

I Think I Might Be Gay

An information booklet for young people

QUEER VOICES OF BHUTAN



Disclaimer:

This material is developed as an informative booklet and may contain basic information on safe sex and condom use. This material may only be appropriate for individuals who are at least 13 years and above.

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What does it mean to be Gay?



A gay person is someone who is physically, emotionally and/or spiritually attracted to a person of the same sex or gender. It is usually used to describe a man. A gay man is sexually and emotionally attracted to other men. The feelings of attraction are normal and comes naturally to them when they are young, and can continue throughout their life.

Some gay men may feel attracted to women, but the feelings of attraction are stronger towards men than women.

Studies have found that every one in ten persons in the world is gay or lesbian (women who are attracted to other women). This means that an average area with a large population has a considerable number of gay and lesbian people.

Gay people would usually blend with society and no one might be able to tell them apart. However, they themselves may always feel the difference internally and often question why they aren't attracted to the opposite sex. This internalised stigma may make it hard for them to fit in or share their thoughts with another person.

How do I know I'm Gay?

“If you are happy with who you are then you are gay. It does take cause and condition for you to realize it but when you do you feel like you have figured out a great mystery in your life; like you have solved something.”

Yeshey Tenzin Yoezer, 20

“I did know I was attracted to guys from a very young age. But it was only later in life I came across the term ‘gay’ on the internet. So that day I discovered my sexual orientation.”

Pema Dorji, 29

You may not know how to describe your sexual feelings. But you don't have to be in a hurry to label yourself. Sexual identity evolves over time. Most young men are highly sexual during the puberty years due to the onset of hormonal changes in their bodies.

Your sexual desires can sometimes be intense but not directed towards any particular person or situation. The desires may arise without provocation or cause. You will find out who you are really attracted to when you grow older. You may find your attraction to men becoming stronger and more concentrated. You may fall in love with a classmate or friend or have crushes.

These experiences may be pleasurable, unsettling, or a combination of both. Some gay men are sure about their sexual orientation at a young age, while others may need more time to be sure. If you think you might be gay, here are a few questions you could ask yourself:

- Whenever I think or fantasize sexually or romantically, is it for boys or girls?
- Have I ever had a crush on another guy or fallen in love with him?
- Do I feel different than other men?
- Are my feelings obvious for men?

Do not worry if you can't answer these questions right away. With time, you will be more confident and sure about your sexual orientation.



Am I Normal?

You are normal. Sexuality is just another aspect of your personality that is unique for each individual.

“What really is normal? If anything at all, I have realized I am much more than normal, I am extraordinary! Every one of us is.”

Sangay, 23

“Normal is overrated, I’m just myself and I feel good about it.”

Tashi Tsheten, 28



What is it like to be young and gay?

“I thought Buddhism would narrow a lot of people’s perceptive but with proper convincing, everyone turned out to be accepting and understanding. Accepting my sexual orientation is just one of my challenges as a person, and slowly I learn to accept everything about myself.”

Yeshey Tenzin Yoezer, 20

“Being gay was difficult for me as I could not understand the changes I was going through as I was grew up. It was difficult for me to accept myself and to understand and learn that the world would be fair to me.”

Phurpa Dorji, 18

“Yes I am gay and I love that about me.”

Jamyang Chogyal, 18

There is no guideline to being gay. However, there may be societal stereotypes for a gay person. There is also no right or wrong way to be gay. Remember, being gay is only one part of your identity and does not define you fully. In many other ways, you may be the same as or different than the people around you.

Lesbian women and gay men often face challenges of discrimination and violence against them. Some people in society may not accept their sexual and romantic identity to be valid. This is called homophobia. In Bhutan, organisations such as Queer Voices of Bhutan are educating people and working to reduce homophobia.



What about HIV/AIDS?



“Sex is beautiful, Natural and Biological; provided it is Consensual, Safe, Well Informed and Healthy. In order to promote safer and healthier sex, dialogues and conversations surrounding sex need to evolve from its taboo representation to a normalized and open nature. Only when individuals have access to well informed safe sex information without the prejudice and stigma, can there be a healthy practice of safer sex among individuals.”

Karma Dupchen, 29

“Sex is only safe if you and your partner use protection and abstain from making rash decisions under the influence of alcohol.”

