

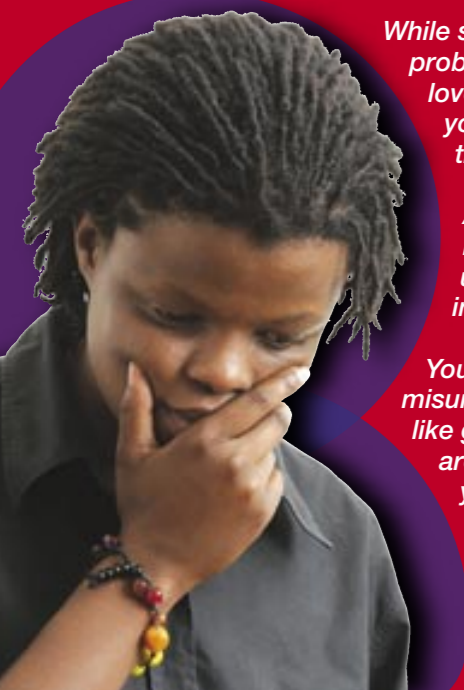
## You may be feeling different to the people around you.

You may have very different ideas about being a guy or a girl ... about what it means to be smart, sexy, successful and satisfied.

While some of your friends are probably dating or falling in love with the opposite sex, you may be having feelings for the same sex.

All these feelings are normal, but they can often be hard to understand if you don't have all the information.

You may be feeling alone or misunderstood, or experiencing problems like getting teased or bullied. Maybe you are in conflict about who you are? Maybe you are confident? Maybe you don't care what other people think? Whatever you are feeling, here are some ideas to help you answer some of the questions you might have, and some tips about what you can do.



## There are many different ways of being a man or a woman.

One of the ways in which men and women can be different is their sexual orientation – who they are attracted to. There are many different kinds of sexual orientation.

Some people are emotionally and sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex, like a guy to a girl, a girl to a guy. They usually do not get given a special label because they are the most common. But that does not mean they are more normal than anyone else. The academic word for these people is 'heterosexual'. They are often called 'straight'.

There are other people who are emotionally and sexually attracted to people of the same sex. There are many different terms to describe this, and sometimes we use the term 'homosexual'. Homosexual men sometimes call themselves 'gay' and homosexual women sometimes use the word 'lesbian'.

According to research, about 5 – 10 percent of all communities are gay and lesbian. All different types of people are gay or lesbian, even some rugby players, politicians and teachers. A few people are emotionally and sexually attracted to both men and women. These people may choose to call themselves 'bisexual'.

Another way in which people can be different is the way they experience their inner sense of being male or female. We all have some 'masculine' characteristics and some 'feminine' characteristics. Sometimes we speak, move and dress in a way that is different to what our society and culture expects from a man or a woman.

Some people feel so different from what their society expects that their own identity challenges common ideas of being male or female. These people sometimes call themselves 'transgender'. Some embrace the opposite gender. Some experience themselves as both male and female.

There are even a few who do not identify with a male or a female gender.

There is nothing unnatural about being a transgender person. It is one of the many ways in which human beings experience and express themselves. Being transgender has nothing to do with your sexual orientation. Transgender people can be gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight.

Some transgender people feel more like a woman even though their physical body is male. Some feel more like a man even though their physical body is female. Transgender people who experience this sometimes call themselves 'transsexual'. Many transsexuals decide to live as the gender they experience in their inner being. Some even decide to change their physical gender and have a sex change operation.

## Being yourself can be a real risk and can cause real stress, especially when you are something that most other people are not!

How do you deal with being different to the people around you? If you are feeling depressed, don't allow yourself to get stuck in it. Act! Do something that you feel really expresses who you are – even if you do it in private. Write about it. Make an art work. Dress up. Throw a party. Do it and enjoy it.

