

talking about **homosexuality** in the secondary school

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AVERT

Talking about Homosexuality in the Secondary School

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Changes to the law, 1997-2003

Since this book was published in 1997, there have been changes in the law, which have affected the legal position surrounding sex education provision and the age of sexual consent in England, Wales and to some extent Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Details of these changes can be found at - <http://www.avert.org/legislation.htm>

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Our greatest thanks are reserved for all the schools, teachers and young people who gave so freely of their time and of themselves to help us write this book. We hope they find it answers their questions and speaks honestly of their experiences. It is dedicated to them in the hope that it will help to make schools safer and better for everyone.

Foreword

I was waiting and expecting to hear something about homosexuality, safe sex and different things in sex education. Maybe some information that could help me. But I got nothing.

Tim

As AVERT's research has already shown, many young gay men do not receive in school the information that could help them to make informed decisions about their lives. Also, the general silence surrounding the whole subject of homosexuality has led in many schools to unacceptable levels of intolerance and bullying.

For these reasons AVERT has examined the difficulties schools face at every level in talking about homosexuality. Problems exist not only with young people in the classroom or in the playground, but also amongst the many different adults involved in the school community.

It is hoped that this resulting resource will enable many schools to make progress in this difficult area and will help them to meet the needs of all young people, and prepare them for the responsibilities of adult life.

Annabel Kanabus and James Lawrence
AVERT, Horsham

August 1997

Why talk about homosexuality in the secondary school?

Things that could have made a difference,

open discussion of homosexuality in class (not addressed as a problem);

open discussion of the oppression of lesbians and gays;

role models;

talks by ex-students;

plays;

books;

teachers standing up for you;

being taken seriously.

This list forms good, realistic advice for any school which aims at providing an education for all its pupils whether lesbian, gay or heterosexual. I did not compile this list, it was written by a young woman who has recently spent several years in a school as a lesbian pupil; she is an expert, I am not...

Rogers (1994)

This initial chapter gives seven reasons for talking about homosexuality in the secondary school. They can be used as a starting point for designing or reviewing a programme of work in sex education, PSE or another subject where issues about sexuality are addressed. Alternatively, they can be used as source material for developing or reviewing school policy on sex education, equal opportunities, bullying or confidentiality. They can also be used as the basis of a discussion about the topic between colleagues in school.

1. Young people have a right to accurate information about sexuality

I was waiting and expecting to hear something about homosexuality, safe sex and different things in sex education. Maybe some information that could help me. But I got nothing. There was nothing.

Tim, in Frankham (1996b)

All young people have a right to accurate information about sexuality and sex. This information goes a long way to enabling young people to have control over and get satisfaction from sexual experiences and relationships – the main purpose of sex education. As government guidance (DfE, 1994c) to schools on sex education makes clear:

The purpose of sex education should be to provide knowledge about loving relationships, the nature of sexuality... at the same time it should lead to the acquisition of understanding and attitudes which prepare pupils to view their relationships in a responsible and healthy light.

Young people in school often express a need for information by asking questions. Schools are, by and large, willing to take on the responsibility of delivering accurate information but do not find it easy to meet the needs of all their pupils. Young lesbian and gay people, in particular, can feel that sex education is very much about heterosexual relationships and excludes them.

Sex education at school was strictly heterosexual with the focus completely on the biological aspects rather than pleasure and there was absolutely no mention of same sex love, which made teen life all the more extraordinary for me.

Mary, 15

All pupils need to know about homosexuality. Without this information they are not well prepared to cope with the diversity of adult lives and may feel uncomfortable or lack confidence about experiences they go on to have. Not only will they be unprepared for what the Education Act (1996) refers to as the:

opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life,

but they may grow up with negative feelings about some kinds of relationships and sexual behaviour. It is not possible to talk effectively about issues like gender roles, attitudes to and beliefs about sex, sexual feelings and relationships without referring to different sexualities. It is important that schools are aware that the National Curriculum Council (1990) says,

feeling positive about sexuality and sexual activity is important in relationships.

All maintained secondary schools are legally obliged to provide sex education. Teaching has to include HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Other aspects related to sex, i.e. human reproduction have to be taught under the National Curriculum Science Orders. However, many schools agree with experts like the British Medical Association Foundation for AIDS (1994) who state:

Good sex education is about relationships as well as biology.

2. Young people are already talking about homosexuality in school

We talk about it a lot. But not in class. There's always films and television programmes with gay and lesbian people in them. I think it's interesting because you want to know more about it. What it's like to be gay or lesbian and why people are prejudiced. It's something I want to know about but the teacher sort of avoids the subject – maybe they think they shouldn't talk about it.

Sarah, 15

Outside the classroom, in their breaks and at social times together, young people frequently talk about sex and sexuality. They talk about soap-operas and other television programmes, popular music and magazines where the topics come up again and again.

However, this talk is not always well informed and can cause concern for some young people. Bringing the topic inside the curriculum enables teachers to correct misinformation, challenge prejudice and allay any anxieties.

3. Bullying in school frequently involves the use of homophobic insults

In the Corner of the Playground

*I see pain in the corner of the playground,
I see bullying in the corner of the school playground
I see children bullying a smaller, weaker
child in the corner of the school playground.
I see children pushing and shoving,
deciding to kick and punch in the corner of the school playground.
I hear obscenities shouted at a poor individual
in the corner of the school playground.
I see wrong colour hair, height, weight, liking
the wrong things in the corner of the school playground.
It is not his fault, everyone is different.
Admire others for what they are not.
Don't hate others for what they are.*

Ben, Year 10

It is bullying when a pupil is picked on, when another pupil or group of pupils say nasty things to him or her. It is also bullying when a pupil is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no-one ever talks to them and things like that.

DfE (1994a)

Homophobic insults are very often part of the bully's armoury (Whelan 1997). Talking about homosexuality can help support challenges to verbal bullying and enables pupils to see why homophobic insults are not acceptable. Government guidance (DfE, 1994b) makes it clear that action against bullying should take place in the context of clear rules and policies;

School staff must act – and importantly be seen to act firmly – against bullying wherever it appears. School behaviour policies and the associated rules should therefore make specific reference to bullying... failure to respond to incidents may be interpreted as condoning the behaviour.

Policies need to be supported by teaching within the curriculum that aims to alter negative attitudes and undermine stereotypes. The National Curriculum Council (1993) stresses the need for school policy and teaching in the classroom to reflect a positive school ethos that:

rejects bullying, cheating, deceit, cruelty, irresponsibility and dishonesty.

4. Lesbian and gay pupils need extra support in school

When he was 14, Rajpaul went to a teacher and...

I told her exactly what the problem was. She knew that I was gay. And I chose not to tell my form tutor who was male and young. I didn't feel he'd take it very well. She was quite good. She was... very much prepared to listen. But I needed someone for support. I just needed somebody to talk to. And, I said who could I see in the support system to do that.

Rajpaul, 14, in Frankham (1996a)

Young people who identify themselves as lesbian or gay not only suffer prejudice but also have to deal with difficult situations and experiences. As the BMA (1997) has pointed out, the stresses they experience can be to the detriment of their schooling:

Responsible teaching about homosexuality is especially important to meet the needs of young people who may be growing up gay (or) lesbian... in view of the risks of mental or physical health problems as a result of social isolation, bullying or lack of self-esteem and to educate all young people about the effects of prejudice and stereotyping. The school can provide a neutral environment for such advice.

Policies and teaching which acknowledge homosexuality contribute to the inclusion and engagement of all pupils in school life. Schools also need to provide young people growing up lesbian and gay with opportunities for individual support. This might be through the provision of services like counselling within school or information about services outside school. According to the National Standing Committee of Advisers, Inspectors and Consultants of Personal and Social Education (NSCOPSE, 1996) a good school will:

provide guidance and support...

and, pupils will:

know who to go to... for help;

feel secure and supported in being able to talk about their problems.

5. Parents may want to talk about homosexuality

My mum found out why I was being bullied and so she came up to school to talk to the Head. The Head must have been really nervous about what to expect because she called me in before my mum came to try and find out how she felt. The Head was really scared that mum would accuse the school of making me gay or something. All mum wanted was for the school to do something to stop the bullying.

Ruth, 20

Some parents/carers may welcome the opportunity to talk about homosexuality with school staff. They may want information and support for themselves or for their children. Dialogue between individual members of staff and parents/carers of young lesbian and gay people can help them feel more confident about supporting each other.

6. HIV infection continues to be a risk for gay men

The vulnerability of young gay men to HIV infection may be increased by the absence from school sex education of references to gay relationships and safer sex for gay men.

It was a gay plague, or it was drug addicts, so naturally they assume that healthy young boys don't grow up to sleep with other men and are very unlikely to use drugs at a Catholic school, so they just didn't tell us anything about it.

Spencer, in Frankham (1996b)

Teaching about HIV and AIDS that advocates fewer sexual partners or monogamous relationships as a protection from HIV infection, may not be as effective as promoting safer sex, skills development and the exploration of attitudes and values.

7. Heightened heterosexual risk

You just hear bits and pieces about it really. Like it's mostly gay men who have got HIV. Well, I remember when I learnt that in the world it's mostly heterosexual people who have AIDS. You think again about what it is you do, not who you are.

Amanda, 17

Some young heterosexual people may believe that gay men are the source of HIV infection and the only group affected by HIV and AIDS. These misconceptions may lead young heterosexual people to perceive themselves to be less vulnerable to HIV infection than might be the case. As Aggleton, *et al.* (1993) state:

... the belief that AIDS is a gay problem serves as a barrier to effective health education. If heterosexual young people believe that AIDS does not affect them, that HIV infection is a punishment for certain kinds of behaviour and that it doesn't matter if gay men die, health education will not be effective.

Who is 'Talking about Homosexuality' for and how can it be used?

Talking about Homosexuality is for those people working within and supporting secondary schools. This includes those involved in advice, consultancy and inspection, as well as all those others who have a wish to further information provision in secondary schools. It is anticipated that *Talking about Homosexuality* can be used in a variety of ways, e.g.

- In a school, with a strong policy framework, a comprehensive sex education programme and support from governors, school staff and parents/carers *Talking about Homosexuality* can be used to develop teaching about sexuality in the classroom.
- In a school, where policy development on sex education, bullying, equality of opportunity or confidentiality is still the priority, it can be used to resource discussion among school governors, parents/carers and senior management.
- It can be used by a teacher who wants to help an individual pupil track down information or support.
- Parts of it can be given to senior school pupils to facilitate discussion, inform debate or understanding of issues associated with sexuality. For example, in the context of studying a lesbian or gay poet in English.
- As a resource for those who want to gain a greater understanding of the issues.

What moral position does 'Talking about Homosexuality' take?

