



JUNE - SEPTEMBER 2011

HALDIMAND-NORFOLK HEALTH UNIT

# Sexual CONNECTION

# PLEASE Accept us



Sexual feelings are a normal part of growing up and begin at birth. As one passes from childhood, into adolescence and eventually into adults, their sexual feelings also develop and change over time. Teens find themselves being physically attracted to others and begin having sexual thoughts and feelings. These sexual thoughts and feelings can be toward the opposite sex, heterosexual feelings, or toward the same sex, homosexual feelings. Some teens find themselves attracted to both sexes, bisexual feelings.

Sexual orientation is defined as being attracted physically and emotionally to people of the same or opposite sex. Homosexuality is the persistent sexual and emotional attraction to someone of the same sex. Most gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) individuals first become aware of and experience their sexual thoughts and feelings during childhood and adolescence. Sexual orientation is not a matter of choice. These individuals have no more choice about being homosexual or bisexual as a person has about being heterosexual.

Despite increased knowledge and acceptance, GLBT youth still feel socially un-

accepted. These feelings include:

- Feeling different from peers
- Feelings of guilt about their sexual orientation
- Worrying about responses from family and loved ones
- Being teased and ridiculed by their peers
- Feeling discriminated against
- Being rejected and harassed
- Worrying about AIDS, HIV and other STI's



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Being homosexual among a straight environment is challenging at best, but is even more challenging during adolescence. These students may be afraid to go to school due to bullying. According to the 2008 Pediatric Study, two-thirds of students felt ostracized at school due to their sexual orientation. GLBT youth have the potential to become socially isolated, withdraw from activities and friends, have trouble concentrating and develop low self esteem. Some may develop depression and think about or attempt suicide. Recent studies show GLBT youth account for a significant number of deaths by suicide during adolescence. The 2008 Pediatric Study of GLBT youth indicated that acceptance and support, particularly from parents, teachers, and others was a significant factor in lowering a teens' risk for depression, addiction, unplanned pregnancy, and suicide attempts.

## Coming Out

Some GLBT youth may tell a few accepting, supporting friends and family members about their sexual orientation. Some are fully accepted after coming out, yet others are not. Those teens who feel they aren't supported or accepted can be at higher risk for dropping out of school, living on the streets, using alcohol and/or drugs, and attempting suicide. According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the average age for coming out is 16. If a student is considering coming out at school, it's recommended they seek out a support system from family, friends and/or school

administration, such as a teacher or guidance counsellor.

## Safety at School

The 2009 National School Climate Survey from the US found that nine out of ten GLBT students experienced harassment and bullying at school in the past year. One-third also skipped a full day of classes, more than once, because they felt unsafe. This same bullying also goes on in Canadian schools. Homophobia, unfortunately, is still at epidemic proportions, especially in rural Canada. Students want to feel safe and accepted, especially at school where they spend most of their day. School administration is responsible for keeping students safe at school. LGBT youth deserve the same protection given to "straight" students.

Many times as an educator you may hear:

"That is so queer"

He is such a fag"

That's soo gay"

Few teachers will stop this conversation or have a discussion about it. Bringing the topic of gay issues into the classroom may help GLBT students that are struggling with their sexuality feel more accepted.

One way to show support for these students is to provide a positive space for them. Positive space symbols, like the one below, is placed in a prominent place so the student can see that you may be someone "positive" he or she can speak to

about their homosexuality. This is a good first start to making GLBT youth in your school feel accepted.



Teachers may also need to be prepared to discuss their own sexuality. If a teacher does identify as gay or lesbian, this will also

give the student the opportunity to have a role model within the school.

## Gay Straight Alliances (GSA's)

Students themselves are starting to form GSA's in schools. Many times students have to fight for the right to start these groups. GSA's welcome students and faculty regardless of their sexual orientation. Check out [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org) if interested in starting a GSA at your school.

Students that are GLBT may be the most underserved students in the educational system. Harassment, prejudice, discrimination and abuse interfere with personal and academic development. The creation of GSA's may help create a safe space for GLBT students. All GLBT youth want is to feel accepted and supported. As a community, we can do this together, to help GLBT youth feel just like every other teen so that they may enjoy their high school years.

### References:

[www.sexualityandyou.ca](http://www.sexualityandyou.ca)

[www.metroparent.com](http://www.metroparent.com) : *Being Gay in High School Today*

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org) : *Sexual Attraction and Orientation*

[www.mtholyoke.edu](http://www.mtholyoke.edu) : *Gay and Lesbian Students in Our Schools*

*American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: Facts for Families, gay and Lesbian Adolescents, Jan. 2006.*



## WORDS TO USE WITH SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- **Transgendered** is an umbrella term, relating to how some individuals express their gender identity. For some it might mean changing their gender identity. For some it might mean changing their gender, perhaps surgically; for others, to dress in the clothing of the “opposite” gender; for some, to be free to express themselves as neither male or female; and, for others it means having been born with ambiguous genitalia.
- **Heterosexual** is to have feelings of affection and attraction, both physically and emotionally, to people of the opposite gender. This is also called “being straight.”
- **Homosexual** is to have feelings of affection and attraction, both physically and emotionally, to people of the same gender. Lots of people refer to this as “being queer.”
- **Lesbian** is to be a woman who has feelings of affection and attraction, both physically and emotionally, to women.
- **Bisexual** is to be a woman or a man and to have feelings of affection and attraction, both physically and emotionally, to both men and women.
- **Gay** is to be a man who has feelings of affection and attraction, both physically and emotionally, for other men.

### Fast FACTS



- Over one-third (37.8%) of GLBT students have experienced some form of physical harassment (ie: being pushed, punched, or spat upon)
- 75% of GLBT teens feel unsafe at school
- Youth who are GLBT are 3.4 times more likely to report a suicide attempt
- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are more than three times as likely as students who are not harassed to make a suicide attempt
- An estimated 28% of completed suicides are by GLBT people

Reference:

*www.sutr.ca : Freedom to be: A Teacher's Guide to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Human Rights, 2007*

## Clinic Schedule



All of the listed clinics require an appointment. Please call:

- Terri Hartwick RN, BScN, Caledonia  
905-318-5367 Ext. 346
- Margot Fournier RN, BScN, Simcoe  
519-426-6170 Ext. 3225

For an appointment with Kristal Pitter RN(EC), BScN, our Nurse Practitioner, please call 519-426-6170 Ext. 3246 or 519-875-4485 Ext. 1851.

Haldimand	
Cayuga Secondary School	1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month
Dunnville Secondary School	2nd Wednesday of the month
Hagersville Secondary School	3rd Thursday of the month
Nurse Practitioner available in the Caledonia office 2nd Wednesday of the month by appt only	
Norfolk	
Waterford District Secondary School	2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month
Port Dover Composite School	2nd Thursday of the month
Delhi District Secondary School	1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month
Valley Heights Secondary School	4th Thursday of the month
Nurse practitioner available in the Simcoe/Langton offices Monday – Friday by appt only	

## Public Health Nurses in your School

Your Public Health Nurse will be in your high school once a week. Please look for her.

Simcoe:  
P.O. Box 247, 12 Gilbertson Drive  
Simcoe, ON N3Y 4L1  
519.426.6170 or 905.318.6623

Caledonia:  
282 Argyle Street South  
Caledonia, ON N3W 1K7  
905.318.5367

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