

# Lesbian Youth

## What does it mean to be a lesbian?

A lesbian is a woman who is sexually attracted to other women and has romantic relationships involving other women. Lesbians do not look, talk, or act in any one particular way. There are many ways to be a lesbian, and no one can tell you if you are one except yourself.

## How do I know if I'm a lesbian?

Many lesbians recall feeling attracted to other girls growing up. They may have had crushes on girls in school the same way that their friends developed crushes on boys. Or they may have felt attracted to both girls and boys growing up. As a teenager, you begin to develop sexual feelings towards other people and want to start dating. It is around this time that some girls want to date other girls, and might realize that they identify as lesbian. There is a great amount of societal pressure for girls to date boys in middle and high school, and you may have already felt some of this pressure. But keep in mind, if you've dated boys or had boyfriends before, this does not mean that you cannot define yourself as a lesbian now or later.

## What does it mean to be bisexual?

Being bisexual means that a person can have emotional, sexual and/or physical feelings for both men and women. Bisexuals may have more of an attraction for one sex or they may be equally attracted to both sexes. Also, their feelings for men and woman can change over time. A person's attraction to both men and women may be a lifetime decision or a part of a phase in discovering their sexuality. Despite what you may have heard, being bisexual does not mean that you have a hard time making up your mind, or that you are simply experimenting until you decide if you are

heterosexual or homosexual. Bisexuality is a sexual identity all by itself.

## Is there something wrong with me?

Of course not! Thinking that you're 'different' can feel scary at times, especially when some people send out messages that homosexuality (women loving women or men loving men) is wrong. Sexuality is a hard thing to deal with when you're young, regardless of your sexual orientation. A lot of teens feel insecure about their bodies, relationships, and social status. Being a lesbian or a bisexual woman may give you a new set of issues to deal with, but it certainly does not make you weird or unlovable.

## How do I come out? Who do I talk to?

There are many different ways to come out. You may want to start by talking to a friend who you trust, or by contacting someone at school like a guidance counselor or social worker. Together, you might be able to brainstorm on how to talk to your parent(s). You might also want to talk to someone who works in an organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth to see what type of methods work best for other adolescents who have come out. Luckily, Philadelphia and its surrounding regions offer many different resources for LGBT youth. The bottom line is that you only need to do what you are comfortable with. Call CHOICE to find out about Philadelphia's LGBT resources.

## Questions?

Call: 1-800-84-TEENS or (215)985-3300

Monday-Thursday, 8:30am-7:30pm, Friday, 8:30am-5pm,

Saturday, 9am-1pm

Free and Confidential

## Do I still have to worry about stuff like sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and getting pregnant?

You may have heard some people say that women who have sex with other women are not at a risk for STIs and pregnancy. This is far from true. While two women having sex cannot cause a pregnancy, they are still at risk for STIs.

### STIs

Lesbians and bisexual women are at a risk for STIs such as HIV, herpes, genital warts, chlamydia, trichomonas, and gonorrhea. Because many STIs can be transmitted through vaginal fluids, it is important that lesbian and bisexual women be aware of the different ways to protect themselves when engaging in sexual activities such as oral sex, fingering, fisting, and vaginal sex with sex toys.

### Safer Sex

For safer oral sex, women can use a dental dam, which is a thin square of latex which may be placed over the vagina or anus to serve as a barrier against the transmission of most STIs. You can buy dental dams at some drug stores or make them out of non-microwavable saran wrap or from a condom that has been cut down the center. You can pick up dental dams and condoms from your local health center for free or at low cost. Call the **CHOICE Hotline** or access our Where to Find Guide online ([www.wheretofind.org](http://www.wheretofind.org)) to find out about the health centers in your area.

When fingering or fisting, check your hand for cuts, scrapes, or torn cuticles. Many STIs are transmitted through blood as well as vaginal fluids, and if the skin on the hand is broken there is a risk of transmission during manual sex. Make sure to cover broken skin with a non-porous material such as a latex glove or

finger condom (also available in drug stores).

Some women enjoy using sex toys like dildos or strap-ons with each other during sex. Make sure you are cleaning your sex toys with soap and warm water every time you use them. To make clean-up easier, you may want to consider putting a male condom on the device that can be thrown out after each use. To lessen the risk, do not share your toys with other couples and make sure to use the toy with only one person.

### Pregnancy

As mentioned earlier, there are many different ways to be a lesbian. While some lesbians may only engage in sexual relationships with women, there are other lesbians who may occasionally or frequently have sex with men. While some may identify as bisexual, many of these women identify solely as lesbians. No matter what you may identify as, if you have sex with a man there is a risk of pregnancy. If you don't want to become pregnant, using a condom every time you have sex with a man greatly reduces this risk. Depending on your preference, you may want to use a male condom or a female condom with a water-based lubricant. Follow the instructions that come with the condom and remember to use a new condom with every act of sex.

### Getting health care

#### Finding a health care provider (doctor, nurse practitioner, clinician) who is right for you

You deserve respect and quality care from a provider who understands your healthcare needs. This means that you may want to research some of the clinics in your area who are LGBT-friendly providers, meaning that they are educated about health issues that are relevant to lesbian and bisexual patients and do not discriminate based on sexual orientation. Here are some tips to keep in mind when you visit your provider:

- Be open and honest with your provider. This way he or she knows your circumstances and can provide you with the best care to meet your individual needs.
- Ask friends in the community which health care providers they recommend.
- Check to make sure that your provider is an LGBT-friendly provider. Ask if he or she currently cares for any LGBT clients. If he or she cannot give you a positive answer to this question, you might want to find one who can.
- Find out what kind of exams you need annually or monthly. Lesbian and bisexual women still need to get routine health exams which include pap smears, breast exams, and STI/HIV testing.
- Contact the **Gay and Lesbian Medical Association** ([www.glma.org](http://www.glma.org)) or **LGBT Health Resource Center** ([www.lgbthealthresource.org](http://www.lgbthealthresource.org)) for assistance in locating a clinic or provider in your area.
- Call CHOICE!



# CHOICE

This fact sheet was produced by CHOICE. For more information about sexual health & LGBT issues call 215-985-3300 or visit [www.choice-phila.org](http://www.choice-phila.org) and [www.choiceteens.org](http://www.choiceteens.org)