

EXPECT MORE

Everyone Deserves Good Health

7th Annual National LGBT Health Awareness Week

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Youth

As many of us grew up, our family and friends made assumptions about our identities that may not have been truly accurate. As LGBTQ youth, we had to confront those assumptions and make decisions about how we would define ourselves, or, out of fear of discrimination or an unwillingness to label ourselves, become involved with members of the same sex without identifying as LGBTQ. Many LGBTQ young people are facing these decisions at an increasingly early age.

Coming out to your family and friends can be very difficult, and it's completely understandable to feel despair, isolation and even anger, especially if you live in a homophobic environment. While your sexuality and gender aren't the only things that define who you are, most people are likely to assume that you are straight until you tell them otherwise. Just know that you're not alone in feeling this way; there are many people who have been through the same experience and feel stronger because of it.

Coming to terms with one's sexuality isn't easy for anyone, so here are a few things that you should keep in mind:

- There's no "right" or "wrong" way to come out. Anyone thinking of doing so should weigh the pros and cons, especially when it comes to your family. We all want our family to be proud of us and to approve of-or, at the very least, accept-the things that make us who we are, but coming out should be approached with care. In any case, it's important to keep in mind that there is no deadline for coming out; wait until you're ready.
- Develop healthy techniques for expressing frustration, aggression or depression: exercise, speak to health professional or religious figure or indulge in the creative arts. Due to stressful environmental factors, substance abuse and suicide are disproportionately high for LGBTQ youth.
- Connect with someone else who is LGBTQ-by phone or in person-who understands what you are going through.
- Don't be rushed into sex. Being LGBTQ is about more than sex. Know how to protect yourself with condoms, dental dams or - if it's right for you - abstinence.
- Go to your local college library. There is a long history of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people of all backgrounds who have written about their experiences - good and bad - that can provide inspiration and guidance.
- Avoid the stereotypes. Our community is often stereotyped on television, but there are many different types of LGBTQ people. You are not alone in your experience.
- Assault and sexual assault is a serious concern among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. If you are the victim of sexual assault, don't hesitate to report the crime to an adult you trust. No one has the right to touch you without your permission.

EXPECT MORE! LGBTQ young people deserve equal access to culturally competent healthcare.

For more information, please see:

Advocates for Youth (www.advocatesforyouth.org)

The National Youth Advocacy Coalition (www.nyacyouth.org)

OutProud (www.outproud.org)

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (www.pflag.org)

YouthResource (www.youthresource.com)

www.lgbthealth.net

 National Coalition
for LGBT Health