

SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

STRATEGY GUIDE

Theme: Sexual Identity

Introduction

Sexual identity

Sexual identity is how a person thinks of themselves in terms of their romantic or sexual attraction. Sexual identity may also refer to sexual orientation identity, which is when people identify or dis-identify with a sexual orientation or choose not to identify with a sexual orientation. There are lots of types of sexuality and for some people their sexuality is fluid and can change over time. Sexuality is often used to describe sexual and romantic attraction. However, these are not always the same:

- Sexual attraction is how physically attracted to someone you are and includes whether you would like to have sex with them.
- Romantic attraction is how much you are emotionally attracted to someone.

You might feel both romantic and sexual attraction to the same people or you might feel different types of attraction toward different people. It is natural for young people to be confused about their sexual identity and they may need time to work out who they are. Some people know who they are attracted to from a young age. For other people, it is not so simple and can take a while to work out.



Common terms used to describe sexuality include:

Aromantic
Asexual
Bicurious
Bisexual (or 'bi')
Crossed orientation (or mixed orientation)
Demisexual
<u>Gay/homosexual</u>
Heteroflexible
Homoflexible
Lesbian
Pansexual
Polysexual
Queer
Questioning
Straight/heterosexual

Source: Source: Childline, 2021

5 things to remember about your sexuality:

1. Sexuality isn't a choice.
2. It takes different people different amounts of time to understand their sexuality.
3. 'Coming out' is different for everyone, but it can get easier as you start to tell more people.
4. There are lots of different types of sexuality.
5. Sexuality can change over time - this is OK.



What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?

Young people who are exploring their own sexual identity can face many challenges. The journey of discovering their sexual identity can sometimes have negative consequences and often these can result in safeguarding concerns. Adolescents can remain unidentified and may display secretive behaviours because they are not comfortable enough to identify themselves and their sexuality. They may fear rejection or stigmatisation from disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity issues to family, friends or healthcare practitioners. This can cause young people to engage in risky behaviours, which can raise safeguarding concerns if their exploration is not safely supported.

Adolescents can become vulnerable to adults whose motivations are to sexually exploit them. Sexual behaviour, especially during early or middle adolescence, does not necessarily reflect present or future sexual identity. Social media can capture these times of exploration and can cause embarrassment and vulnerabilities to adolescents. Bullying can occur in schools amongst peers, having a detrimental impact on mental health.

Risks associated when a young person is exploring their sexual identity:

Mental health disorders	Social exclusion & rejection	Sexual exploitation	Bullying
Social isolation	Substance abuse	Victims of violence	Discrimination & harrasment

Facts and figures (Stonewall, 2017)

- Nearly half (45%) of LGBT pupils - including 64 per cent of trans pupils - are bullied for being LGBT in Britain's schools. This is down from 55% of lesbian, gay and bi pupils who experienced bullying because of their sexual orientation in 2012 and 65% in 2007.
- Half of LGBT pupils hear homophobic slurs 'frequently' or 'often' at school.
- Seven in 10 LGBT pupils report that their school says that homophobic and biphobic bullying is wrong, up from half in 2012 and a quarter in 2007.
- Just two in five LGBT pupils report that their schools say that transphobic bullying is wrong.
- Just one in five LGBT pupils has been taught about safe sex in relation to same-sex relationships.
- More than four in five trans young people have self-harmed, as have three in five lesbian, gay and bi young people who are not trans.
- More than two in five trans young people have attempted to take their own life, as have one in five lesbian, gay and bi students who are not trans.
- One in five LGBT people have experienced a hate crime or incident because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the last 12 months.
- Two in five LGBT students (42%) have hidden their identity at university for fear of discrimination.
- Half of black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT people (51%) have experienced discrimination or poor treatment from others in their local LGBT community because of their ethnicity.
- More than one in ten LGBT people (11%) have faced domestic abuse from a partner in the last year.
- Half of LGBT people (52%) said they have experienced depression in the last year.
- Nearly two-thirds of bi women (72%) and just over half of bi men (56%) have experienced anxiety in the last year.
- Only half of lesbian, gay and bi people (46%) and trans people (47%) feel able to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity to everyone in their family.

Additional Resources and Information

[Breakout Youth Project \(BYP\)](#) – An independent charity which offers a confidential support service for young people aged 13 to 21, who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or unsure of their sexuality or gender identity. Breakout Youth was set up in Southampton in 1993 as a full-time project run by Southampton City Council, in response to the dangers faced by LGBTQ+ youth at the time. During that time the service offered a youth group, one to one support, counselling, and training for other professionals. Breakout Youth became a charity in its own right in May 2012. Breakout Youth currently offers group-based support to LGBTQ+ young people in Southampton, Eastleigh, Basingstoke and on the Isle of Wight.



What they offer:

- Confidentiality and safety are important at Breakout, so the venues of the youth groups are not advertised. This means that only people who have been referred (by themselves or someone else) can come along to the sessions.
- Provide access to free condoms, lube, Chlamydia screening, pregnancy testing and advice from qualified sexual health workers.
- Telling others how they are feeling can be difficult and stressful for children. BYP can help children decide who they want to tell, what they want to share and how best to say it.
- Bespoke training for professionals on issues around sexuality, homophobia, gender and transphobia. They can design and run sessions for groups or assemblies, or support children on a one-to-one basis.

Contact details:

35 The Avenue, Southampton, SO17 1XN, United Kingdom

Telephone: 02380 224224

Email: hello@breakoutyouth.org.uk

[No Limits](#) - No Limits is a charity that offers information, advice, counselling, advocacy and support for young people under 26 living in Southampton and Hampshire. No Limits offer free support on a wide range of issues including housing, homelessness, debt, employment, relationships, sexual health, mental health and substance misuse. Support is offered at the No Limits Advice Centre in Central Southampton, through outreach work delivered in schools and colleges across Hampshire, in the Emergency Department at two Hampshire hospitals and virtually via telephone, email, web chat and Zoom.

[The Proud Trust](#) - The Proud Trust is an organisation that helps LGBT+ young people empower themselves to make a positive change for themselves and their communities through youth groups, coordinating national and regional LGBT+ youth work networks, managing the LGBT+ Centre for Manchester, delivering of training, running events and campaigns, undertaking research and creating resources.



[Hampshire CAMHS: Sexuality and gender identity](#) – The service supports anyone of any gender (however they self-identify) and anyone of any sexual orientation (however they identify) to be happy, healthy and comfortable in their own skin. As well as providing mental health services for children, Hampshire CAMHS is proud to be a part of the NHS Rainbow Badge Scheme. The Rainbow Badge initiative gives healthcare staff a way to show that their place of work offers open, non-judgemental and inclusive care for all who identify as LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, the + simply means inclusive of all identities, regardless of how people define themselves). Staff members who are wearing a Rainbow NHS Badge have completed specialist training in LGBTQ+ suicide and self-harm prevention. Resources include websites for additional information, podcasts and apps regarding sexuality and gender identity.

References

Childline (2021). [Sexuality](#). Accessed: 23 November 2021.

Stonewall (2017). [School Report - The experiences of lesbian, gay, bi and trans young people in Britain's schools in 2017](#). Accessed: 23 November 2021.