



# One minute guide

## Working with lesbian and gay young people

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### What is lesbian and gay and how does it relate to our services?

**Lesbian** refers to a woman who has an emotional, romantic and/ or sexual attraction towards women. **Gay** refers to a man who has an emotional, romantic and/ or sexual attraction towards men. It is also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality - some women define themselves as gay rather than (or in addition to) lesbian.

These terms relate to sexual attraction, which is defined as a combination of emotional, romantic, sexual or affectionate attraction to another person. Sometimes the acronym LGBT+ is used, which includes bi and trans people.

Many lesbian and gay young people are aware of their sexuality from a young age, though they may not have shared this with anybody. Any of the young people you are working with may identify as lesbian or gay, but you should not make assumptions about any young person's sexuality.

All young people want places to go and things to do in an environment where they feel valued, accepted and included. The [Equality Act 2010](#) made sexual orientation a protected characteristic which means that any service provided to young people, whether publicly funded or not, cannot lawfully discriminate against lesbian or gay young people. In addition, the Act introduced the public sector Equality Duty, which means that services have to consider how they can address inequalities experienced by these young people.

### What is 'coming out'?

The process of lesbian and gay people telling others about their sexuality is often referred to as 'coming out'. Coming out to somebody can be very stressful, as young people may fear rejection or discrimination. For this reason, young people will often tell someone they trust and have confidence in. If a young person comes out to you, they may simply want someone to talk to about what can be a confusing and scary time for them, or they may want support in accessing further information, some of which is available through this guide.

It is important not to share information about a young person's sexuality with other family members, young people or practitioners without the young person's consent. Doing so without their consent is called 'outing' and can be very harmful to young people. Sharing personal or sensitive information about someone without their consent could be a breach of their rights under data protection legislation. This should only be considered in exceptional circumstances, which should be discussed with your line manager and/ or safeguarding lead.

## What barriers or difficulties might lesbian and gay young people face?

A lot of lesbian and gay young people do not experience any difficulties with their sexuality, and are accepted by their family, friends and community. However, some may experience difficulties such as bullying, mental health problems, and an increased risk of poor outcomes. Other issues could include drug and alcohol misuse and domestic violence.

**Homophobic bullying**—in [Stonewall's School Report \(2017\)](#), 45% of young people surveyed had experienced homophobic bullying, and half hear homophobic slurs 'frequently'.

**Homelessness**—the [Albert Kennedy Trust \(AKT\)](#) estimates that around one in four homeless young people identifies as LGBT, and 77% of these young people believe coming out to their parents was the main factor in their becoming homeless.

**Drug and alcohol use**— the [2018 Stonewall LGBT in Britain Health Report](#) noted that one in eight (13%) LGBT young people aged 18-24 reported taking drugs at least once a month, compared to one in 11 (9%) young adults aged 16-24 in the general population.

**Mental health**—Stonewall's School Report notes that 22% of lesbian and gay young people (who aren't also trans) have tried to take their own life.

**Domestic abuse**— lesbian and gay young people who are experiencing domestic abuse in their relationships may face additional vulnerability; if they have not told anybody about their sexuality, they may fear reporting the abuse in case they are 'outed', and this fear may be exploited by perpetrators. Young people may also fear domestic abuse within their families if they are living in a homophobic environment.

## What is available for practitioners to support young people?

Leeds has a youth group for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual young people aged 13 - 18 called 'Out to 18'. The group meets regularly and offers both a safe space for LGB young people to socialise and receive 1-1 confidential support. Contact the Youth Service on 0113 378 6840 or email [youth.service@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:youth.service@leeds.gov.uk) to request a leaflet or referral pack, or to request a call back. **Young people can contact this group directly, they do not need to be referred by a practitioner.**

Also in Leeds, the [School Wellbeing Service](#) has a number of resources on their website, and [Forward Leeds](#) provides support for young people and adults experiencing substance misuse difficulties.

Stonewall have produced [a range of resources](#) for schools and settings on supporting LGBT young people, which include useful information and advice for all practitioners who work with young people. Stonewall have also produced a guide for schools on designing LGBT-inclusive relationship, sex and health education.

For young people directly, Stonewall have a range of information on their [website](#), which includes a section entitled 'What's in My Area', a help and advice section and the phone number for Stonewall's Information Service: 0800 0502020.

The [Albert Kennedy Trust](#) can provide support in relation to young lesbian, gay and bisexual people in relation to homelessness and living in hostile environments.

The [Galop LGBT+ anti-violence charity](#) provide advice and support in relation to same-sex domestic violence, hate crimes and sexual violence. Their domestic violence helpline is 0800 999 5428.