Tika Ram, 27

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that causes a chronic, potentially life-threatening condition called Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). HIV can also make you susceptible to other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). All human beings irrespective of gender or sexual identity can get infected with HIV. Although gay men or men who have sex with men (MSM) are at a higher risk of HIV, being gay won't naturally infect you with HIV. Unprotected sex and sharing needles while injecting drugs are a few main factors that could put you at risk. HIV is preventable and can be managed but it has no complete cure.

Followings are ways to protect yourself from HIV and STIs

- Don't share needles while injecting drugs.
- Abstain from sexual intercourse if you can. Engage in less risky forms of intimacy with your partner such as hugging, normal kissing, talking, and texting. Avoid direct intercourse such as anal sex as they are known to be effective in transmitting HIV. Use a condom and water based lubricant whenever you have anal sex.
- Condoms are effective ways to prevent infection. Always use a condom whenever you have sex - vaginal, anal, or oral.
Use a new latex condom that is undamaged and stored away from direct sunlight. Remember: your wallet is not a good place to keep condoms for a long period of time.
- Use a condom only once. Choose condoms with a “reservoir tip” and be sure to squeeze out the air from the tip as you put it on. Hold on to the condom as you take it off. Be aware that condoms sometimes slip off.

- Do not double up: some people use two or more condoms over one another thinking that it will offer more protection against HIV. However, using more than one condom increases the risk of condoms breaking due to friction.
- Refrain from using drugs and alcohol as it inhibits a person's judgments and puts them at the risk of infection.

How do I learn to like myself?

“Appreciate what you have. Be thankful for the positivity around you. Do what you love the most. Surround yourself with good people. When you are with good people you won't feel insecure or afraid to face difficulties. Then slowly you'll love yourself by realising that you don't need materialistic things to make you happy.”

Rinzin Galley, 22

Acknowledging that you are gay is not easy. People around you may be awkward with you or even hateful. It is natural for most gay men and lesbians to hide their emotions to protect themselves. They may not be true about their feelings even with themselves, in fear that others will find out. Some may even avoid being around other gay people for the fear of what people would think.

The struggle of keeping your feelings from everyone else is hard work - this is called “being in the closet”. It is a painful and lonely place to be, especially if you stay there just to survive. It takes a lot of energy to deny your feelings, and denial can be costly.

Reading books that have correct information by or for gay people can be helpful. Books about gay people who are living a fulfilled life can help you understand that being yourself is also important for a good life. You can learn that gay people, just like others, are diverse and have a lot to offer. There is a lot of misinformation about gay people in society, but there is increasingly more information in recent years.

Try saying to yourself, **“I am gay and it’s okay.”**



Whom should I tell?

The times are changing with more gay people starting to accept and feel better about themselves. Learning about yourself and understanding your feelings may help you become more comfortable with your sexual identity.

This is the beginning of the process called “coming out”. Start by accepting yourself. Tell yourself that it’s okay. Find someone you can trust and share with them. They could be anyone; your parents, siblings, friends, relatives, teachers, etc. Start by coming out slowly and eventually, it will get better.

At the same time, it can be dangerous to come out to people who could use the information to harm you. For this reason, it is important to choose the people you come out to wisely. Although it is not easy, many young people recount coming out as rewarding. They feel more at peace, happier and confident about themselves once they aren’t in the closet anymore.

Being in the closet may lead to unhealthy habits such as substance abuse or self-harm. Suicide is also a common issue with gay people in the closet. Remember, you are not alone in this. There are various places you can look for help. Your feelings are important and it is okay to acknowledge and accept them. There is more to your life than alcohol, drugs, and suicide.

How do I find other men like me?

“I met a guy from a fake account on Facebook, to whom I could talk freely. Eventually I met his friends, and his friends’ friend. This led to a circle of people like me. That’s how I came to know my community. I know most of the LGBT people in Bhutan now.”

Tshewang, 23

Find a local **LGBT community** youth group you can be a member of. It is a great way to meet others like yourself.



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Published: 2021

QUEER VOICES OF BHUTAN PUBLICATIONS

Queer Voices of Bhutan wishes to thank Equal Ground,
Sri Lanka for allowing us to re-produce materials from their
publications.

Queer Voices of Bhutan thanks the
Embassy of Canada to Bhutan for their support.



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