

Am I gay, lesbian or bisexual?

LGBT heart



Sexual feelings and sexual attraction can be complicated and confusing. If you're trying to work out whether you're attracted to men or women or both, remember that you're not the only one. Figuring this out is especially hard because so many people around us assume that everyone is heterosexual (straight).

'Sexuality' refers to the way in which you express yourself sexually. It includes how you feel about sex, the people you are attracted to, the things you'd like to do, and your [relationships](#).

The gender of the people you want to have sex with is just one part of your sexuality. There are words which people use to talk about this. In English, men who like men may call themselves 'gay', women who like women may call themselves 'lesbian', and people who like both men and women may say they are 'bisexual'. Other words might be used in your language or in your culture.

You don't have to define your sexuality

Some people find that a word like 'gay' suits them – they feel it describes part of who they are.

But you don't have to label yourself. Many people find that things are more complicated and that their sexuality can't be defined by one of these words. Many people's sexual feelings change as time goes on.

"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." - Shalini

Some people describe themselves as "questioning", meaning that they are still working it out. Sexuality is a very personal thing. As you explore and discover your own sexuality, you'll get to know what feels right for you.

You may not be sure of your sexuality

Some people worry that they can't be sure about their sexuality if they've never done anything sexual with someone else.

If this is the case for you, you might be tempted to try things out with someone to 'find out' if you're attracted to people of that sex. While this could work out, if you rush into a relationship that feels uncomfortable, or with a person you're not really attracted to, then you may have a bad experience that just confuses you even more. Sex is going to be more satisfying with someone you really like.

Remember that if you are going to have sex, this comes with risks such as [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#) and [HIV](#). Take the time to read about how to prevent them, and have [safer sex](#) by using [condoms and lubricants](#).

Whatever happens the first time, your sexual feelings will keep on changing and developing as time goes on. What you like now may be very different to what you like in a few years' time.

If you've decided that you definitely like other guys (or girls)

If you know for sure that you have sexual feelings for members of your own sex, you may be going through a whole range of feelings. While the idea of sex itself might interest or excite you, you may be worried or confused about it at the same time. You might also be afraid of other people's reactions.

Take the time to explore, discover and enjoy your sexuality. It's probably not a good idea to rush straight into making major changes – whether that's telling everyone you know, spending all your time with new friends, or getting into a new relationship.

Telling other people and 'coming out'

It can be a great relief to confide in people you trust and who care about you. Their love, support and understanding may be invaluable. Rather than telling everyone at once, it's better to start with one or two carefully chosen people. Then you'll have a better idea of whether you want to talk about this with other people and the best way to do it.

"I told my mum which was really hard, she was confused and had a time to begin with, we didn't talk until the next day and my sisters where 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." - Toby

Just because you decide to 'come out' about your sexuality to some people you know, this doesn't mean that you have to be open with everyone. It's quite common for people to be 'out' in some parts of their lives but not others.

On the other hand, many people choose to be open with (almost) everyone they know, so that their sexuality is hardly ever a secret. Not having to hide parts of your life from other people can be liberating. Living in this way may also make it easier to meet other people who have a similar lifestyle.

What if I get a negative reaction?

Not everyone who knows about your sexuality will have a positive reaction. Some people are just uncomfortable with anything that seems a little different. It may just take some time for them to get used to the idea or to understand what your life is really like.

Unfortunately some people may be hostile or unkind. If someone tries to intimidate or bully you, it's very important to get the help and advice from a support organisation, friends you can trust, or

someone in authority (such as a teacher, if you are at school). Some helpful organisations and websites are listed below.

Getting support

Hearing from and meeting other people who have had similar experiences can be really helpful and there's probably a support or social group not far from where you live. There may also be a telephone support line you can call.

"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." - Shalini

Useful websites

[Being gay is okay](#)

[It gets better](#)

[Stonewall - Coming out](#)

[RUComingOut](#)

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Sources:

Weeks, J. et al (2002) 'Sexualities and Society: A Reader' Cambridge: Polity Press

Being gay is ok 'Popular topics' [Accessed 10 September 2015]

Brook 'Advice on coming out' [Accessed 10 September 2015]

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