Many conventions about sex and sexual behaviour in Britain can be traced back to religious roots and because of this judgements about them are never value-free. In contemporary Britain the traditional belief that sex is basically a procreative act that takes place in the context of marriage is very powerful. Laws about sexual behaviour reflect this view. There are laws of consent that regulate the age at which it is lawful to have sex. Some relationships between men and women have a special legal standing, e.g. marriage and cohabitation. The family is assumed to comprise one male and female adult and their biological children. Homosexuality is sometimes seen as a challenge to these values.

Talking about Homosexuality tries to respond honestly to the questions about homosexuality and the concerns of young people and school staff. It does not aim to promote homosexuality over heterosexuality as a chosen way of life or preferred sexual identity. Some people believe that the law prohibits schools from teaching about homosexuality. However, this is not the case. Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988) prohibits Local Authorities from promoting homosexuality but this does not affect maintained schools where the

responsibility for what is taught rests with school governors not the Local Authority. As the BMA (1997) points out, no school should be inhibited in its provision of education and information to pupils by the erroneous belief that the law forbids teaching about homosexuality.

Talking about Homosexuality was developed within the moral framework laid out in the Education Act 1996 that requires state-maintained schools to provide all pupils with a curriculum that:

is balanced and broadly based... promotes their spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development; prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life; includes, in addition to the National Curriculum, religious education and, for secondary pupils, sex education.

Talking about Homosexuality also reflects the authors' belief that prejudice against lesbian and gay people because of their sexual orientation is wrong. They believe it is wrong in the same way, and for the same reasons, as prejudice and discrimination against people because of sex, race or religious belief.

What facts about homosexuality are young people interested in?

Am I gay?

I'm 16 and really unsure about my sexuality. My friends have turned their back on me and I've been spending a lot of time with a new friend. The other day he asked me how I felt about him and whether I wanted to go out with him. He makes a move on me every time I see him and I feel scared but felt good when we kissed. How can I stop these feelings? I know my parents would never approve.

Mark, 16, Exeter

Am I a lesbian?

Lately I've been wondering if I might be a lesbian. I've never had a boyfriend like the rest of my mates. Also, I think I've been acting weird round my girlfriends – as if I'm flirting or something. How do I know if I'm gay or not?

Maz, 19, Oasis fan

These letters come from the 'problem pages' of teenage magazines. There are letters like these in almost every edition suggesting that a lot of young people have questions about homosexuality. Some common concerns are:

- How do I know if I am lesbian or gay?
- Can I stop myself feeling attracted to people of the same sex?
- Can other people tell?
- Is it a phase?
- What can I do if people think I'm gay and I'm not?

The questions young people ask tell us a lot about what they think homosexuality is. They recognise being homosexual means having sexual feelings and sexual experiences with people of the same sex. They may also think it means being unhappy because they will be disapproved of or rejected by their friends, peers and family.

Sometimes the letters to problem pages come from friends who feel some of these anxieties and wonder how their relationship with the person who they think is lesbian or gay should carry on.

She had sex with a girl

I was at a party when I saw my best friend go upstairs with another girl. A little while later I went upstairs into the room where they were and caught them having sex with each other. I freaked out and ran downstairs. I haven't spoken to her since. Will she always be like this?

Rachel, 15, East Anglia

Young people build up a picture of what homosexuality is from what they see, hear and read as well as from their own experiences, the experiences of people they know and their feelings about themselves. Some of the information they get is inaccurate. It stereotypes lesbian and gay people. So it is unhelpful when young people use it to try to understand themselves and their experiences. It says more about the prejudices of heterosexuality than about homosexuality itself.

I'm a boy who can't get a girlfriend because everyone thinks I'm gay. It isn't true, but because I get bullied a lot because of this, I hang around with girls more than boys. People tell me I look like a girl, and say I'm 'sad', so I stay indoors most of the time to hide from this horrible life. I don't want to end up a loner. Please help me.

David, 15, Wales

Definitions of homosexuality

In order to talk about homosexuality and to answer people's questions it is necessary to be clear about what the word means. Young people writing to magazine problem pages seem to define homosexuality using three criteria:

- having sexual feelings towards other people of the same sex;
- sexual behaviour with people of the same sex;
- and describing oneself as homosexual.

It can be helpful to think of these elements of a person's sexuality in a visual way. It is possible to conceive of *sexual feelings*, *identity* and *behaviour* as three circles which overlap to varying degrees depending on the individual.

Thinking first of *sexual feelings* and *behaviour* we can imagine a situation in which two different people might be represented by the diagrams below. In the first diagram the circles overlap about halfway. This person might be attracted to people of the same sex without acting on it – equally they might be having sex with people of the same sex but feeling like most of their *sexual feelings* are directed to people of the opposite sex. In the second diagram this person's *sexual feelings* and *behaviour* go together so that they feel attracted to people of the same sex and have sex with people of the same sex.

fig.1

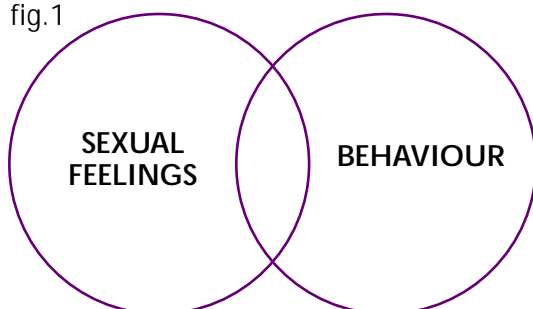
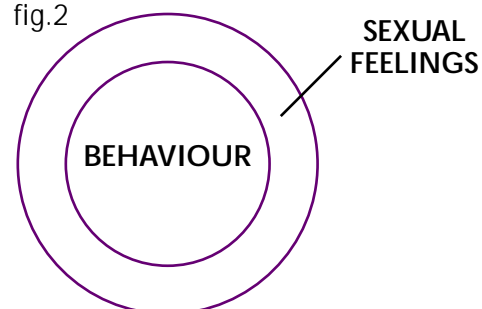


fig.2



In the next situation, thinking of *sexual feelings* and *identity*, we can imagine how different people might be represented by these diagrams below. The first represents a person who is attracted to people of the same sex but does not always choose to call themselves gay. In the second diagram this person's *sexual feelings* and how they describe themselves are completely related.

fig.3

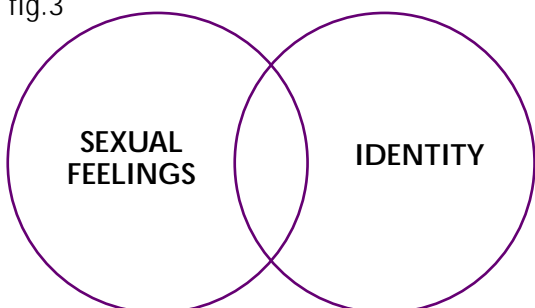
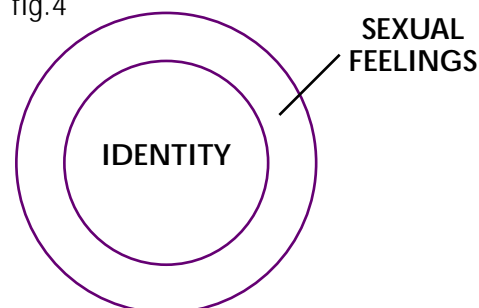


fig.4



Thinking of these diagrams it is clear that they could apply equally to defining homosexuality or heterosexuality. They also show that defining sexuality depends very much on the individual in question, their sexual feelings, behaviour and how they describe themselves. There is a wide spectrum of potential relationships between the three elements. In other words it can be helpful to think of a spectrum of experience from exclusively homosexual to exclusively heterosexual with many people in between. Sometimes people who feel equally attracted to men and women and have sex with both, choose to place themselves in between and call themselves bisexual.

The main points to bear in mind when defining heterosexuality or homosexuality are:

- The three main factors are sexual attraction, sexual behaviour and identity. For most people the factors go together in a congruent way. So people tend to behave sexually in line with their sexual feelings, i.e. people tend to be sexually active with people they are attracted to.
- However, sexual identity and behaviour may be quite fluid over a period of time and they may not always coincide with each other as people's feelings change. For example, a person may have at some point in their life a partner of the opposite sex and then later on someone of the same sex.
- Applying labels to people is not necessarily a good or accurate way of describing them. There may be phases in a person's life when their sexual feelings and behaviour are very clearly homosexual or heterosexual. However, at other times, labelling them as heterosexual or homosexual does not fit exactly with their sexual behaviour or feelings.

At one level, young people seem to know that applying labels to other people can be restricting because they rely on using stereotypes which over simplify experiences and feelings.

Being gay means being queer and liking men, I mean other men. Being gay means having sex with other men and doing gay things. Most gay men are easy to tell, I mean they're kind of softer – more like women in their interests and how they do things.

15 year old boy

However, falling back on simple dichotomising definitions of homosexuality and heterosexuality can be appealing because it keeps the distinctions between them clear. Some beliefs common among young people involve doing precisely this by showing homosexuality as a kind of reflection of heterosexuality. For example:

- Believing that some occupations and interests are more attractive and more suitable for heterosexual people and others more attractive and suitable for homosexual people. For example, regarding sports as predominantly heterosexual and performing arts as homosexual.
- Assuming that when two lesbian women or two gay men are in a sexual relationship they will adopt roles which are traditionally masculine and feminine.
- Believing that lesbian and gay people can be identified by the way they look and talk. Thinking, for example, that gay men look more effeminate than straight men and lesbian women look more masculine than straight women.

It is essential for any discussion about homosexuality in the school to include talking about the definitions people use and where they come from. This inevitably brings into the open implicit assumptions about what homosexuality and heterosexuality are. These assumptions can be discussed by asking questions which explore stereotypes that reinforce the rigid boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality. For example:

- Do a homosexual couple in love and a heterosexual couple in love experience the same feelings?
- If a person who calls themselves heterosexual has sex with someone of the same sex are they heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual?

Terminology and language

The terms 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' are rarely used in everyday speech. More often people use slang words or terms which are abusive. Oral histories of lesbian and gay Britain such as *'It's Not Unusual'* (Jivani, 1997) give a very detailed picture of the changes in the terms which lesbian and gay people have used to describe themselves throughout this century. These changes are important in telling us a lot about how lesbian and gay people lived their lives and felt about themselves as well as social reactions to them. What about the terms 'straight', 'gay' and 'lesbian' which are commonly used?

