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A large, stylized rainbow graphic composed of several curved, overlapping bands of color. From top to bottom, the colors are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The blue band is the largest and contains the title text.

**A Young Men's Guide to Sexual
Orientation and Same-sex Attraction**

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This is a guide for young men about sexual orientation and same-sex attraction. It aims to provide you with some information about what being gay, bisexual, or same-sex attracted could mean to you. It will answer some of the common questions that young people ask about sexual orientation and coming out as a gay or bisexual person.

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important to be clear about what you do want to do and what you don't. As with anything, people have their likes and dislikes and it's important that you talk them over with your sexual partner.

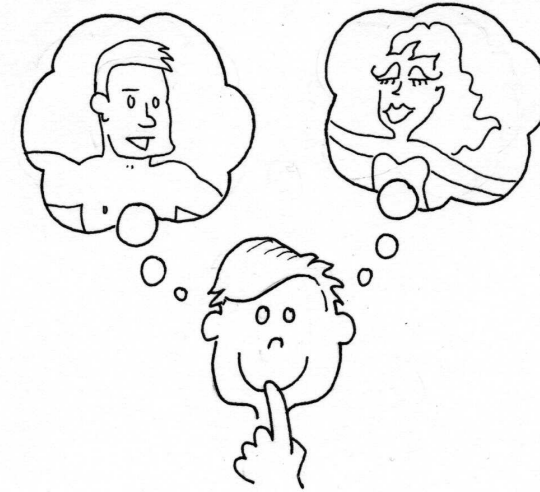
It is really important to consider your sexual health before having sex with others. The Rainbow Project has produced a Young Men's Sexual Health Guide that provides up-to-date information on safer sex and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You can download a copy by logging on to our website at www.rainbow-project.org.

FINALLY.....

Being gay, bisexual, or same-sex attracted is something to feel good about and proud of. Sexual orientation can be a complex issue, and it is important to try and not feel overwhelmed by it. If having read this guide, you still have concerns, fears, or issues with your same-sex attraction, there are lots of excellent support organisations, resources, books, and websites that are available to help.

The Rainbow Project's website has details of all these services at www.rainbow-project.org.

WHAT DOES GAY, BISEXUAL AND SAME-SEX ATTRACTED MEAN?



A gay man is someone who is physically, emotionally and sexually attracted to other men. A bisexual man is someone who is physically, emotionally and sexually attracted to both men and women but not always equally or at the same time. Since being gay or bisexual mean different things to different people, the term "same-sex attracted" is sometimes used to describe those who are physically, emotionally and sexually attracted to someone of the same gender (sex), but who do not necessarily identify as gay or bisexual.

IS SAME-SEX ATTRACTION NORMAL?

Yes – having feelings for someone of the same sex, or both sexes, is completely normal. Homosexuality and bisexuality have always existed throughout history and around the world. The UK Treasury estimate that between 6-10% of the population are gay, lesbian or bisexual, a figure that is similar to estimates in other parts of the world. Although same-sex attraction is less common than

opposite-sex attraction, it does not make homosexuality or bisexuality any less 'normal' than heterosexuality.

IS IT ALL ABOUT SEX?

Some people think that being gay or bisexual is only about sex, what you do in the bedroom, or what turns you on. Sex is important in any relationship whether you're gay, bisexual or heterosexual. However, sexual orientation is not just about behaviour – it is about our thoughts, feelings, behaviour and identity.

Think about it this way – if a heterosexual man stopped having sex with women, would he stop being heterosexual? Likewise, if a gay man stopped having sex with men, would it stop him being gay? Of course it wouldn't. Defining sexual orientation in terms of behaviour is leaving out all the other things it means to be heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual.

Heterosexual relationships are about love, affection, emotion, feelings, intimacy, and sex. The same is true for gay and bisexual relationships. When it comes to sex and love, some people are just looking for casual (sexual) relationships, while others are seeking someone special to spend a lifetime together. Being gay or bisexual does not differ from heterosexuality in this respect.

DO PEOPLE CHOOSE TO BE GAY?

Some people do believe that being gay or bisexual is a choice. However, everyone is born with a particular sexual orientation which only becomes obvious once you hit puberty and discover sex and sexual attraction. Most people are born with opposite-sex attraction and some people are born with a same-sex attraction. Just as straight men do not choose to be attracted to women, gay and bisexual men do not choose to be attracted to men.

beforehand.