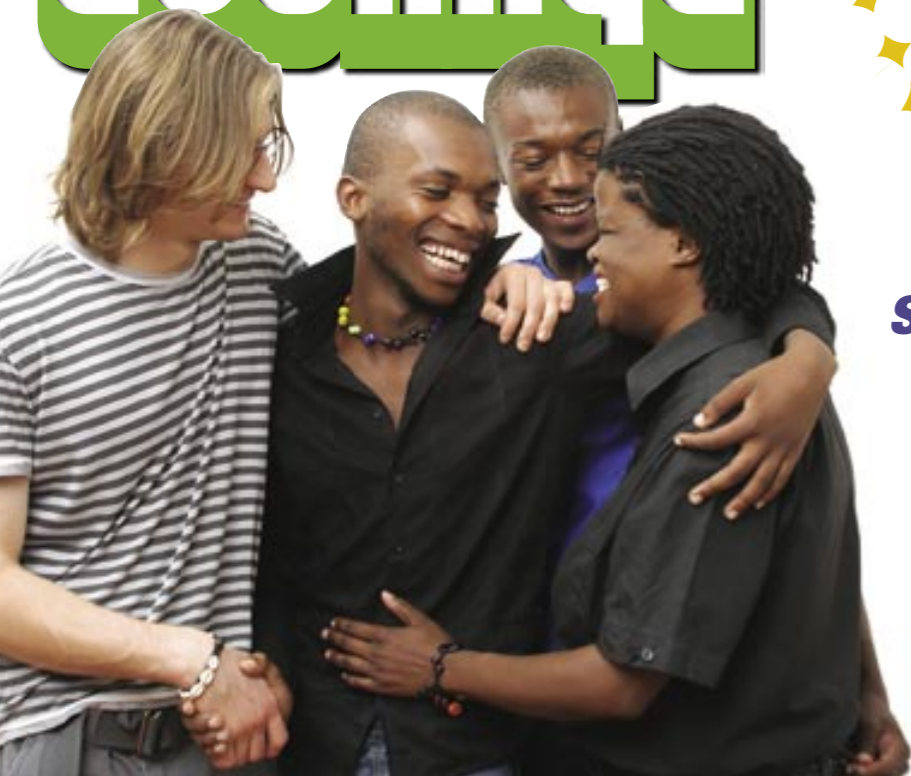
Finding the support of other people can make all the difference. People who live in rural areas or small towns often leave to go to the city where they are more likely to find groups of people like themselves.

Some people express themselves by rebelling in shocking or violent ways. This can be dangerous and doesn't always get you the support you need.

How you act will have an influence on how other people treat you. Maybe you don't care what other people think – but you should still be clever and make sure that you act in ways that get you the support and opportunities you need.



# DO YOU HAVE THE COURAGE



# TO BE YOU

Don't take yourself so seriously that you forget to play.

Some people are gay, some people are straight and others are transgender. There is not one reason why you are who you are. It is because of a complicated mix of what you are born with and social factors. There have been gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in all cultures and it has been this way all through history.



## Do you respect yourself enough to...

- look after your own well-being
- fulfil your potential for satisfying relationships
- get an education
- avoid abusing alcohol and drugs
- stay free of sexually transmitted diseases
- avoid becoming pregnant before you are ready
- be sensitive and loving towards you partner
- achieve your dreams.

Acceptance starts within.



Discovering what kind of a guy or girl you are, and learning what kinds of activities and relationships you find satisfying can be confusing. Don't put pressure on yourself. It may take a while before you are clear about your feelings and how you want to express yourself. Your feelings may even change over time.

What kinds of relationships do you fantasise and dream about? Who do you want to get close to? Have you ever had a crush on someone? Was it a guy or a girl? What do you think when people talk positively about gay or lesbian relationships? How do you feel reading this information?

You are not gay or lesbian just because:

- you have had sexual experiences with people of the same sex;
- you are a feminine man or a masculine woman;
- other people say you are.

You don't have to be sexually active to know your sexual orientation. You can have strong feelings and emotions and express them in meaningful relationships long before you have sex with anyone.