The term 'homosexual' is not nowadays sex specific. It was coined by Victorian scientists who regarded same-sex attraction and sexual behaviour as symptoms of mental disorders

or moral deficiency. Homosexual men and women decided to use the term 'gay' in order to distance themselves from being labelled as somehow abnormal or ill. In fact, some people find the term 'homosexual' insulting and abusive and object to its use. Generally, the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' are seen as being less laden with negative implications than 'homosexual'. The term 'gay' is used to describe both homosexual men and women but has become particularly associated with homosexual men. Its derivation is unclear but may come from the nineteenth century French slang for a homosexual man: 'gaie'. Throughout this century it has been used as a sort of code word between homosexual men. However, in the late fifties and sixties it came into everyday use in association with the struggle for gay rights. In this context the word 'gay' came to represent, as it does now, a word with no negative connotations but is associated with a positive and proud sense of identity. Nowadays, the term 'lesbian' is used in relation to homosexual women and is derived from Lesbos, the name of the Greek island on which the lesbian poet Sappho lived in antiquity. In the past homosexual women have been called 'Sapphist' (again after Sappho). 'Straight' is used to describe heterosexual people and is an equivalent term to 'gay'.

I don't mind so much what people call me as what they mean by it. I have been called a 'dizzy queen' by some friends, and that's all right. But, mostly with people who are seriously prejudiced it's about how they say it – they say 'gay' like it's a curse, not something to be proud of.

Mark, 19

Choosing which term to use and how to use it can be troubling. If a person is describing themselves they can be anxious about the reaction they might get. If a person is talking about someone else, or the issue in general, they can feel anxious about causing offence or saying the wrong thing.

I think that everyone is OK with the term 'gay' nowadays. It says something about lifestyle and identity as well as sexual behaviour which 'homosexual' doesn't seem to do. I describe myself as 'straight' so I would use the word 'gay' in the classroom. Anyway it's what the kids would say. But they do need to be clear about what all the terms mean otherwise telling them off for being homophobic doesn't make any sense to them. They say; 'it's just a word Sir'.

Teacher

Some men and women generally describe themselves as either 'gay' or 'straight'. Using these words gets away from the negative overtones of terminology like 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' which for these people can feel too 'medical'. However, words like 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' can have advantages in other contexts, for example, in this book. Communication is a complex affair in which not only what words are used matters but also who is saying them, about whom and in what context.

For example, in school the term 'gay' is used a lot as an insult, and is not a word with positive overtones. A person called 'gay' by bullies in school might find it abusive because of the way it is said but the same person might happily call themselves 'gay' when they are with friends.

How many homosexual people are there in Britain?

Calculating how many homosexual people there are in Britain today is difficult. In estimating the number the following points have to be borne in mind:

- How many people we estimate are homosexual depends on how we define homosexuality.
- Many more people experience sexual feelings for someone of the same sex than report recent sexual experience with someone of the same sex.
- Because homosexuality is stigmatised in Britain it is more likely to be under than over-reported.

In the early 1990s, Kaye Wellings, *et al.* (1994) undertook a national survey of sexual attitudes and behaviour in Britain among about 11,000 people. They were interested in people's sexual experiences and feelings with members of the opposite and the same sex.

Among men they found the following:

- 6.1% reported some same-sex experience in their lifetime;
- 3.6% reported any genital contact with another man;
- 1.4% reported having a male partner in the last 5 years;

and among women they found that

- 3.4% reported some same-sex experience in their lifetime;
- 1.7% reported any genital contact with another woman;
- 0.6% reported having a female partner in the last 5 years.

Most people in Britain report themselves to be exclusively attracted to members of the opposite sex and exclusively to have heterosexual sexual experiences. However, some people report a few same-sex experiences in their lifetime and fewer still report themselves to be predominantly homosexually attracted and predominantly sexually active with people of the same sex. They concluded the following three main points about same-sex sexual behaviour in Britain:

- Not many people are exclusively homosexual in their sexual behaviour. Almost all the people who reported themselves to be currently homosexually active or homosexually inclined reported some heterosexual experiences in their past.
- Attraction and sexual experience were highly congruent, i.e. people who reported exclusively homosexual attraction generally reported exclusively homosexual sexual experience.

- Reported homosexual behaviour seemed to have a strong regional bias. London in particular, seemed to have a disproportionately high number of homosexual men compared with the rest of Britain. The researchers concluded that this might be because London is attractive because it is more tolerant and has many gay venues compared with the rest of Britain. However, it might also be because gay people feel confident about reporting homosexual feelings and experience when they live in a hospitable environment.

How many homosexual young people are there?

Wellings, et al. (ibid.) found that about the same proportion of young people aged between 16 and 24 reported homosexual attraction and behaviour as did respondents over the age of 24. However, boys and young men in this age group are a little more likely to report homosexual attraction than in any other age group. They give the following minimum figures. For boys and young men:

- 6.6% reported any homosexual attraction;
- 4.3% reported any homosexual experience;
- 2.4% reported any genital contact with another man;
- 1.3% reported having at least one male partner in the last 2 years;

and, for girls and young women:

- 5.1% reported any homosexual attraction;
- 2.4% reported any homosexual experience;
- 1.4% reported any genital contact with another woman;
- 0.8% reported having at least one female partner in the last 2 years.

The data on how many homosexual people there are in Britain has been updated in a new survey since publication of this book. If you visit the AVERT website, at www.avert.org/hsexu1.htm, you can read about the new findings.

Is homosexuality a phase young people go through?

For some people yes, and for others no. Some people do not have their first homosexual feelings or experience until they are well into adulthood. In the survey by Wellings, et al. (ibid.), nearly the same number of women reported their first homosexual experience had happened in their twenties as did in their thirties, forties or fifties. But, there is evidence that for some people homosexual experiences may well be part of a transitional or experimental phase in their youth. This is hardly surprising given that adolescence is a period of change in which many people find who they are and what they want for themselves in adult life. This kind of behaviour is perfectly normal.

Is homosexuality more common now?

I Have Not One Word From Her

*Frankly I wish I were dead,
When she left she wept*

*a good deal she said to me, 'The pain must be
endured, Sappho, I go unwillingly.'
I said, 'Go, and be happy
but remember (you know
well) who you are leaving shackled by love.*

*If you forget me think
of our gifts to Aphrodite
and all the loveliness we shared.*

*All the violet tiaras
braided rosebuds, dill and
crocus twined around your young neck*

*Myrrh poured on your head
and on soft mats, girls with
all that they most wishes for beside them.*

*While no voices chanted
choruses without ours
no woodlot bloomed in spring without song.*

Sappho c.600 B.C.

Throughout history there have always been people who have had homosexual feelings and experiences. In fact, in some cultures, at some times, these feelings have been celebrated or at least accepted rather than condemned or stigmatised. Two major changes have taken place which may give the impression that homosexuality is more prevalent now than at any other time:

- Images of gay and lesbian people, their lifestyles and the issues they face have become very much more visible in recent years. There are gay and lesbian characters and story-lines in soap-operas (e.g. East-Enders and Brookside) and very powerful gay and lesbian images and image-makers in popular music and culture (e.g. Pet Shop Boys and Skunk Anansie).
- At the same time there have been a series of important struggles for gay and lesbian equality in relation to the right to be parents (adoptive and natural), the right to serve in the Armed Forces, the right to fair treatment at work, and so on. These have, as has often been intended, attracted considerable media, political and legal attention.

Homosexual sexual behaviour – what do gay men and lesbian women do?

I used to kiss my first girlfriend when we were at school, looking back, it was a reaction to the way we were treated. We were defying the boys particularly, the boys who said things behind our backs, mostly being crude about us. They were sort of excited by us – two women who had sex – living breathing women they knew.

Kate, 23

Just as heterosexual relationships vary greatly so too do homosexual relationships. Some are short-lived and others long-term. Some people are more sexually adventurous than others. A person's sexual and emotional predilections and needs may alter over time and so too may each of their partner's.

Both heterosexual and homosexual men and women can enjoy a wide range of sexual activities. They can kiss, cuddle, massage and rub each other, masturbate themselves or each other, give and receive oral sex, enjoy the use of sex aids and penetrate each other with fingers, or in the case of two men, their penises.

Some people presume that sex between men will involve anal penetration. In fact, in relation to penetrative sex between a quarter and a third of homosexual men have never had anal sex, either as the penetrative or receptive partner (Wellings, *ibid.*), and in recent years, since it has become clear that penetrative sex is a particularly risky activity with regard to HIV, quite a lot of men who previously had penetrative sex have altered their behaviour (Davies, *et al.*, 1992).

In heterosexual relationships, especially between young people, it is a common expectation that it is the male role to push for penetrative sex and the female role to resist until she is ready. Young people naturally believe that there must be equivalent roles for lesbian and gay couples. Therefore, they expect that same-sex couples take on roles in which one person is dominant and the other submissive. In fact, this need be no more true of same-sex relationships than it is of heterosexual relationships.

What is homophobia?

It's a kind of fear really. I think as a boy I was scared of gay men. How would I cope with the embarrassment if I was chatted up? Would it mean I was gay? I had never met a gay man – it was a stupid belief. But when you're scared, especially of something you actually know nothing about, hatred is a natural reaction.

Robert, 25

Homophobia is a fear of and/or hostility towards homosexuals or homosexuality. Homophobia is often expressed visibly, audibly and sometimes violently. Young people's accounts in this guide of their experiences of being teased, insulted and bullied because

they are, or are thought to be lesbian or gay, illustrate very well the content and forms homophobia commonly takes.

What causes homophobia?

There are probably no simple causes of homophobia. Many people grow up exposed to more or less the same beliefs about sexuality but hold quite different attitudes in their adult lives. Personal experiences and feelings combine with social images and models to produce points of view and inform beliefs in ways that cannot be predicted exactly. While there is no single thing which causes a person to be homophobic, it is possible to identify factors which correlate with homophobic beliefs and that seem likely to play a part in the formation of prejudices about sexuality and sexual behaviour.

Research (for a review see Clift, 1988) shows that negative attitudes towards homosexuality seem to correlate with the following:

- Reporting no homosexual experiences or feelings.
- Being negative about types of sexual behaviour and relationships which are neither procreative nor take place within marriage. i.e. Oral/anal sex, sex between young people, sex outside or before marriage, and so on.
- Lower educational and social status. i.e. The lower a person's level of educational attainment and social class the more negative their attitudes are towards homosexuality.
- Adhering to strong religious beliefs which disapprove of sex and/or homosexuality.
- Lack of social contact with lesbian and gay people.

For young people homophobia is linked with the development of gender roles. For boys, traditionally appropriate sex roles as worker, breadwinner, head of household and decision-maker have implied certain personality characteristics and interests. They have been expected to be competitive, sporty, strong and sexually successful. For girls, the traditional sex role has revolved around child-bearing, rearing and nurture of the family. This was accompanied by an expectation that women would be softer, more readily emotional, expressive and dependable. Of course, these stereotypes are problematic for many girls and boys. Increasingly, especially for girls, they are proving less of a constraint on the individual. However, the models of different, complementary roles for men and women are a very powerful force in the development of gender in adolescence.