As with any group of people, there will be some you get on with and some you won't. If you feel that you have little in common with the gay or bisexual people you have met so far, you could try different ways of contacting more online or through many of the special interest groups such as the gay choir (Quire), gay rugby team (Ulster Titans), or the LGBT mediation group (Beginner's Mind). Details about groups in your area can be found on The Rainbow Project's website at www.rainbow-project.org.

THANKS FOR THE ADVICE, NOW I'M READY FOR A BOYFRIEND!

Slow down Mister! Don't forget that the most important relationship you have is the one you have with yourself. Take time to think about what exactly it is you want from a relationship with another man. It may take you time to figure this out, but it's not the end of the world if you do not get into a relationship right away - it is more important that you get the relationship you want.

Although you may have an idea in your head as to what you want from a relationship, your partner may have a different idea. Some people want no-strings casual (usually sexual) relationships, while others want a monogamous relationship (you and your partner do not have sex with other people). There are many different ways of having relationships with others. It is important that you are open and honest with others about what you want in a relationship from the start.

WHAT ABOUT SEX?

Whether it's a relationship or a one night stand, sex with another man can feel great and should make us feel good about who we are. Sex with other men can be whatever you want it to be and it's

longer true for other things listed above?

Furthermore, the word 'sodomy' is considered to be a (homosexual) sin (Gen, 18:20) by those holding anti-gay views. Yet the word actually refers to any sexual act that does not, or cannot, result in conception. Sexual acts are also condemned if they take place outside marriage. If we are to take the literal meaning of these passages, it would mean that a great number of people, regardless of their sexual orientation, have committed a sin of sodomy.

Gay and bisexual people are entitled to follow a religious, spiritual path of their choosing, and although most Christian denominations will publicly state anti-gay policies, quite a few individual Christians and specific Christian churches welcome gay members as they are. There are also a number of gay Christian groups that provide support and guidance on living a Christian life as a gay or bisexual man. For more information, check out the website www.changingattitude.org.uk.

I'M OUT – WHAT NEXT?

There comes a time to stop talking and to get on with living your (new) life exactly how you want to. It's time to meet other gay and bisexual people and to explore your sexual orientation safely and confidently.

Despite the stereotypes, there is no single way of being gay/bi. It is, however, about expressing yourself in the way YOU want to.

Going out with friends and meeting new ones at clubs or parties can be great. But the scene isn't for everybody and it's not everything there is to being gay or bi. Most towns and cities have gay social groups and gay men's health projects. These can be excellent places to meet new people and to find out what there is to do locally and most will arrange to meet first time visitors

WHY THEN ARE PEOPLE CONFUSED ABOUT THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?



Most of us live in communities, cultures and societies that can be described as homophobic and heterosexual.

Homophobia is fear, dislike or prejudice against people who are gay (and bisexual). Examples of homophobia include name calling, abuse, physical attack, being treated unfairly by employers, or being refused services because you are attracted to other men. Homophobia is unacceptable and illegal – if you do believe that you have experienced homophobia and want to report it, contact The Rainbow Project for more information and advice. Unfortunately schools are exempt under the equality law that applies to Northern Ireland, known as Section 75, and therefore you might have limited rights. However, The Rainbow Project is lobbying to have this addressed.

Heterosexism is the assumption that everyone is heterosexual, or that being heterosexual is more favourable than being lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). An example of heterosexism is when you are asked if you have a girlfriend (the assumption being made is that since you are a male, you're going to have a female partner). Other examples of heterosexism include the belief that heterosexual relationships are more stable, desirable and valid than homosexual relationships; the invisibility of gay or bisexual characters in films; the lack of awareness by many health professionals on LGB issues; and, the belief that being gay is abnormal and bad for society.

All of us are bombarded with negative messages about homosexuality as we grow up. We are socialised into heterosexual lifestyles that cause confusion and uncertainty when our feelings conflict with what is 'expected' of us by our families, friends, schools, work colleagues, and communities. This confusion can be very difficult to cope with, and leads many young people to question their sexual orientation.

AM I GAY OR BISEXUAL?

Your sexual feelings may be so strong that they are not directed toward particular persons or situations, and this is why sometimes being attracted to someone of the same gender is called a "phase". However, sexual orientation is something that is fixed at birth, just like gender, eye colour, or skin colour, and being gay or bisexual is not a "phase". As you get older you will figure out who you are and who you really are attracted to.

This is a question that only you can answer for yourself. If you're reading this guide, chances are that you already suspect that you may be gay or bisexual. Perhaps you find yourself looking at other men that you pass in the street. You might have a crush on someone at school, college or work. Maybe you fantasise about having sex with other men. For many teenagers and young men,

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?



