no to anything - don't get bullied or pressured into doing anything you want to
- If you pull, tell a mate where you're going
- It is your right to agree or disagree to what type of sex you have
- Get free condoms and advice from an LGB youth group
- If you are having sex you can have regular health check ups at a sexual health clinic
- Be careful - find out about safer sex and how you can get STIs (sexually transmitted infections)
- A relationship is not just about sex
- It's good just to kiss and cuddle

Advice for guys - 'there are lots of couples who don't have anal sex, it is not uncommon. If you decide to try this, always use a condom (to protect you from Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV) and preferably with a boyfriend'

You can find more information about STIs, safer sex, condoms and sexual health clinics if you go to the contacts page at the back of this booklet.

The age of consent

As of the 8th January 2001 in England, Scotland and Wales, the age of consent for gay men and lesbians is 16. This means it is against the law to have sex with someone who is younger than 16.

The law is there to protect young people.

There is an exception: if a person holds a position of authority i.e a teacher or youth group leader, then the age of consent is 18.

A different way ... a song ...

A different way

The way I feel, I can't explain
I can't even say your name,
coz you will find out how I feel
and this pain inside will never heal.

It's everything you do, that
makes me go crazy for you

I'm falling for you, coz of
everything you do.
I think about you everyday,
why am I a different way?
I never thought I'd see a time
where I'd write & say I'm here
but it's true, I think I'm in
love with you.

every night I lay in my bed,
with the thoughts running through
my head.

You have a guy so there's
nothing to hide,
I don't go for men,
but you wouldn't understand

By Harriet



Part 3 - Coming in



The foundation of coming out is about safety.

Ask yourself:

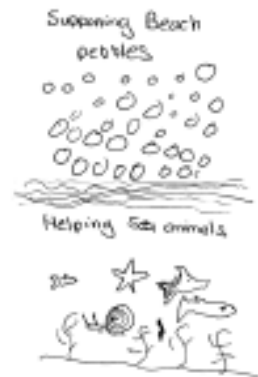
Do I feel safe enough to tell this person something that's very precious to me?

Weighing the situation up, your gut reaction may say 'no!'

Also you may not feel sure about being gay yourself - you may still feel unhappy about it.

Feeling good about yourself, and developing confidence is a very important thing to do - Try not put yourself in a position where your confidence might take a bashing.

Members of Allsorts have all struggled with feeling confident and good about themselves. There are so many messages on TV or at school that say being gay is not ok.



MY SAFE SPACE

There are going to be times when you feel low, or somebody will say something to upset or hurt you. We talked about this at Allsorts, and many people said they could find the strength to continue by finding themselves a 'safe space' - a place where they could go to lick their wounds and re-charge their batteries.

A place where they could draw on their inner resources and strength (which you will have!). It could be watching TV, or going to the cinema - anything that is kind to you!

IDEAS FOR SAFE SPACES

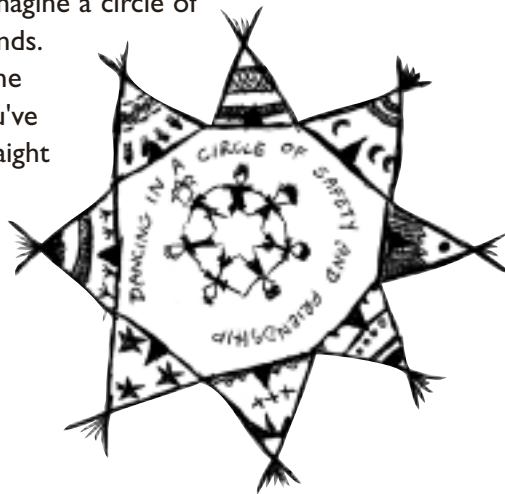


Part 4 - Helping someone who may be gay

You may not be gay yourself, but it is likely that someone you know of is. Is there someone in your circle of friends who seems withdrawn and isolated? Being lesbian gay or bisexual could be one of the many reasons they are finding it difficult to fit in.