Boys and girls who consistently fail to conform to these stereotypes can be subjected to merciless bullying in which they are accused of being of the opposite sex or of being homosexual. Boys who show their feelings or who are too intimate with other boys are often called 'girls' or 'poofs' by their peers. Girls who are deemed to be too 'boyish' or

w

h

o

hold feminist views run the risk of being called 'dykes' or 'lesbians'. The threat of failing to conform to gender role stereotypes can propel young people into homophobia. Boys may try to prove their hardness and maleness by indicating that they are only sexually interested in girls and reject all emotional and potential sexual contact with other boys.

Homophobia may be more severe among boys than girls because the stereotypical gender role expectations for boys are much more rigid than for girls. Boys have few legitimate avenues for the expression of softer emotions to other males which means that any expression can be interpreted as latent homosexual interest. Between girls, in contrast, close friendships which involve embracing, touching and sharing thoughts and feelings are more legitimate and less likely to be taken as an indication of homosexual inclination.

The effect of homophobia

Homophobia makes school unsafe for young lesbian and gay people. Consequently they have to find ways of coping that minimise the chances of being victimised. Some concentrate on school work and become 'invisible', hoping that academic success will lead to an opportunity in adult life to be proud, confident and secure about their identity. Others try to avoid classes where they are bullied and may become regular truants and even school-refusers (Rivers, 1996). Many cannot miss school for fear of questions being asked at home, so they have to find a circle of friends by whom they are supported and within which they are protected from at least some of the victimisation. Research has shown that in some cases the experiences of victimisation are so powerfully negative that young people are driven to self-harm and suicide (Remafedi, *et al.*, 1991).

As well as coping with the physical effects of homophobia young lesbian and gay people often find themselves facing an erosion of their self-confidence and esteem. Coming to terms with being 'different' and coping with the difficult feelings associated with identifying oneself as lesbian or gay is very hard. It is even more difficult if it has to be conducted in secrecy from family, friends and school because a young person senses their disapproval or fears a negative reaction. Lesbian and gay young people and adults can find themselves emotionally exhausted by having to wrestle with their own feelings about themselves and the problems other people have in coming to terms with their sexuality (Frankham, 1996a; Rogers, 1994).

Homophobia in schools also draws in other young people who are the friends of lesbian and gay young people. They are often forced to face up to their own presumptions, fears and antipathies and, at times, become targets of homophobia by association with young people growing up lesbian or gay. They may also be drawn into conflicts of loyalties in which they have to defend their friends against homophobic attacks.

The extent of homophobia

In 1994, Stonewall (a national lobbying group campaigning for civil rights for lesbian, gay and bisexual men and women) undertook a survey of lesbian and gay people's experiences of homophobia through the national gay press (Mason and Palmer, 1996). The study showed that the people who responded had experienced more homophobia and more extreme homophobia as young people than as adults. They found that as young people the respondents had experienced the following:

- 90% had been called names;
- 61% had been harassed;
- 48% had been violently attacked;
- 22% had been 'beaten up'.

About half the violent attacks took place in school and were perpetrated by fellow students. The violent attacks and assaults were rarely reported to the police. This is because the young victims feared that their parents would find out that they were lesbian or gay, or feared the attacks would get worse if they said anything about them.

Research with adult lesbian and gay people on their experiences of victimisation in school has discovered a similar pattern of widespread verbal and physical abuse (Rivers, 1995; 1996) These studies investigated the characteristics of homophobic bullying in more detail. Rivers makes four important points arising from his work:

- Much more frequently than violent attacks, young lesbian and gay people suffered homophobic bullying which involved being given nasty looks and stares, having personal property vandalised or stolen and being isolated. These forms of bullying can be just as damaging to self-esteem and make the victim feel as insecure as the threat of violence.
- Homophobic bullying takes place in classrooms, corridors, the school yard/playing fields, in changing rooms and on the way to and from school. This makes some spaces very unsafe for young lesbian and gay people. While they may be able to avoid the playing fields to some extent they cannot avoid changing rooms or corridors and can fear the waiting times between lessons.
- About one third of the people in the study told their teachers or parents about the bullying. In only 6% of cases did the bullying stop as a result.
- The most frequent perpetrators of bullying were groups of boys, then boys and girls together, followed by groups of girls. Half of the victims had been victimised by teachers who made 'snide' comments, or did not challenge homophobic remarks by other pupils and in a few cases, abused the victim themselves.

Are people born lesbian or gay?

I think when I was younger I really wanted to know if I was made gay or became gay. It seemed important to have that security. Over time I came to realise that I was actually worried about something else. I was worried about what it meant to my parents if it was genetic. And, if it wasn't a born thing, was it something I did or was done to me? After a while it becomes less important because you realise that what matters is who you are and what you're like.

John, 22

There is no simple answer to the question, 'are some people born lesbian or gay?' There are some theories which stress biological differences between heterosexual and homosexual adults suggesting that people are born with their sexuality already differentiated. The evidence is still pretty weak for the existence of a 'gay gene'. Where experiments and tests have been undertaken to measure hormone levels or brain structures in homosexual and heterosexual people, hoping to find a difference between them, the findings have, for the most part, been unclear. It is generally thought that biological explanations of sexuality are insufficient to explain the diversity of human experience and behaviour.

How can science tell you what I am? I mean I've had boyfriends, and was happy with them, had girlfriends and may have boyfriends again for all I know. If it's a gay gene what's going on? Is it just turning itself on and off in my head? It doesn't feel like biology it feels like love.

Jo, 19

Psycho-social explanations stress the importance of life experiences, childhood and relationships with parents and treatment by them, adherence or deviance from conformity to gender roles, and individual psychological make-up. While none of these factors alone completely answers the question 'what causes homosexuality?', they rule out some things. For example, lesbian and gay young people are not 'failed' heterosexuals. Also, homosexual partners are generally of the same age hence giving the lie to assumptions that young people are 'turned gay' by older people.

What is clear is that young people's assumptions about sexuality and their behaviour is influenced by their family environment, their experiences and their sense of themselves. Beliefs about sex are initially shaped by family values. Later on these beliefs may be shaped by pleasurable and unpleasant experiences of sex and also shape their choice of activities and partners. Throughout their life a person's sense of who and what they are has a strong impact on their sexual development and experience.

While thoroughly convincing and embracing explanations of homosexuality prove elusive there are some good descriptions of the experience of growing up lesbian or gay. Some of these descriptions come from research (Frankham, 1996a; Rogers, 1994) and others are contained in books, plays and films. For example, the story of a young woman growing

up lesbian in the book, *'Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit'* (Winterson, 1985), the story of two boys falling in love told in the film, *'Beautiful Thing'* (Channel Four Films, 1996) and the song *'Small Town Boy'* by Bronski Beat about a young gay man running away from home.

This is important to schools since many lesbian and gay adults say that they began to identify themselves as 'different' in their secondary school years. In this period, the absence of support, understanding or information was sometimes a source of distress in itself and often magnified their anxieties.

'Coming Out'

Identifying oneself as lesbian or gay and disclosing this to other people is often referred to as 'coming out'. There are three main issues associated with 'coming out' which schools need to be aware of:

- 'Coming out' is a necessary and ultimately positive experience for most young people who grow up lesbian or gay. It can take place in the years between starting and leaving secondary school. In this period, coming to terms with confusion about identity can affect a young person's social relationships, school work and self-esteem both negatively and positively.
- Many young lesbian and gay people experience critical times when they have to decide who to tell about their sexuality. In making this disclosure they are often fearful of negative reactions, rejection and causing upset and distress to the person they are telling. Sometimes a young person may try 'coming out' to a supportive teacher or a school friend as a precursor to talking to parents in order to rehearse their own part and to judge reactions. Receiving a negative reaction can be very distressing.
- Support and guarantees of safety are valuable to young people 'coming out'. The availability of secure and confidential groups or contacts can be instrumental in reducing anxiety which is only magnified by feelings of isolation. The presence of role models in the shape of adults who 'come out' and those who offer non-judgmental support and help young people access these groups can be important. Positive treatment by, and contact with, role models can also encourage them to feel confident about their future.

There are several theories about the elements of the 'coming out' process (for a review see Goggins, 1993). Each has its own emphasis but all of them are developmental models which regard 'coming out' as a series of stages. These stages do not necessarily last the same length of time and there is no one age when the whole process begins and ends. These stages can be described as follows:

1. Sensitisation

I remember feeling very upset when the teacher in our sixth form called me and my friends the 'gay young men'. We were interested in art and hated sport. He thought we were wimps. It is funny, so far about four out of the eight of us have since come out. I don't know whether the teacher knew more about us than we did about ourselves.

Peter, 30

In this stage a person generally begins to feel 'different' to other people of the same sex. Sometimes they recognise that they are not very interested in people of the opposite sex, but more often they feel they are not really interested in things which are supposed to be appropriate for their sex. Most people report just feeling unusual when they compare themselves to other people of their sex. Commonly this happens before or in early adolescence when friendships and relationships between the sexes begin to change.

2. Confusion about identity

I didn't even know what a lesbian was. It was a sort of tradition that girls in the lower end of the school had crushes on older girls. They were everything you wanted to be and admired. I did wonder once if my crush was just a bit stronger than it ought have been but I was brought up to believe I would meet Mr Right and settle down to 2.4 kids so I just expected it to go away when we started to go out with boys.

Katie, 21

There are usually four elements which contribute to confusion about identity:

- Feeling that perceptions of the self are altering;
- Feeling and experiencing heterosexual and homosexual sexual arousal;
- Sensing the stigma surrounding homosexuality;
- Lacking knowledge about homosexuality.

Research indicates that most young gay men first decide they are probably gay between the ages of 12 and 17, and most young lesbian women first decide they are probably lesbian between the ages of 16 and 20 (Troiden, 1989). At this time they have to deal with feeling that they have changed, as have their relationships with other people around them. Some also have to combat the potentially powerful feelings of self-recrimination and disgust that come from describing themselves as homosexual. There are various strategies for coping with this emotional upheaval.

Some young people who think they are lesbian or gay will try to deny it to themselves and even seek help to eradicate their feelings. Others will try and avoid thoughts and feelings which remind them that they have homosexual inclinations. In these situations young people can avoid getting any information about sexuality in order to avoid confirming their suspicions about their orientation.

Some young people have great difficulty in managing their relationships with peers and family. They may avoid situations in which they may encounter opportunities for heterosexual pairing, so that they are not forced to deal with their lack of sexual interest in members of the opposite sex or have it exposed. They may, alternatively, persevere with heterosexual relationships to try and 'convert' themselves and/or conceal their homosexuality from others. In some extreme cases young people may try to avoid confronting their feelings by expressing strong homophobia or turning to drink and drugs in order to find temporary relief from their feelings.