Gay and bisexual men and their families who have particularly religious beliefs sometimes struggle with issues concerning faith and same-sex attraction. This is because the Bible is said to condemn homosexuality by calling it an 'abomination' (Lev, 18:22) in the Book of Leviticus. In this same chapter, God also calls many other things an abomination including: eating shell-fish (Lev, 11:10), getting your hair trimmed (Lev, 19:27), planting two different crops in the same field, and wearing clothes made of two or more fibres (Lev, 19:19).

Does this mean that the Bible is to be taken literally as stated in each of its Books? Or, should it be interpreted to reflect changes in modern-day societies. After all, the Bible states that it's acceptable for people to possess slaves (Lev, 25:44), or that anyone who works on the Sabbath should be put to death (Ex, 35:2). However, these things no longer happen in modern-day societies, so why should homosexuality still be considered as an abomination if it's no

“Someone has made you gay / those friends have influenced you”

Explain to your parents that no one can make you gay or bisexual – you just are. Many people believe that hanging around with other gay/bi people will ‘influence’ you to ‘be that way too’. This is simply not true. Most gay and bisexual people grow up surrounded by heterosexuals, yet it doesn’t seem to ‘influence’ them to ‘be that way too’.

SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

You may find it helpful to have some reading material or resources to give your parents to help them understand more about same-sex attraction. The Rainbow Project can provide these resources to you, including a booklet called “Family Ties” which provides information for the parents of gay/bisexual children.

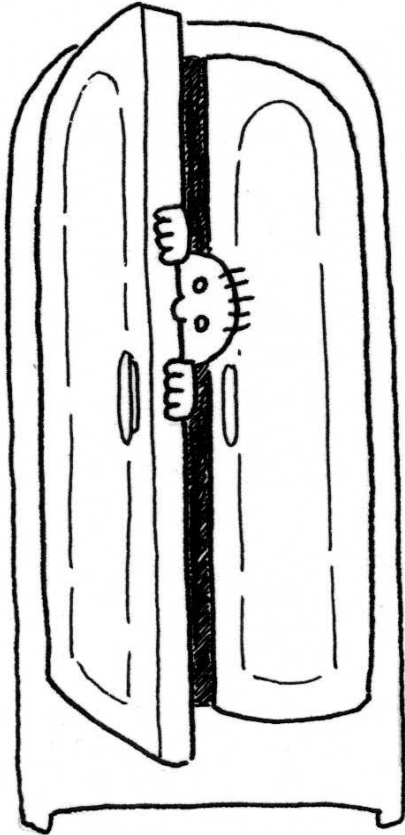
The Rainbow Project, in partnership with Cara-Friend, also run a monthly support group for parents which is a great way for your mum or dad to meet other parents who have a gay/bisexual child.

these feelings can be very confusing as you’re growing up, but they usually become more clearly focused over time.

You may not know what to call your attraction, emotions or sexual feelings for other men. You don't have to rush and decide how to label yourself right now. You do not need to have sex or a relationship with another man to ‘know’ whether you’re gay or bisexual. As you get older you will figure out who you are and who you really are attracted to.

Take your time to get to know yourself better. You might find it helpful to get the support of a trained professional. The Rainbow Project provides a professional, confidential counselling service for young men who are unsure about their sexual orientation. Counselling can help you to sort out your feelings, and it will support you in the coming out process if you are gay, bisexual, or same-sex attracted.

WHAT IS COMING OUT?



Coming out is often described as a process that involves coming out to yourself (accepting you are gay or bisexual), and choosing to share this with others (coming out to family, friends, and others).

Understanding, acknowledging and accepting your sexual orientation is the most important part of the coming out process. People don't choose to be gay, but you can choose to accept it or deny it. Many men find this acceptance difficult since society teaches us that being gay is 'bad', 'strange', 'abnormal', 'shameful', and 'immoral'. These negative messages are often internalised and accepted as being true. This is called 'internalised homophobia' and can cause many gay/bisexual men to deny or repress their

Try to stay calm and clear about what you are telling them. Remember that our parents also grow up in the same society that teaches us myths, stereotypes and negative messages about same-sex attraction, so it may take them time to understand, acknowledge and accept your sexual orientation, just as it took you time too.

Be prepared to answer any questions they may ask. Here are some of the common questions or reactions parents have, with tips on how to respond.

