

*What should I say to my child about homosexuality?  
- parent support material from Open Doors Education*



*Introduction -*

There is increased pressure on young teens to experiment sexually with both gay and straight partners. It is promoted by popular culture as a way of finding out who you are. Psychologically speaking, this can have the opposite effect, causing identity confusion, depression and low self esteem.

Some young people experience identity confusion as a result of past sexual abuse. They may need support to work through this experience and understand how it has impacted upon them.

Some may have a sense of being 'different', even from an early age, and may struggle for years about their sexual orientation. They can be fearful of acknowledging/voicing any doubts they may have about their sexuality and will often deny and suppress any differences they may feel. They can struggle with what they believe to be the expectations of their parents and will observe your viewpoint to gauge how safe it is to bring the issue up.

*Your role -*

A parent's role is to help the young teen achieve maturity and independence by providing healthy values, safe boundaries and appropriate expectations throughout adolescence. Your relationship with your adolescent is pivotal and keeping the communication channels open is vital. Your teen may worry about your reaction if they raise a discussion with you about sexual issues so it's important to react in such a way that they don't feel judged. Parents need to reassure the teen that everything is up for discussion and need to demonstrate their willingness to listen and remain calm. Parents need to look honestly at their own take on homosexuality in order to be prepared should the teen raise the topic of their own uncertainties.

If parents have specific moral or religious views on the practice of homosexuality you have the right to voice those. However, as with any other topic of potential conflict, it is important to -

- explain your views calmly and why you believe that (*helps your teen understand where you are coming from*)
- avoid going on the attack or using aggressive, unloving language (*helps your teen know you are not rejecting them for asking the question*)
- listen to your teen's views and encourage them to explore the question from different angles (*helps your teen assess what they really know, think and believe*)
- be respectful of other people as people, even if you don't agree with their choices (*helps your teen learn to be respectful too*)

Whether or not you have a moral or religious view about homosexuality, your teenager needs certain things from you as their parent -

*Young teens need reassurance* - It's natural for young teens to feel strongly attached to members of the same sex. This is a normal stage of development and is part of finding their identity in the peer group ('people who are like me') and also about learning to be close in a safe environment. Having close emotional ties to a friend or friends of the same sex does not mean you are gay.

*Young teens need to be encouraged to act in ways that protect their health* - Delaying being sexually active is the healthiest course for all teenagers, whether or not they identify as being straight or gay. Physical, emotional and psychological health is compromised by early sexual activity and multiple partners. Taking the time to find out who you are and who you want in a partner before becoming sexually involved is a healthy message for all teens.

*Young teens need to know how to seek support when they feel they aren't coping* - Certain personal skills and attitudes, along with the support of trusted adults, can help a young teen cope resiliently when life is difficult. The issue may be anything from loss of a family member, bullying, academic stress or concern about sexual orientation. Whatever the concern, the young teen needs emotional support and acceptance from the trusted adults in their life, particularly if feeling unsafe, depressed or isolated. They need the skills of recognising their emotional state, placing negative events in context and taking action to tackle the source of the problem, including seeking support. Professional counselling may be indicated.

*For a parent who is concerned about their teen's sexuality, it may be helpful to talk it through with a counsellor or therapist as it can be a difficult issue to deal with and the parent may question if 'they've gone wrong' somewhere. Feel free to contact Open Doors Counselling on 03 9870 7044 or [info@opendoors.com.au](mailto:info@opendoors.com.au).*