Finally, some young people fall back on a strategy of redefining their feelings and behaviour in such a way as to convince themselves that they are not really homosexual. For example, they may describe their experiences as a 'phase' or a 'one-off' or they may put them down to extreme emotional or physical circumstances such as the break-up of a relationship or drunkenness at a party. In this stage feelings are becoming more concrete. Young people may well have partners of both sexes and may well find their moods and feelings shifting as they feel more or less certain about their identity. This period often lasts throughout adolescence.

3. Assuming a lesbian or gay identity

Clearly, living with confusion about identity is emotionally exhausting and potentially destructive. For some young people this period is followed quite quickly by a stage in which they come to accept their lesbian or gay identity and are able to express it in a positive way. For both young men and women growing up, mixing with other young gay people – in social settings or through support groups – can help them feel able to accept who they are. For some young people, particularly in larger towns and cities, lesbian and gay youth support groups provide a safe environment for 'coming out'. Elsewhere local and national lesbian and gay telephone helplines provide a safe space and listening ear for young people who want support. See *Useful Contacts* at the back of this book.

4. Commitment

I think when I fell in love it all became so much more concrete for me. I was suddenly very certain of what I wanted and why I wanted it. I mean, I still found myself thinking every now and then, 'why am I gay?', but I came more and more to think, 'I am gay because I love another man'. And I'm proud of that. I am proud of him and I'm proud of me and I don't care who knows it.

Martin, 19

The final stage in the process of 'coming out' involves being openly lesbian or gay and recognising that it is a central aspect of 'who I am' and 'how I want to live my life'. Young people begin to feel that homosexuality is a valid way of life and develop a sense of contentment with being lesbian or gay. They often have the experience of falling in love at this time and, perhaps as a result, feel more confident, fulfilled and able to combat the social stigma that they may suffer.

At this time some young lesbian and gay people begin to feel proud of their sexuality. The expression of this pride in being lesbian or gay is a powerful force in challenging the stigma attached to homosexuality by people with prejudiced attitudes and provides positive role models to others less sure about 'coming out'.

Homosexuality and HIV/AIDS

We asked the groups to do a brain-storming activity around the words HIV/AIDS. They always put gay men somewhere. When we probed for an explanation it almost always boiled down to the prevalence of HIV in the gay community. They might be sympathetic but more likely be blaming gay men for causing infections.

Health Promotion Officer

HIV and AIDS affect homosexual men to a disproportionate degree in the UK and the rest of the developed world. It is thought currently that 61% of all cases of HIV in the UK are among men who became infected through sex with another man (Communicable Disease Report, 1997). This fact has sometimes been used to criticise gay men suggesting that they are promiscuous and take sexual risks. The evidence suggests that on the contrary, gay men have been very sensitive and responsive in regard to safer sex promotion and condoms are widely and properly used. The high rate of infection reflects a complex relationship between a lack of information in the early days of the epidemic, patterns of sexual activity, the risk of infection and prevalence of the virus among gay men.

The primary mode of transmission of HIV between men is through anal sex without a condom. For young gay men there may be particular problems with trying to practice safer sex. Some young gay men may not feel secure about obtaining or using extra-strong condoms for anal sex because if they are seen purchasing or in possession of them it might be interpreted as a disclosure of gay identity. They also rarely have the benefit of sex education in school in which sexual behaviour between same-sex partners is discussed. This can make it very hard for young gay men to feel comfortable about negotiating safer sex. It can also fuel stigmatisation of homosexuality by leaving unchallenged the fallacious beliefs that many young people have about gay men and anal sex.

Talking about HIV or safer sex may be an obvious way in to talking about homosexuality in secondary school. However, it is important not to make a negative connection between sexuality and disease. To leave issues about safer sex for gay men and HIV transmission unaddressed is to deny young gay men potentially valuable information with which to protect themselves and their partners from infection. Also, it may allow beliefs that gay men are somehow to blame for HIV infections to continue to exist unchallenged.

Strategies for talking about homosexuality in the secondary school

This chapter contains strategies for talking with governors, parents, school staff and young people. The strategies are laid out in a similar way for each group. Each is preceded by general information about some of the issues involved in talking with people in the specific group and is followed by some detailed information about how to use the strategies. There are some points about talking with groups which apply to all the strategies.

- Where necessary, worksheets and other materials are provided and may be copied for use within a single institution.
- Each strategy can be used in a session of about 30 minutes.
- It is necessary for someone to facilitate discussions that will take place. In most cases this will be a teacher but in some cases the role might be shared between two teachers or a teacher and a health professional (e.g. a school nurse or health promotion specialist).
- Most sessions with groups of people will involve asking them to work in pairs, small groups and as a whole group. This means consideration needs to be given to the size and composition of the group. There are no fixed rules but the following are some issues to consider when deciding how many people to talk with:
 - The demands of the session and the complexity of the strategy you are adopting. The more complex and demanding the strategy the better it is to keep the group small.
 - The character of the group and the individuals within it.
 - The confidence and experience of the facilitator.

Good tactics to use with groups are to ask small groups or pairs to talk about different pieces of material or aspects of the issue so that the group covers ground more quickly and processing is more interesting. An alternative is to ask everyone to look at the same material but talk about different questions or issues that it throws up.

The four main kinds of people you might want to talk with, either as a group or individuals, are:

- School governors;
- Parents;
- Teachers and other school staff;
- Young people.

Who you decide to talk with will depend on your role and the particular circumstances in the school. In some schools it will be possible to start by talking with teachers and school staff. However, in others there will be no policy to support this or a lack of clarity about the position of the school governing body on talking about homosexuality. Even in schools where teachers and other staff might be in a position to talk about homosexuality and to begin to plan how to talk about it with young people, there may be practical constraints like difficulties with finding time to meet.

For many people working in school the priority will naturally be to talk with young people about homosexuality. It can be tempting to delay talking to senior management, governors or colleagues and take advantage of opportunities that arise in the classroom. Although this may well be appealing, it is sensible to develop a strategy and make an agenda for talking. You can consult on this with other people in school in order to solicit their advice and support. It also means that you can feel confident that young people will feel safe in talking about homosexuality and you should find it constructive. Benefits in talking to other people can be:

1. You will feel more confident if you have the support of school governors, parents and your colleagues.
2. You should feel in control in talking with young people and able to arrive at positive resolutions.

Who is it helpful to talk with?

You might need to talk at a number of different levels in school. It is recommended that in order to decide where to start you go through the questions below relating to school governors, parents, staff and young people. Where you cannot be positive about an answer it is advisable to refer to the relevant section as indicated. For example, if there is something you are not sure about in relation to governors, you are directed to three strategies for talking with them.

Do I need to talk with governors?

Q. Do you think that governors realise that talking about homosexuality will contribute to a positive school ethos?

Yes

No

Q. Do you think that the current school policy on sex education ensures that the school staff feel confident about what to do if an individual young person approaches them for advice or information about homosexuality?

Yes

No

Q. Do you think that the current school policy on bullying ensures that the school staff will feel clear about what to do if a young person is subjected to homophobic abuse or bullying?

Yes

No

Refer to page 33 'Talking with school governors'

Do I need to talk with parents/carers?

Q. Are school staff confident that parents/carers understand why homosexuality ought to be talked about in the classroom?

Yes

No

Q. Do you think that parents/carers who want support, advice or guidance about homosexuality for themselves or their children can be confident that the school will provide it?

Yes

No

Refer to page 42 'Talking with parents/carers'

Do I need to talk with school staff?

Q. Do you think school staff are clear why they want to talk about homosexuality in the classroom?

Yes

No

Q. Have school staff talked among themselves about homosexuality?

Yes

No

Q. Have school staff talked among themselves about talking about homosexuality in the classroom?

Yes

No

Q. Are you sure school staff know what issues are likely to be raised in the classroom and how to deal with them?

Yes

No

Refer to page 46 'Talking with teachers and other school staff'

Am I ready to talk with young people?

Q. Do you think young people are ready to talk about homosexuality in the classroom?

Yes

No

Q. Are the classroom and the group safe environments for talking about homosexuality?

Yes

No

Q. Have young people asked questions about homosexuality in the classroom?

Yes

No

Q. Do young people in the school know what homosexuality and homophobia are?

Yes

No

Q. Are young people able to access support and advice inside and outside school if they want or need it?

Yes

No

Refer to page 64 'Talking with young people'

Talking with school governors

School governing bodies have a legal responsibility for the formulation of policy on sex education and other issues in schools. They have a responsibility, therefore, to see that teachers and other school staff act within policies that they have laid down and that, from time to time, parents and other people involved with the school have an opportunity to view and review school policies. They should also be consulted on the development of any policy.

Teachers and other school staff, together with young people in school, have a right to expect school policies to be clear and provide both support and boundaries to teaching, pastoral care and behaviour. School governing bodies can be very sensitive to perceived parental objections to dealing with some issues in school. They may also be sensitive to the risk of unsympathetic, if not hostile, reporting in the media about the school and its staff or pupils. These concerns along with erroneous beliefs about the scope of Section 28 of the Local Government Act (DoE, 1988) may make them reluctant to talk about homosexuality in the secondary school. Talking about homosexuality in the context of talking about sexuality more widely, or bullying, equality of opportunity or school ethos and values can help ameliorate anxiety among school governors. It can also lead to the development of policies which endorse and even positively encourage talking about homosexuality among school staff and with young people in school. The following three strategies are suggested in relation to talking with school governors:

Strategy One – Talking about policy, practice, school ethos and values

This strategy aims to enable governors to review policy or develop guiding statements on school ethos and values by considering government guidance on sex education, bullying and moral framework.

Strategy Two – Talking about bullying

This strategy, using four case-studies, aims to enable school governors to think about homophobic bullying in the context of other kinds of bullying and harassment and to evaluate whether current school policies acknowledge it sufficiently.

Strategy Three – Providing information about lesbian and gay support for school staff and young people in school

This strategy aims to enable school governors to think about how people in school can access information such as leaflets, advice, support for individuals and groups of young people, and how that information will be made available in school.

Strategy One – Talking about policy, practice, school ethos and values

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the list of statements on the page opposite.

Method

You can use this strategy to talk with school governors as a group or individually. If you want to talk to a school governor on their own you can suggest that you use the statements on the list as points for an agenda to talk around. If you want to talk with a group of school governors you need to make sufficient copies of the list of statements for each person to have one. In this case you can ask them to consider their responses to the list individually then talk as a group about the main points. In order to save time you can ask them to look at the list of statements before you meet to talk or, you can just use a few of the statements.

Processing

You can either talk about responses to each statement in turn or suggest that the group talk about the general issues which groups of statements on the list address. These are as follows:

- The ethos of the school and values that are promoted through the taught and hidden curriculum.
- The effectiveness of school policies on bullying, equality of opportunity, sex education and confidentiality and their congruency with the school ethos and values.
- The position of lesbian and gay young people (and staff) in the school.
- Young people's experience of growing up gay in school and reactions to them.
- The position of lesbian and gay parents/carers.

