

## Sexuality: am I gay, lesbian or bisexual?



### FAST FACTS

- It's natural to enjoy and explore your sexual feelings whatever your sexuality.
- You may want to tell people about your sexuality ('come out' to them) or to keep your feelings private.
- If you decide to explore your sexuality through sex, make sure you understand how to prevent [HIV](#), other [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#), and unplanned pregnancy.
- Some people use words like 'gay', 'bi' or 'queer' to help define their sexuality; others prefer to avoid labels altogether. Either is fine, it's up to you.
- You're not alone. There is a lot of support out there to help you understand your sexuality and how to deal with other people's reactions to it.

Sexual feelings are an important part of many people's lives and can bring a lot of pleasure. Although these feelings are exciting, they can also be complicated and confusing.

If you're trying to work out how you feel, what you're into, and who you are attracted to, remember that you're not the only one.

Everyone is different and your feelings and desires are personal to you. The important thing is that you are comfortable with who you are and how you feel.

## What is sexuality?

Your sexuality or 'sexual orientation' is a whole package of things that make up how you express yourself sexually. It includes:

- who you are attracted to either romantically or sexually (your sexual attractions and feelings)
- who you have sex with, and what sexual acts you like and choose to take part in (your sexual behaviour)
- how you describe your sexuality, for example gay, lesbian, straight (your sexual identity).

You may find that all aspects of your sexuality match up. For example you might be a man who is attracted to men, has sex with men and identifies as gay. Or you may find your sexuality is more complicated. For example you might be a woman who is attracted to men and identifies as straight, but also sometimes has sex with women. Your sexuality is personal to you and there is no right or wrong way to feel.

Your gender identity is different to your sexuality. For example whether you feel you ['fit' into the category of 'girl' or 'boy'](#) growing up, or whether you feel your gender is different to the sex you were assigned at birth.

## What if I am confused about my sexuality?

Don't worry. If you have never had a sexual relationship you may not know who you will be attracted to. Or you may feel your sexuality has changed over time and you are no longer sure who you desire. These feelings are very common.

Begin by getting to know yourself and developing the confidence to talk about your feelings. You could start by talking it over with friends. Once you begin to understand your sexual desires you might want to explore your sexuality by taking part in a sexual activity. Only do things you are comfortable with. Talk to your partner about what you enjoy and listen to what they want.

Try not to feel pressured into acting a certain way or fitting in with other people's expectations. Avoid starting a relationship if it feels uncomfortable, or having sex with a person you're not really attracted to.

And remember, there's no hurry. Give yourself time to work out how you feel rather than rushing into anything.

## What do all the different labels mean and what if none of them fit me?

There are lots of words that people use to describe their sexual orientation. Here are some of the more common ones. Different ones might be used in your language or in your culture.

Asexual	Not sexually attracted to anyone.
Bisexual (bi)	Sexually attracted to more than one gender.
Curious (bicurious)	Not purely heterosexual or homosexual but sometimes curious about or open to sexual activity with the gender they are not normally attracted to.
Heterosexual (straight)	Sexually attracted to the opposite sex.

Homosexual	Sexually attracted to the same sex.
Gay	Same as homosexual - often used particularly to describe men who are attracted to other men.
Lesbian	Women who are attracted to other women.
Pansexual (pan)	Sexually attracted to people of any gender or sexual orientation.
Queer	It was used as an insult but now many LGBTQ+ people use it as a way to describe any sexuality without needing a specific label.
Questioning	Still exploring or unsure about their sexuality.

\*LGBTQ+ - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and others

Some people identify strongly with a label like 'gay', while others don't feel that any of these words fit their sexuality or don't want to be labelled at all.

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*When I come out to people, I don't like to brand myself a certain orientation. I want my freedom to learn, to grow, and to experiment.*

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- Shalini

## Sexuality, sexual health, pregnancy and HIV

If you're ready to have sex or be sexually intimate with someone, you need to know how to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unplanned pregnancies.