“Look beyond yourself. Imagine a circle of straight people holding hands. There is a gay person in the middle crying, because you've broken the bond. The straight circle doesn't notice the difference because they're too busy keeping the circle.

Look beyond yourself.”



Christy: Allsorts

- Try and be friendly and include them in what you're doing.
- Perhaps make it clear you are not homophobic, “I went to my uncle's barbeque at the weekend and his boyfriend was there and knocked over the cake ...”
- Refer to gay friends or people you know of in the media who are gay “I've just found out one of my friends is a lesbian”.
- Try and think beyond the stereotypes of lesbian, gay and bisexual people - your friend doesn't have to have a label.
- Show them that you accept it, and that they are still valued by you.
- Let them know that its ok to talk to you and that you won't judge them.
- Be there for them and give them time and space to be what they want to be.

Part 5 - Contacts and resources

We're all 'coming out' and 'coming in' all of our lives but with support from the LGB community it gets easier. The following are a list of useful books, films and contacts that may help you in the process of exploring who you are and who you want to be. Good luck!



Some good films to watch ...

- Get Real
- But I'm a Cheerleader
- Beautiful Thing
- Better than Chocolate
- Bound
- The Fruit Machine

Allsorts have other publications that might be helpful

Challenging Homophobia in Schools and Colleges

A resource for Teachers and Tutors

Blue Deep Sea

An anthology of writings by lesbian, gay and bisexual young people from Allsorts Youth Project

Zero Tolerance

A toolkit for challenging homophobia for people who work with young people

Other books

"Beginnings" - Lindsey Elder

Lesbians Talk About the First Time They Met Their Long-Term Partner

"Early Embraces:" - Lindsey Elder

True Stories of Women Describing Their First Lesbian Experience

"There Must Be 50 Ways to Tell Your Mother " - Lynn Sutcliffe

Contains personal "coming out" stories from a wide range of young women and men in the UK.

"Out and About"

Advice pamphlet for young gay and bisexual men - Terrance Higgins Trust

"Being Happy, Being Gay" - Bert Herrman

Fiction

Tales of the City - Armistead Maupin

Annie on My Mind - Nancy Garden

Rainbow Boys - Alex Sanchez

Boy Meets Boy - David Levithan

You can find self help manuals for young gay/lesbian teenagers at places like www.amazon.co.uk

Websites

The UK Alliance of LGBT Young People

www.queeryouth.org.uk

Stonewall Youth Project Website (Scotland)

www.lgbtyouth.org.uk

The Albert Kennedy Trust - Helping Homeless Lesbian and Gay Teenagers

www.akt.org.uk

Being gay is ok (A website for gay youth)

www.bgiok.org.uk

Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (for help with your parents and friends when coming out)

www.fflag.org.uk

UK Youth community on gay.com

www.gayyouthuk.co.uk

Young gay men and lesbian talking

www.avert.org/ygmt.htm

A website for young gay men

www.ygm.org.uk

Gay Times Magazine - the UK's leading gay life and style magazine... from the latest news, reviews and fashion to a comprehensive national scene and travel guide.

www.gaytimes.co.uk

Diva Magazine - Whether you are just coming out or just want to keep up-to-date, DIVA is the only place to check out the latest news, reviews and scene info

www.divamag.co.uk

Youth Groups - Sussex

Brighton Area

Allsorts Youth Project

www.allsortsyouth.org.uk

Email: allsortsyouth@yahoo.com

Tel 01273 721211

Crawley Area

Hundreds and Thousands

Tel 07876 214066

Hastings/Eastbourne Area

Glyssn

Tel 07791 976 858

Email: glyssn@tht.org.uk

Details of other youth groups can be found in Gay Times and Diva

Sexual health/HIV

Terrance Higgins Trust South 01273 764200

Claude Nicol Centre (Sexual Health Clinic) 01273 664721

UNISEX (Universities of Sussex and Brighton) 01273 678461

Wilde Clinic (Sexual Health Clinic for Gay and Bisexual Men)
01273 664722

Counselling

For an LGB counselling project call 01273 204050 or visit
www.switchboard.org.uk

General Advice

Brighton Lesbian and Gay Switchboard 01273 204050

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