Following through...

It is important that talking about the moral considerations and policy frameworks within which talking about homosexuality can take place in school does not marginalise talking about the motives. You can follow through talking about school ethos, values and policy by referring school governors to the list of seven reasons for talking about homosexuality in school (*Chapter 1*, pages 1–5). It can be useful to talk about which of these reasons apply in school and how that ought to affect policy and what is taught.

Below is a list of statements based on government guidance to schools, and extracts from books and articles relating to sex education. What do you think about each statement?

Agree/Debatable/Disagree

- This school encourages respect for different ways of life, beliefs and opinions.
- Sex education in this school seeks to promote the traditional heterosexual family unit.
- Parents/carers are consulted on the content of this school's sex education.
- This school provides support and help for parents/carers who want advice or support about homosexuality for themselves or young people.
- This school's policies provide a framework for the issue of homosexuality to be discussed in the classroom.
- This school's current policy on sex education gives clear guidance to school staff on what they should do if an individual young person approaches them for advice or information about homosexuality.
- This school's current policy on bullying is sufficient that school staff can feel clear about how to react or what to do if a young person is subject to homophobic abuse or bullying.
- Lesbian and gay young people – or those who other people think are lesbian or gay – are likely to be picked on in this school.
- There are lesbian and gay people in this school.
- I feel comfortable with the sex education currently being provided by this school.
- Young people receive honest answers from staff in this school to questions they ask about sex and sexuality.

Strategy Two – Talking about bullying

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the stories and statements on the following pages.

Method

The strategy is best used when talking with a group of school governors. A good way of working is to ask the governors to work in four small groups (or pairs). You can ask each group to talk about a different story and the associated statements. If you want to talk to a school governor on their own you can suggest using the case-studies as the basis for a discussion about bullying.

Processing

You can talk generally about the issues the stories raise. It is more useful to focus discussion on three questions:

- In each case how would you want staff in this school to react?
- How do they know these are the views of the governing body on bullying?
- Does the school bullying policy recognise all types of bullying?

Following through...

If there is a problem with the recognition of homophobic bullying in school it may be because school governors have no information about it. You can follow through by referring them to the relevant sections in *Chapter 2* which deal with causes of homophobia (pp.18–19), its effects (p.19), and its extent (p.20). It can be useful to talk about the degree to which this information seems to relate to what goes on in school.

Sara's story

It was really difficult at school. Girls kept on asking me if I was a lesbian because I had short hair and wore DMs. One day I just said 'yes'. Rumours started spreading all over the school and within a couple of days it seemed that everyone knew. From then on my life was a misery – I was constantly bullied.

All the friends I had before wouldn't talk to me. I got really depressed and didn't want to go to school. I finally plucked up the courage to speak to a teacher who was really supportive.

Society encourages people to be anti-gay. It seems like there's this unwritten rule which says if you don't get married and have 2.4 children, then you're weird or abnormal. But loads of people don't live like that anymore. There are lots of different relationships nowadays.

A lot of straight girls assume that I fancy every girl I see. But they don't fancy every boy that walks down the street do they?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements from and about the story above:

Agree/Debatable/Disagree

- It seems like there's this unwritten rule which says that if you don't get married and have 2.4 children you're weird or abnormal.
- There are lots of different relationships nowadays.
- A lot of straight girls assume that lesbian girls fancy every girl they meet.
- Society encourages people to be anti-gay.
- Girls who have short hair and wear DMs can be stereotyped as lesbians.

“Help! I’m being bullied at school”

I’m 13 and I’m being bullied at school. I’ve never felt so depressed in all my life. There’s this boy who always calls me names and laughs at me with his friends. They call me ‘rich boy’ and ‘stuck-up’. We are quite well-off but we’re not rich. I’m scared even to wear any new clothes or have a new bag in school because of what they’ll say. I don’t know what to do. I don’t want to talk to my mum or the teachers. I feel like I want to move school. I just don’t understand, I’ve never done anything to them.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the story above:

Agree/Debatable/Disagree

- Verbal bullying can be as harmful as physical bullying.
- People are bullied because of what they look like.
- Some young people are reluctant to talk to teachers about being bullied.
- Not all teachers are able to tell when young people are being bullied.
- Teachers should be able to provide appropriate support to young people who are being bullied.

"He pinches my bum"

I'm 15 and a boy who is in my class always wants to grab hold of my bum and pinch it. I told him I didn't like it and asked him to stop but he hasn't. I really don't know what to do or who to talk to. If I tell a teacher are they just going to tell everyone? I don't like this boy at all and I don't like what he's doing.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the story above:

Agree/Debatable/Disagree

- Sexual harassment is a form of bullying.
- If a young person tells a teacher about bullying they are not going to keep it secret.
- It is nearly impossible to stop this kind of behaviour in school.
- Teachers react differently when boys harass other boys to when boys harass girls.

Whole lot of hassle

I used to get a whole load of hassle. People automatically assumed I was a 'poof' and there was so many incidents where people hit me, kicked me, spat at me, just because of the way I looked. You can't go to your parents and say, 'someone kicked me today because they thought I was a poof', and you can't go to a teacher and say that. It was something that you didn't just deal with and tried to carry on as normal. And that was so difficult but... there was one incident... someone came up and grabbed me from behind and simulated anal sex with me, in front of all his friends... it was just... so bad.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the story above:

Agree/Debatable/Disagree

- Young people may not always be confident about getting support at home if they are being bullied.
- Homophobic bullying goes on in every school.
- Some young people think that school cannot do anything about bullying.

Strategy Three – Providing information about lesbian and gay support for school staff and young people in school

Preparation

You will need to assemble leaflets written for young lesbian and gay people. These should be available free from the local health authority/health promotion unit. A list of national organisations, most of which produce resources, is given on pages 96–98.

Method

This strategy is best used when talking with a group of school governors. A good way of working is to ask them to work in four small groups or pairs. You can ask each group to look at a variety of resources and to evaluate their suitability for display in the following settings within school:

- A noticeboard in the staffroom;
- A noticeboard in the Year 11 social area;
- A noticeboard in the Year 9 social area;
- A leaflet rack in the medical room/sick bay.

Processing

You can have a general discussion about the issues this strategy raises. You can also talk about other settings where the materials might be placed and which professionals involved with school might give them out.

Following through...

You can follow through on talking about resources by referring governors to other parts of *Talking about Homosexuality*. Because sex education is predominantly about heterosexual reproduction and relationships, young people growing up gay can feel it does not provide them with adequate or appropriate information about same-sex relationships, HIV prevention and safer sex. Governors can talk about young gay people's experiences of school sex education as contained on pages 1–5. Alternatively, because support is very important to young people when they are 'coming out', you can talk about what part resources might play in providing them with information and advice by referring to '*Coming Out*' on pages 22–25.

Talking with parents/carers

Parents/carers have an important role to play in relation to the schooling of young people. Consulting with the parent/carer group as a whole and the involvement of representatives on working groups which develop and monitor school policy is good practice for any school. Having mechanisms for talking about sex education and other issues can ensure that parents/carers feel valued, involved and reassured about what is being done and the motives for it.

The overwhelming majority of parents/carers support sex education in schools. In some schools there will be a few parents/carers who want clarification about what is taught in sex education, or about sex in some other part of the curriculum or contained in policy. This does not necessarily mean they object as expressions of concern can be taken as evidence of interest. Much more often there are parents/carers who want support from school for themselves or a young person in their care.

Homosexuality can seem a particularly sensitive subject to be talking to parents/carers about and teachers can feel anxious about it. Parents can feel anxious but may appreciate an honest approach to the subject. The following two strategies are suggested in relation to talking to parents/carers:

Strategy Four – Talking about school policy, ethos and values

This strategy aims to enable a group of parents/carers to talk about school ethos/values by considering statements on sex education, bullying and moral frameworks within which schools operate and the values that they seek to promote. This strategy is particularly suitable when the aim is to develop or review school policies or consult with parents/carers on current practice.

Strategy Five – Talking with individual parents/carers about homosexuality

This strategy aims to enable teachers to develop some approaches for talking with individual parents/carers.

Strategy Four – Talking about school policy, ethos and values

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the list of statements on the following page.

Method

This strategy is useful when talking with a group of parents/carers. This might be a small group like a working party, or a larger group, at, for example, a parents evening. Depending on the number of people in the group you can ask people to work on their own, in pairs or in groups of four.

Processing

You can either focus on talking about responses to each statement in turn or, especially with a bigger group, talk about a few statements which seem particularly relevant at the time.

Following through...

You can follow through talking about school ethos, values and policies generally by talking about current school policies and statements about ethos and values. To do this you will need to provide copies of statements from the relevant documents in the school. These can be shown as overhead projections or on handouts. You can ask parents in the group to talk about their responses to these statements and to compare them to what they thought about the general statements. If you are developing policy you can suggest statements that might be adopted or reflected in policies and ask parents to talk about them. Or you can ask them to talk about how statements from the general list on which they agree can be incorporated into policies.

Below is a list of statements based on government guidance to schools, and extracts from books and articles relating to sex education. What do you think about each statement?

Agree/Debatable/Disagree

- This school encourages respect for different ways of life, beliefs and opinions.
- Sex education in this school seeks to promote the traditional heterosexual family unit.
- Parents/carers of young people in this school are adequately consulted on the content of the sex education it provides.
- This school provides support for parents/carers who want advice or support about homosexuality for themselves or young people in their care.
- Homophobic bullying, when young people are abused because they are believed to be lesbian or gay, is common in this school.
- Staff in this school challenge homophobic remarks and bullying.
- There are lesbian and gay young people in this school.
- I feel comfortable with the sex education in this school.
- We have talked about homosexuality with young people in our care.
- An 'out' gay member of staff could be a positive role model.

Strategy Five – Talking with individual parents/carers about homosexuality

Talking with individual parents/carers about homosexuality will probably take place in the context of addressing specific concerns about a young person they are responsible for. In some cases it will be where a parent/carer wants to know more about what is being taught in school or the way a specific policy operates. In other cases it will be where a parent/carer is concerned about the welfare of a young person in their care and is asking the school for advice or support. It may be that sometimes this concern is shared and that the overture from the parents/carers does not come as a particular surprise and is even welcome. For example, a parent/carer might ask to speak to a teacher about homophobic bullying which their child has reported to them, and the teacher, who has detected something is wrong but is unsure what it is, is pleased at the opportunity to help. However, it would be unwise for any teacher to raise the issue of homosexuality with individual parents/carers if they are not sure that it is in the young person's best interest.