Condoms are the best way to prevent against both pregnancy and STIs (including HIV). You can find out more about [external \(or male\) condoms](#) (which go on a penis or sex toy) or [internal \(or female\) condoms](#) (which go in a vagina or anus) on our safer sex pages.

Education and information about sex often focuses on [vaginal](#) sex between a man and a woman but you might want to explore other forms of sex, such as [oral](#) and [anal](#) sex. Remember there are lots of ways to get sexual pleasure beyond penetrative sex, including kissing, touching, stroking, and exploring intimacy.

Whatever sex acts you try and whoever you try them with, you need to trust each other and both give your [consent](#). Sex will be more enjoyable if you have a shared understanding and you both [feel ready](#) and relaxed.

## Should I 'come out' to people?

It's up to you to decide. The idea of sex might excite you but you might also be confused or ashamed about your feelings, or afraid of other people's reactions. It can be a good idea to take time to discover and enjoy your sexuality before you start talking to other people about it.

When you are ready, you can 'come out' to people you trust and who care about you. As well as giving you love and support, they may be able to help you come to terms with your own feelings. It's often better to start with one or two carefully chosen people, then you can decide if you want to tell more people and the best way to do it.

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*I told my mum which was really hard, she was confused and had a [hard] time to begin with, we didn't talk until the next day and my sisters were disgusted with her because we were such a close family, but after she had thought about it she came to terms and we had a heart to heart and now we're closer than ever.*

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- Toby

Some people are open about their sexuality with most people they know and hardly ever keep it a secret. This can feel liberating and make it easier to meet other people with similar lifestyles.

On the other hand, you don't have to be open with everyone. Many people prefer to only be 'out' to some people in their lives.

Sadly, in certain parts of the world there are laws or cultural or social rules that make it difficult to be honest about your sexual orientation. So you should always think carefully about the potential benefits and risks of talking to someone before you say anything.

## **What if I experience negative reactions, bullying or homophobia?**

Not everyone will react positively when they know about your sexuality. Some people are uncomfortable with anything that seems different or that they don't understand. Give them time to get used to the idea and to understand you better.

Unfortunately people can be rude or unkind. If someone tries to intimidate or bully you, you don't have to cope on your own. Get help or advice from supportive friends, family, someone in authority (like a teacher) or a support organisation.

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*Discovering your true orientation is not easy, but having the freedom to experiment is a gift. To anyone I come out to, I'm willing to give them the time to adjust. Give them the same freedom. I wouldn't trade these feelings for anything else in the world. The excitement is actually not knowing – just learning is a big thrill and through experimentation you can learn a lot about yourself.*

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- Shalini

## Getting support

Meeting and talking to other people who have had similar experiences can really help when you're coming to terms with your sexuality. You can look for LGBTQ+ support groups in your area, call a helpline or join an online support group.

The websites below also have links to support organisations and helpful information.

### Useful LGBT support and information websites

[Planned Parenthood](#)

[Childline](#)

[LGBT Foundation](#)

[Stonewall - Coming Out](#)

[Stonewall - What's In My Area?](#)

[Ditch the label](#)

[It gets better](#)

## HELP US HELP OTHERS

Avert.org is helping to prevent the spread of HIV and improve sexual health by giving people trusted, up-to date information.

We provide all this for FREE, but it takes time and money to keep Avert.org going.

[Can you support us and protect our future?](#)

Every contribution helps, no matter how small.

[PLEASE DONATE NOW](#)

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## Sources:

[Planned Parenthood 'How do I know my sexual orientation?'](#)

[Childline 'Sexuality'](#)

[LGBT Foundation - Helpline](#)

[Stonewall 'Coming Out'](#)

[Stonewall 'What's in My Area?'](#)

[Ditch the Label - Get Help](#)

[It Gets Better - Get Help](#)