**Be yourself, whatever that is.**

**How do you tell people who you are when it is so completely different to the picture they have of you?**

- You have a right to decide whether you want to be open about who you are. Don't be pressured. This is your decision.
- Be clear about your own motivation for telling someone. Are you trying to shock them, impress them, get their understanding and support, or deepen a friendship?
- Telling someone may require tremendous emotional energy, so don't do it when you are feeling down. Do it when you are feeling good about yourself.
- Think about who you will go to afterwards for support and encouragement.
- Choose the moment carefully – a moment when people are ready to listen and talk.
- Think carefully about the risks of coming out. If you are fearful and the risks are high, you may choose to wait.
- Make sure you have thought about the kinds of questions they will ask and that you have the information you need to answer them. Some of their questions may seem stupid or unfair. Don't just react. Be patient with them and answer as clearly and sincerely as you can.
- Some of the people close to you may react with shock, denial, anger, guilt, depression, disappointment, as they come to learn that the picture they have of you is not the one you have of yourself. They may need time to get used to the idea.
- You may not get the best response. You may even experience rejection. This is not your fault.
- Tell them that you are not a different person now. You are the same person you have always been.
- Be clear about what you expect from them. Don't leave them wondering about how they should treat you from now on.

**You have a right to be yourself.**

Sometimes you may feel the pressures of society and culture. There are values and beliefs about what is male and what is female, about right and wrong, about success and failure, etc. But society changes over time. For example, there was a time, when the Christian church supported slavery. Now slavery is considered as inhuman. There was a time when women were not allowed to vote. Now we can all vote.

Our Constitution, the highest law in the land, is amazing. It protects people from discrimination based on difference. This difference includes race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, belief or place of origin. So, you have the right to be who you are.

**Discrimination against a person because he or she is black, white, female, male, lesbian or gay is illegal!**

The rights that are in our Constitution were fought for by courageous individuals. Having the courage to stand up for what you believe can make you feel good and can change the world you live in. Use what others have fought for wisely.

What is your attitude towards discrimination?

Are you going to speak out if you hear people using hate speech, telling hurtful jokes or spreading information that is simply not true – even if it is not about you?

Being open about who you are, or taking a stand against discrimination, isn't always easy. It can be dangerous. Be clear about the battles you are prepared to fight. Share this information with others.

**Be the change you want to see.**

Young gay and lesbian people often realise they are different when their friends start going out or having sexual encounters with people of the opposite sex. This can put pressure on young people, especially if they want to be accepted by a group. They may feel shocked and emotionally hurt to find out they are different. They may even go through a period of denial and may even feel that they just want to be 'normal'. They may feel very alone.

Once they have started to accept themselves they sometimes choose to tell someone else for the first time. They will begin a journey that can follow many paths. They may seek out gay and lesbian friends and, eventually, find that special friend or partner.

'Coming out' means being open about who you are. You first have to be honest with yourself and come out to yourself, before you come out to anyone else. As you meet different people you will have to decide whether you are going to come out or not.

**Schools are supposed to be safe and supportive places where you are free to learn and grow. If you are called names, teased, bullied or physically attacked while at school it is the school's responsibility to make sure that these acts are dealt with and stopped. You could try the following:**

- Ask a friend, a parent or a teacher for their support.
- Write down what happened to you and how it made you feel.
- Can you talk to the person who violated your rights? Be clear about what they did, how it made you feel and how you want things to change. Think carefully about what you are going to say before you approach them.
- If talking to the person doesn't work or doesn't feel safe, share your experience with someone you trust, someone who has some authority.
- Taking a stand may not be easy. Be prepared.
- Remember that other students and teachers have rights too.

## Hate Hurts!

We usually discriminate against people who we think are different from us because of ignorance and fear. No person who is confident and comfortable with themselves will tease or bully other people. People who have inner strength don't discriminate!

If people discriminate against you, you may think of leaving school, of running away, or of abusing alcohol and drugs. You may find that things sometimes get so bad that you even start to think of hurting yourself. Many people have had these thoughts when trying to cope with what feels like the impossible.

You need to find a way of reducing your pain and increasing your abilities and support systems. Don't deal with your feelings alone. Find someone who can be with you at this horrible time – someone you trust to talk to. You may want to talk to a doctor or a counsellor. Spend time with people who are caring and positive. People do get past these kinds of feelings. It is far more challenging and rewarding to succeed in making your dreams come true.