Aspects of *Talking about Homosexuality* can be used in either of these kinds of situations described above. In situations where parents/carers are anxious about their children being involved in discussions about homosexuality in the classroom you can refer to any of the following sections:

- *Why talk about homosexuality in the secondary school* (pages 1–5)
- *How many homosexual people are there in Britain* (page 14)
- *The effect of homophobia* (page 19) and *The extent of homophobia* (page 20)

In situations where parents/carers want advice or support about a child who is growing up lesbian or gay you can refer to the following sections:

- *'Coming Out'* (pages 22–25)
- *How many homosexual young people are there?* (page 15)
- *Is homosexuality a phase young people go through?* (page 15)

Talking with teachers and other school staff

Talking about homosexuality with teachers and other school staff might be important for several reasons. A recent survey of over 300 secondary schools in England and Wales by the Health and Education Research Unit, Institute of Education was reported in the Terrence Higgins Trust CHAPS newsletter (Whelan, 1997). The survey investigated issues related to homophobic bullying, teaching about sexuality and HIV/AIDS and the perceived effects of Section 28 of the Local Government Act (DoE, 1988). The results of this survey showed that teachers had the following concerns:

- 61% of the schools responding were aware of lesbian, gay or bisexual young people in school and 42% had been asked for help or advice. However, 44% felt that the perceived effects of Section 28 and uncertainty about its implications for schools made it more difficult to address their needs. 81% of respondents would appreciate further clarification in relation to Section 28.
- While 82% of the schools responding were aware of incidents of verbal homophobic bullying and 26% were aware of incidents of physical bullying, 17.4% of respondents felt that the lack of experienced staff made it difficult to tackle.

So talking about homosexuality with teachers and other school staff might be important because it can help them to:

- more effectively support young people in the school who are growing up lesbian or gay;
- more clearly understand the legislation and guidance to schools on sex education, and its implications for what can be said and done;
- explore ways of putting into practice school policies which refer to homosexuality;
- have greater confidence in talking about homosexuality in the classroom.

Teachers and other school staff may feel reluctant to talk about homosexuality because they find it is a sensitive issue. It inevitably brings up differences in personal values and judgements about what is appropriate for the classroom. In talking with school staff it is important to be aware that it is not always easy for them to keep clear the distinction between personal views and professional responsibilities.

You can talk with teachers and other school staff in the following kinds of groups:

- working parties on school policies which refer to homosexuality or homophobia;
- teams involved in delivering PSHE or sex education;
- or the whole teaching and non-teaching school staff in the context of staff development or training days.

In all of these contexts talking about homosexuality might be one aspect of wider discussions about sex education, bullying, equality of opportunity or confidentiality.

The strategies for talking as a group are of two kinds. Strategies 6 and 7 involve talking about their feelings about homosexuality. These strategies are most useful when you want teachers and other school staff to start talking. Strategies 8, 9, 10 and 11 involve talking about their needs for information, support and skills in order to talk about homosexuality with young people. These are most useful when you want to talk with them about planning work with young people.

Strategy 12 gives some guidance on talking with individual teachers or other colleagues. Some of the issues they might raise are indicated and pointers provided to relevant information in parts of this book.

When time is limited for talking as a group we advise that you pick at least either strategy 6 or 7 and then one or more from the others depending on what you want to achieve. The list below describes the content and aim of each of the strategies.

Strategy Six – Talking about sex and love

This strategy aims to enable teachers and other school staff to talk about their reactions to issues associated with homosexuality by using extracts from books and magazines.

Strategy Seven – Leaflets

This strategy aims to enable teachers and other school staff to discuss how people in school can access information such as leaflets, advice and support for individuals and groups of young people, and how that information will be made available in school.

Strategy Eight – Feeling clear about school ethos, values and policy

This strategy aims to enable teachers and other school staff to review policy and develop guiding statements on school ethos, values and policies by considering government guidance on sex education, bullying and moral frameworks.

Strategy Nine – Please Sir, please Miss, what's homosexuality?

This strategy aims to enable teachers and other school staff to identify what knowledge, information and skills they need in order to talk about homosexuality in the classroom, through discussing the questions most frequently asked by young people.

Strategy Ten – Making a safe environment for talking about homosexuality with a group of young people

This strategy aims to enable teachers and other school staff to talk about techniques for making the classroom a safe place to talk with young people about homosexuality through the use of case-study material which describes situations where the confidentiality or the security of the group is at risk.

Strategy Eleven – Being prepared to handle disclosures from young people

This strategy aims to enable teachers and other school staff to talk about how they operate school policies or practice relating to pupil confidentiality through discussing disclosure statements made by young people.

Strategy Twelve – Providing support and advice to individual teachers and other colleagues

This strategy aims to enable teachers and other staff to identify important issues in relation to talking with individual colleagues.

Strategy Six – Talking about sex and love

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the passages of text on the following pages.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of school staff. You should give each person one of the accounts to read and ask them to consider the following questions:

- What reactions and feelings do you have in reading the account?
- Are there things you are uncomfortable with reading?
- Do the accounts help you to understand young people's feelings and experiences of same-sex sex and love?
- What other stories, accounts or experiences, if any, do they make you think of?

Processing

You can talk generally as a group about the issues the passages raise and people's reaction to them. Or you can focus discussion on the specific questions above. If it feels inappropriate to talk about people's personal reactions in a group, you can ask people to get into pairs with someone they feel confident talking with and to take it in turns to share their reactions to the questions.

Following through...

You can follow through on this strategy by asking the pairs to form into groups of four and talk about their reactions in the context of some of the information provided elsewhere in this book. For example, you can refer them to the accounts in *Strategy Seventeen – My story is...* (pages 75–79) and ask them how they react to reading these accounts and experiences.

My father used to get Playboy and Penthouse, and I remember cutting out these pictures of lovely women and pasting them on my wall of favourite things... I shared a room with my stepsister and when we were about 12 or 13, we often sort of explored each other's bodies; I remember our lying on top of each other, not quite sure what we were doing, but knowing that it felt really good.

Stephanie Norris and Emma Read (1985) *Out in the Open*.
London: Pan Books. Pp.17–18.

I remember when we made Peter and Shaun kiss. We were waiting for our history teacher, and were chatting and mucking about. There was an argument between Gary and Peter. Soon they were exchanging insults. Gary said that Peter was talking 'crap', Peter said Gary was 'fat'. Gary said that Peter was 'gay', and that was because 'he was gay and said gay things.'

Oggy, Gary's friend joined in. He said that Peter had been found in the toilets with a boy from the first year and that everyone knew what that meant. Peter said he was not gay. Someone else said that he must be gay because, 'he wouldn't need to deny it if it wasn't true.'

Then Gary said, 'kiss Shaun, he's gay too, so kiss him.' It was like a dare. We were laughing and egging them on. Then, quite suddenly, without saying anything Peter looked really hard straight at Shaun and then they kissed; full on the mouth, for a long time. I felt stunned.

The teacher must have come in then because I don't remember anything else happening. It was funny because I used to go out with Peter in our group, with Mark and Jon and we never ever mentioned the kiss.

from Simon Forrest and Grant Biddle (1997) *Loving the Enemy*,
in *Young People Now*, February issue.

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I was round at Terry's. It was a great party. Loads of people were there. I was just standing around with my mate Steve and I see this girl over his shoulder. She smiles at me, right, so I give it the business. You know, I talk to Steve but every now and then laugh really loud and look at her again, smiling loads. She kept smiling back, so I moved in. We get talking and everything's going fine. She laughed at my jokes. Next thing I know she's looking at me all soppy and we kiss. Then it all got out of control. She's whispering to me to come upstairs – you know – and I said, 'you go on, I'll come in a minute, I've got to go to the loo first', or something.

Anyway she goes off and Steve comes over. He's really excited, going on about 'taking my chances' and 'having it off'. I didn't know what to say. I mean I was really excited about the kiss still and he's saying that I must be a right stud to pull a girl like that. It is true, I have had lots of girlfriends but it doesn't mean I'm experienced. I mean, I'm really good at the chatting up and smooth-talking but I've never actually done it. Slept with someone. But I couldn't tell him that could I?

Anyway, I went upstairs, and found her in the bedroom, with all the lights off on top of a pile of coats. She had taken half her clothes off. I had been intending to say something. All the way upstairs I'd been thinking 'tell her, tell her you're a virgin.' But how could I? I just knew she thought I wanted to have sex. I was thinking, 'I don't want it like this, what about protection and that?'

It was awful, looking back, but I did it. I fumbled around and we were hardly talking so eventually, after a bit of wrestling I got it in and it lasted about 10 seconds. I just got dressed and left. I kept thinking, 'well I've done it but what could it have been like?'

from Clift S, *et al.* (1996) *Sexual Feelings and Relationships*.
Horsham: AVERT pp.18–19.

Monica and Marya met when they were both nursing during the war. Their relationship was frowned on by the hospital authorities who separated them at work. Thirty years later they were reunited when Marya saw Monica in an advert on television and was able to trace her. Marya sat down and wrote to Monica immediately. Monica picks up the story from the day that letter arrived.

'I was... having coffee at 11 o'clock and I opened this letter. I can't describe the feeling, it was great excitement and I rushed and got my best writing paper and started to write... and I thought, well she hasn't mentioned whether there's a husband there or not – do I need this? Well, I thought, I'd better stop and think about this before I write.'

Before long Marya had moved down south and she and Monica set up house together. Monica says, 'she used to say that her greatest dream was to have a house in Rye, a boat on the river Rother and a French maid. Well, she got a house near Rye and we could see the river Rother from our bedroom, and she got me instead of a French maid, but I think she was quite pleased with the deal.'

We were going to live and love until we were ninety and make up for that waste of time, but, sadly, she got ill after we'd been together for about seven and a half years. It was cancer... and she had some very tough times... but she was very, very brave and her love for me shone through to everyone. She made no secret of the fact to all the consultants; nurses, everyone knew. She was, and is, the love of my life'.

adapted from Jivani, A. (1997) *It's not Unusual: A history of lesbian and gay Britain in the twentieth century*. London: Michael O'Mara Books Ltd. pp.203–204.

Strategy Seven – Leaflets

Preparation

You will need to assemble leaflets written for young lesbian and gay people (these should be available for free from the local health authority/health promotion unit). A list of national organisations, most of which produce resources, is given on pages 96–98 of this book.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of school staff. A good way of working is to ask them to get in smaller groups of four or five people to look at a variety of leaflets and resources. It can be useful to ask each group to consider all the resources in the following way:

- How acceptable do you find each of the leaflets?
- How acceptable do you think they will be to parents?
- How acceptable do you think they will be to young people in the school?

For each evaluation you can ask the group to rank the resources from ‘most’ to ‘least’ appropriate on a table top or on the floor.

Following through...

You can follow through this strategy by talking about reactions to leaflets and other resources for young heterosexual people. Or you can muddle up resources for young lesbian and gay and young straight people and talk about the same questions.

