



Safe Zone

WHAT ARE YOUR BELIEFS ABOUT GAYS AND LESBIANS?

The following are common, normal feeling often experienced when a relationship.

Does being "different" sound like a positive or a negative experience to you? For gays and lesbians, daily living can be a frustrating and painful experience in our society. Because they are different in their sexual orientation, gays and lesbians have been oppressed. They suffer social, religious, economic, political and legal discrimination. Much of this discrimination is based on the myths people believe about gays and lesbians. For gays and lesbians to be treated equally in our society, we need to dispel these myths. What is most needed is the elimination of the irrational fear and hatred some people have for intimate, same-sex relationships. This irrational fear and hatred is called homophobia.

MYTH #1

It's OK to call gays and lesbians names like "queer," "faggot," and "dyke" because they are "deviant."

Fact: A gay man or lesbian is someone whose primary sexual and affectional preference is for a member of his or her own sex. This is different from the statistical norm, but difference does not equal deviance. If it did, blue-eyed people and left-handed people, who are also in the statistical minority, would be considered deviant. Male homosexuals generally prefer to be called "gays," while female homosexuals generally prefer to be called "lesbians," although the term "gay" is often acceptable for both sexes. To be called "queer," "faggot" or "dyke" is derogatory and may be insulting.

MYTH #2

Gays and lesbians are mentally ill.

Fact: Homosexuality is considered normal in most of the world's cultures. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders and declared that homosexuality is as healthy as heterosexuality. Like anyone else, however, gays and lesbians can become maladjusted when they are treated with hostility.

MYTH #3

Gays and lesbians are not "normal."

Fact: Sexual behavior and orientation exist along a continuum that ranges from people who are exclusively attracted to members of the same sex, to people who are equally attracted to

members of both sexes, to people who are exclusively attracted to members of the opposite sex. All are normal.

MYTH #4

Gays and lesbians are few in number and "hide out" in careers like theater, interior design and cosmetology.

Fact: A generally accepted statistic is that approximately one in 10 persons is gay or lesbian. Gays and lesbians are found in all walks of life and in all professions. For example, consider the following professional associations: the National Lawyers Guild Gay Caucus, the Association of Gay Psychologists, the Gay Nurses Association, the Association of Gay Seminarians and Clergy, the Gay Airline Pilots Association, and the Gay Prize Fighters of America Association, to name but a few.

MYTH #5

Gay men like to dress as women; gay men wish they were women and lesbians wish they were men.

Fact: Gay men and lesbians, for the most part, are comfortable with their identities as men and women and have no desire to change their sex.

MYTH #6

Gays and lesbians are a menace to children.

Fact: The overwhelming majority of child molestation cases 95 percent involves heterosexual men and is committed against females under the age of 18.

MYTH #7

Gays and lesbians are promiscuous.

Fact: Homosexuals are neither more nor less sexually promiscuous than heterosexuals. Like heterosexuals, many gays and lesbians are involved in monogamous relationships, considering themselves partners and committed to each other for life. Some gays and lesbians may also choose to remain celibate, and others may have multiple partners, just as some heterosexuals do.

MYTH #8

Parents cause their children to become gay or lesbian.

Fact: Reasons that a particular sexual orientation develops are unknown. Current research indicates that it is a very complex matter that involves both biological and environmental influences. Just as we cannot explain what makes some people heterosexual, we do not understand what makes other people gay or lesbian.

MYTH #9

If a gay or lesbian could just meet the "right" member of the opposite sex, then he or she could fall in love and be "cured."

Fact: Many gays and lesbians have dated members of the opposite sex but find it more fulfilling to date members of their own sex. Most gays and lesbians have no desire to change their sexual orientation. Those who do are usually reacting to negative societal attitudes toward homosexuality.

MYTH #10

If a friend tells you he or she is gay, then that friend is coming on to you.

Fact: Being gay involves more than a person's sexual activity. When friends "come out" (reveal their homosexuality) to you, they are essentially inviting you to know them as whole people. If a gay person chooses to come out to you, then that person has decided to share part of his or her identity with you. Such a disclosure means only that this friend trusts you, not that he or she would like to become sexually involved with you.

MYTH #11

If you have friends who are gay or lesbian, that must mean you are also gay.

Fact: Liking or loving someone who is gay or lesbian does not make you gay any more than liking someone who is Catholic or Jewish makes you Catholic or Jewish.

MYTH #12

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a gay disease.

Fact: AIDS is caused by a virus. Viruses infect all kinds of people, regardless of their sexual orientation. AIDS is spread through the exchange of bodily fluids, such as blood, semen and breast milk. Some people have contracted AIDS from sharing intravenous needles. While AIDS has been contracted by a large number of gay men, it has also been contracted by heterosexual men and women as well as children and even infants. Associating with gays does not mean you will get AIDS. For further information about AIDS, contact Aids Community Services (847-2441 or 847-AIDS) or the National Gay Task Force Hotline (1-800-221-7044).

READINGS

Books:

- A Family Matter, Charles Silverstein
- Are You Still My Mother? Are You Still My Family? Gloria Guss Back
- Coming Out Right, Wes Huchmore and William Hanson
- Living Gay, Don Clark
- Loving Someone Gay, Don Clark
- Now That You Know, Betty Fairchild
- Our Right to Love: A Lesbian Resource Book, Ginny Vida (editor)
- Permanent Partners, Betty Berzon
- Positively Gay, Betty Berzon and Robert Laughton
- Rubyfruit Jungle, Rita Mae Brown
- Society and the Healthy Homosexual, George Weinberg
- The Beauty Queen, Patricia Neil Warren
- The Front Runner, Patricia Neil Warren
- The Joy of Gay Sex, Charles Silverstein and Edmund White
- The Joy of Lesbian Sex, Emily Sisley and Bertha Harris

Periodicals:

- 10 Percent
- Christopher Street
- Deneuve
- Empathy
- Genre
- Good Times
- Out
- Outlook
- The Advocate

"Coming Out to Your Parents,"

Parents FLAG
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