



Tips For Professionals Who Work with GLBTQ Youth...

1 Don't be surprised when a youth "comes out" to you. They have tested you with a series of "trial balloons" over a period of time. Based on your previous responses they've decided you can be trusted and helpful.

2 Respect confidentiality. If a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or questioning (GLBTQ) youth shares with you information about his or her sexual orientation or gender identity, you have a trust that must be respected. A breach of this confidence has led some to suicide.

3 Be informed & examine your own biases. Most of us are the products of a homophobic and transphobic society influenced by misinformation and fear. You can't be free of it just by deciding to. Read reliable sources and talk to qualified persons.

4 Know when and where to seek help. Know the reputable referral agencies and counselors in your area. Gay helplines can provide professional persons and organizations that are qualified to help. Tell them who you are and what kind of assistance you need.

5 Maintain a balanced perspective. Sexual thoughts and feelings are only a small (but important) part of a person's personality.

6 Understand the meaning of sexual orientation and gender identity. Each person's sexual orientation and gender identity is what is right for that person. It is not a matter of sexual "preference." In most cases, people do not choose to be gay or lesbian; they simply are. Understand that one's sense of gender identity is a separate issue with unique complexities and challenges.

7 Deal with feelings first. Most GLBTQ youth feel alone, afraid and guilty. You can assist by listening, thus allowing them to release feelings and thoughts that are often in conflict.

8 Be supportive. Explain that many people have struggled with these issue in the past. Admit that dealing with one's sexuality or a gender identity that is different from one's birth sex is difficult. There are no easy and fast answers, whether heterosexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian or transgender. Keep the door open for more conversations and assistance. Be aware that so-called "reparative therapy" has been discredited by all major mental health professional associations and can be harmful. While some groups promote it, it is not a credible way of offering support.

9 Anticipate some confusion. Most youth are sure of their sexual orientation by the time they finish the eighth grade and the same appears to be true with gender identity. But, some young people will be confused and unsure. They have to work through their own feelings and insights; you can't talk them into, or out of, being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

10 Help, but do not force. If you are heterosexual, or comfortable with your birth sex, you probably don't understand what it means to be different in these ways. Clues for how you can help will come from the young person. Don't force him or her into your frame of reference to make it easier for you to understand.

11 Don't try to guess who's GLBTQ. It is not helpful for you or for the youth you serve. We live in a world of stereotypes that do people an injustice; do not be tempted to perpetuate old myths.

12 Challenge homophobic remarks and jokes. Speak up when someone makes disparaging remarks about GLBTQ people, or thoughtlessly uses anti-gay language, just as you would any other slurs. Don't perpetuate injustice through silence. See the tips on the other side of this sheet for suggestions.

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons, their families and friends through: support, education, and advocacy. PFLAG provides an opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity. Serving over 85,000 members and supporters, PFLAG affiliates are located in 440+ communities across the U.S. and abroad.

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