“Where did we go wrong? / It's my fault you're gay”

Be clear with them that they did nothing wrong. Tell them that you love them and they should be proud that they have raised a son who is willing to be honest with them and wants them to be a part of his life. Talk to them about how you did not choose to be gay or bisexual, but instead it is a part of who you are and something you cannot change.

“Maybe it's just a phase?”

Talk to them about how long you have taken to come to understand and accepting your sexual orientation. Show them that you are confident about being gay or bisexual, and you know you will be for the rest of your life.

“How can you know if you're not had sex with another man?”

It is not necessary to have a relationship or a sexual experience with another man to know that you are gay or bisexual, just in the same way that heterosexuals do not need to have sex in order to know that they are physically, emotionally, and sexually attracted to people of the opposite gender.

“You just haven't met the right girl yet!”

Talk to them about how you are feeling, and tell them that you are just not attracted to girls and you cannot change that.

WHAT WILL MY PARENTS SAY?



Gay and bisexual men often find that coming out to parents and family is the most difficult part of the coming out process. You may find that your parents have already suspected and feel happy that you have had the courage to tell them. On the other hand, you may receive a negative reaction, especially if they have always assumed that you were heterosexual. If you do get a negative reaction, don't lose heart. Time is a great healer. They may be experiencing a whole range of emotions including shock, grief, guilt, blame, disappointment and lots of pain.

same-sex attraction, trying to 'be heterosexual', perhaps by having relationships with women, or even getting married and having children. They hope that eventually their attraction for other men will go away, but it rarely does.

Internalised homophobia can have serious implications for your mental health – that's why coming out to yourself is such an important process for gay and bisexual people.

If you are having difficulties understanding, acknowledging, or accepting your sexual orientation, speak to a counsellor who can help you explore your feelings and make sense of what's going on. You can make an appointment with a counsellor at The Rainbow Project by telephoning (028) 9031 9030.

When you feel confident and proud of your sexual orientation, sexuality, and identity, it is natural and normal to want to share this part of who you are with others. Telling other people that you are gay, bisexual, or same-sex attracted can be a daunting experience. Fear of prejudice, discrimination, abuse, and lack of understanding can prevent many LGB people from disclosing their sexual orientation to others, even to close family and friends.

However, coming out to others can also be very empowering. The ability to be open about your sexual orientation with your friends and family will help you to lead a happier life that is about being true to yourself. When you have to lie and hide your sexual orientation it can have a damaging effect on your relationships with others and your own mental health.

HOW DO I COME OUT TO OTHERS?

Deciding to come out to others should always be your own decision. Be clear about your reasons for wanting to tell others. Ask yourself why you want to come out. If your answer goes

something like “I feel proud of who I am and what to share this with others”, or “I want to get to know other gay people”, then these are good reasons. Think very carefully if your reasoning is to hurt or shock people. Often the person who gets hurt will be you.

I AM READY - WHO SHOULD I TELL FIRST?

There are no rules that say you have to come out in a certain way or who you should tell first — it's what works best for you. Some young men decide to tell their friends first before telling their parents. Regardless of who you tell, keep in mind the following tips when you decide to tell others:

- Try to pick a time when you are both quite relaxed and have plenty of time available to talk.
- Try not to follow a script, you can almost guarantee that some people will react differently from how you expected. However, you may find it helpful to sit down and write an email or letter to the person you are thinking of coming out to. You may not give the letter/email to that person, but this will help you to gather your thoughts and think about exactly what you want to say.
- It's not a good idea to come out if you are feeling particularly angry or emotional, or if either of you are drunk. Dutch courage might seem like a good idea at the time, but you may end up saying something you will regret later.
- Remember that people may be shocked or upset at first and might need a little time to think about what you have told them.

WHAT WILL MY FRIENDS SAY?

Coming out to friends is normally the first step that young gay or bisexual men make in the coming out process.

Friends can have mixed emotions or responses to this news. It is a good idea, therefore, to test the water by talking about gay issues, or gay celebrities to see what reactions you receive. If they respond negatively, you may want to reconsider whether or not to tell them at this time.

It is important to have friends you can rely on and talk to. You also need to be able to trust your friends, as you probably don't want everyone finding out just yet.

Supportive friends can help you with the coming out process. They may also be willing to support you in telling your parents or accessing support from many of the gay support organisations available in Northern Ireland.

If you do not feel ready to talk to any of your friends, you may find it more helpful to meet other young gay and bisexual people first. For more details on youth groups in Northern Ireland, visit The Rainbow Project's website at www.rainbow-project.org.