Lesbian issues

Women usually question whether they are heterosexual ('straight') or lesbian (same-sex attracted) when they realise they are feeling attracted to other women. Lesbians usually say their main physical, emotional and sexual feelings are for women. Many women report they have lesbian experiences or feelings, but do not think of themselves as lesbians or gay.

There is nothing wrong with being lesbian

There are lesbians in every country, culture and society. The most important thing is to be happy with who you are. Unfortunately, some women find it difficult to stand up as lesbians because their society doesn't accept it. It is important to remember that:

- It is natural for people to be attracted to members of their own sex
- Scientific evidence shows that it is normal and healthy to be a lesbian.

Why are some women lesbians?

There is no real explanation as to why some women are lesbians and others are not – it is just a part of who we are. It may be a result of genetic influences or because of social experiences or an interaction of the two.

Some people recognise their attractions at an early age, while others don't develop attractions until well into adulthood. Many young people begin to develop gay feelings and attractions during their teenage years.

The main thing to remember is that being gay is not a disease to be 'cured' or 'fixed'. It is part of the broad spectrum of human sexuality.

How do I know if I am lesbian?

There is no questionnaire or test you can complete that will tell you whether you are lesbian or not. If you are a lesbian you may:

- Feel attracted to other women
- Feel you are different to your girlfriends or don't always 'fit in'
- Find yourself checking out your girlfriends while they are checking out guys
- Feel confused because you're attracted to men as well as women.

These feelings can be difficult to cope with, but are all very normal. It can take time to work out how you feel about your sexuality. You should not be in a rush to work out what your sexuality is – it will develop over time. It's okay to feel unsure.

Can you tell if a woman is a lesbian?

You probably won't know if a woman is gay until she tells you. There is no way you can tell whether a woman is a lesbian just by looking at her. The way people dress is about their personal identity, not their sexuality.

Telling people you are lesbian

Before you decide to come out, you should consider who you will tell and what their reaction may be. Coming out is a long process. Be prepared for both positive and negative reactions. For some people, coming out is a positive step. For others, it is an unnecessary complication.

Lesbian relationships

The major difference between lesbian and straight relationships is that there are two women, instead of a man and a woman. Lesbian women fall in love and form committed relationships. Like all relationships, there will be both good and bad times. There are no rules you have to follow in lesbian relationships. Everyone is free to make up their own rules.

Becoming sexually active

Before you have sex, you should make sure:

- You are ready to become sexually active. Don't be forced into something that is not right for you.
- Both you and your partner trust and respect each other.
- You are doing it safely. Avoid contact with your partner's body fluids to reduce your risk of sexually transmitted disease.

Use dental dams if you are having oral sex. Dental dams are small sheets of latex rubber that act as a shield between the vagina and the mouth.

Getting further information

You can get more information from:

- **The Gay and Lesbian Switchboard** – this service is anonymous and will not show up on your telephone bill. You can chat to someone about your feelings and they can answer many of your questions. They can also tell you about support groups and social functions.
- **The Internet** – search for gay and lesbian topics. Many lesbian groups have websites that can provide you with useful information.
- **Gay and lesbian newspapers** – every state has a gay and lesbian newspaper. This will tell you what is on and how to access support and social groups. You can also subscribe to national magazines.

Where to get help

- Gay and Lesbian Switchboard Tel. (03) 9663 2939 or 1800 184 527
- Kids Helpline Tel. 1800 551 800 (24-hour telephone counselling service for young people aged 5–25)
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14 (A 24-hour counselling service)

Things to remember

- There is nothing wrong with being lesbian.
- Some women enjoy lesbian experiences but still consider themselves 'straight'.
- It can take time to work out whether you are lesbian or not. Don't rush yourself to make a decision.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Reach Out

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