Another useful way to talk about resources is to consider which ones are suitable for use in school. If you want to develop this discussion you can refer to *Strategy Three – Providing information about lesbian and gay support for school staff and young people in school* on page 41.

Strategy Eight – Feeling clear about school ethos, values and policy

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the list of statements on the page opposite.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of school staff. A good way of working is to ask them to get into pairs and talk about the list of statements and then, having agreed their responses, to get into groups of four and try to reach a consensus about some points.

Processing

You can either focus on talking about responses to each statement in turn or, especially with a bigger group, talk about a few statements which seem particularly relevant to the school. It may be necessary to talk about specific points of information which arise, i.e. the scope of Section 28 of the Local Government Act and government guidance on sex education. Information about both these issues is contained on pages 6–7 (*What moral position does Talking about Homosexuality take?*) and 1–5 (*Why talk about homosexuality in the secondary school?*) of this book, respectively.

Following through...

You can follow through by talking about current school policies and statements about ethos and values. To do this you will need to provide copies of statements from the relevant documents in the school. These can be shown as overhead projections or on handouts. You can ask teachers and other school staff in the group to talk about their responses to these statements in the same way. If you are developing policy you can suggest statements that might be adopted or reflected in policies and ask them to talk about them. Or you can ask them to talk about how statements from the list opposite can be incorporated into school policies.

Below is a list of statements based on government guidance to schools, and extracts from books and articles relating to sex education. What do you think about each statement?

Agree/Debatable/Disagree

- This school encourages respect for different ways of life, beliefs and opinions.
- Sex education in this school seeks to promote the traditional heterosexual family unit.
- Section 28 of the Local Government Act acts makes it difficult to talk about homosexuality in schools.
- Parents/carers of young people in this school are adequately consulted on the content of the sex education it provides.
- This school's policies provide a framework for the issue of homosexuality to be discussed in the classroom.
- This school's current policy on sex education gives clear guidance to teachers and other school staff on what they should do if an individual young person approaches them for advice or information about homosexuality.
- Homophobic bullying, when young people are abused because they are believed to be lesbian or gay, is common in this school.
- This school's current policy on bullying is sufficient that teachers and other school staff can feel clear about how to react and what to do if a young person is subject to homophobic abuse or bullying.
- Teachers and other staff in this school challenge homophobic remarks and bullying.
- There are lesbian and/or gay young people in this school.
- I feel comfortable with the sex education we do in this school.
- Young people have a right to receive honest answers from teachers and other staff in this school to questions they ask about sex and sexuality.

Strategy Nine – Please Sir, please Miss, what's homosexuality?

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the questions below and on the following pages.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of school staff. A good way of working is to ask them to get into pairs and talk about how they would answer each of the questions.

Processing

You can ask the whole group to talk about the following questions in relation to the questions young people might ask:

- Do you feel a need for any information about homosexuality in order to talk about these questions?
- Have you ever been asked any of these questions by young people in school? How did you talk about it with them?
- What positive experiences of talking with young people about homosexuality do you have?

Following through...

You can follow through on talking about these frequently asked questions by talking about the main issues that are raised in leaflets and resources for young lesbian and gay people. If the group want more time and opportunity to talk about the facts about homosexuality you can refer them to the relevant parts of *Chapter 2* of this book, especially *What facts about homosexuality are young people interested in?* (pages 9–10), *How many homosexual people are there in Britain?* (pages 14–15) and *Homosexual sexual behaviour – what do gay men and lesbian women do?* (page 17).

"Can my parents tell if I'm a lesbian?"

9a

I'm 17 and I've been confused about my sexual identity for a few years but now I've come to accept that I'm a lesbian. The trouble is, my parents are anti-gay, but I know I'll never be happy with myself until my Mum and Dad know how I feel. I'm scared stiff of being near them in case they twig. It has affected me so badly that I'm thinking of killing myself so I don't have to live a lie any more.

9b

"Am I gay?"

I'm very confused. Just recently I've started to notice I'm having feelings for my mates. I've had quite a few relationships with several girls but they have never lasted longer than a couple of months because I start to feel guilty that I'm leading the girl on. Am I gay?

9c

"What can I do about my feelings?"

There's someone at school I really fancy and I am worried because I can't get them off my mind. Even when I'm supposed to be working in class my mind wanders and I think about them. A teacher told me off and asked if anything was wrong. I want this feeling to go away, but I think it's love. Is something wrong with me?

9d

"They think I'm gay and I'm not"

I'm a boy who can't get a girlfriend because everyone thinks I'm gay. It's not true, but because I get bullied a lot because of this, I hang around with girls more than boys. People tell me I look like a girl, and say I'm "sad", so I stay indoors most of the time to hide from this horrible life. I don't want to end up a loner. Please help me, what should I do?

9e

"I want to get some advice"

I'm 15 and my boyfriend wants me to have sex with him. I really want to but I'm nervous. We have talked about taking precautions but I don't know where to go for help. I know that if you can't use protection then people say you aren't ready for it but I am ready. What should I do?

9f

"Am I lesbian?"

I'm a 14 year old girl and I can't help having strong sexual feelings for my biology teacher who's a woman. I'm so confused because one minute I'll drool over a poster of Keanu and the next my mind wanders back to my teacher. Am I lesbian, bisexual or straight?

9g

"We are in love and want to tell our parents"

I've had boyfriends in the past but recently I fell in love with my best girlfriend. We talked about how we felt a lot and have been really careful to keep it a secret that we are going out and in love. We are just about to leave school now and want to move in together. We don't want the happiness to end or the secrets to have to go on. We both agree that we want to tell our parents about us but are scared that they will not take us seriously. We are completely in love and it is serious. How should we approach them?

9h

"I need some advice about sex"

I'm a 16 year old gay young man. I have met another young man and we are in love. I want to make our relationship sexual but I'm really scared. I know that gay men can be at risk of HIV but I don't know exactly how or why. What's safe and what's not?

9i

"What do gay people do?"

I have read something about lesbian and gay people in magazines and talked a bit with my friends but I don't know what to believe. Some people say you can tell gay people by the way they look and talk, and that they do certain jobs. But what I want to know is how do they have sex?

Strategy Ten – Making a safe environment for talking about homosexuality with a group of young people

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the case-studies on the following page.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of school staff. A good way of working is to ask them to get into pairs or small groups of four or five and talk about one of the case-studies. Each group can consider the following questions in relation to their example:

- How will the people in this case react?
- Is it possible to agree on rules in advance which would make this situation safer or prevent it arising at all? What are they?

Processing

You can ask each pair or small group to talk about their case-study and responses to the questions above.

Following through...

You can follow through by talking about how anything in the discussion about these case-studies should inform current practice in the classroom. You can structure this by talking about the following questions:

- What rules do you use when talking with young people about sex in the classroom?
- How do you come to have these rules?
- Are they adequate for talking about homosexuality?

10a

In an English lesson this morning a Year 8 class read a story called 'An Embarrassing Moment'. The teacher asked the people in the class if any of them could describe what being embarrassed felt like. A boy said he could because he had been really embarrassed once when he had wet himself in primary school. Soon the story spread around the school about what the boy had said. Some people started to tease him and make up rumours.

10b

In PSHE with a Year 11 group a teacher was talking about different people's attitudes to people with HIV and AIDS. The teacher asked the group to brainstorm a list of groups of people who are stigmatised in relation to HIV and AIDS. Someone said, 'gay men'. Someone else said, 'What, poofs and queers?' and then someone asked the teacher 'What do you think of gay men, do you think there are any in this school?'

10c

In a Maths lesson the teacher wants the young people in 10G to get into small groups to do some work on a problem. The teacher says it is a sort of competition between the groups to see who can get it finished first. So, to make it fair, she is going to mix up people of different abilities in each group. A girl is picked to work with a group of three boys. She doesn't like the boys very much.

10d

In a Science lesson with a Year 9 group the teacher is talking about some of the different ways animals care for their babies. One person in the class asks the teacher if he has children. He says he has. Another person asks him if he saw them being born. He says he did. A third person says, 'How did you make the babies, Sir?'

Strategy Eleven – Being prepared to handle disclosures from young people

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the disclosure statements on the next page.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of school staff. A good way of working is to ask them to get into pairs and talk about how they understand school policy suggests they should react to each of the disclosures described. You can introduce the exercise by asking the staff to imagine in each case that a troubled child has come to talk to a teacher after school.

Processing

You can ask the group to discuss each disclosure thinking of the following questions:

- Is this kind of situation covered by school policy?
- Is the action required clear and unambiguous?
- If not, is it appropriate to review the policy?

Following through...

You can follow through on talking about dealing with the disclosures of individual young people in school by referring to the section *Lesbian and gay pupils need extra support in school* on page 4 of *Chapter 1* of this book which deals with pupil confidentiality in schools.

11a

A 13 year old boy says to a teacher in school, 'I don't like my mum's new girlfriend – I want to leave home'.

11b

A 17 year old boy says to a teacher in school 'I am having a sexual relationship with an 18 year old, I'm worried that my parents will find out. What should I do?'

11c

A 14 year old girl says to a teacher in school, 'I think I'm a lesbian. I don't want my friends to know but I want girls to like me. Can you help please?'

11d

A 15 year old girl says to a teacher in school 'I'm having a sexual relationship with an older man, I'm worried that my parents will find out. What should I do?'

11e

A colleague says to a teacher in school, 'I've been threatened by a boy in Year 11 because he thinks I'm gay. I don't want to come out to the Head, how shall I deal with it?'

Strategy Twelve – Providing support and advice to individual teachers and other colleagues

A teacher or another member of school staff may also want to talk with you individually. Other strategies are appropriate on these occasions. For example, when they want to talk about providing support for a particular young person or their family, or when they themselves are the target of homophobic remarks.

In these cases you can use sections of *Talking about Homosexuality* as the basis for one or a series of discussions. A simple strategy is to suggest you both read a section of the book independently or together and then talk about it. Some examples are:

- If a teacher or another member of school staff asks what a young person ‘coming out’ might be experiencing you can refer to the section ‘*Coming Out*’ (pages 22–25). It might be helpful to look at the section on *Useful Contacts* as well (pages 96–98). This could also be useful in preparing teachers planning to talk with parents/carers.
- If they want to talk about dealing with homophobic bullying then you can refer them to the sections on homophobia, especially *What causes homophobia?* (pages 18–19).

If you are going to talk with a teacher or other colleague you ought to consider what each of you expect your roles to be. You may well be able to give support as a fellow professional, or even as a friend, but you should not be acting as a counsellor. So, issues to consider are:

- Are you going to keep the conversation private between you?
- Is it acceptable to talk about personal as well as professional issues?
- Do you feel happy about listening to someone else talking about potentially difficult issues and concerns?

Talking with young people

In many schools the aim of using this book will be to talk about homosexuality with young people. For you to talk about homosexuality successfully with young people you need to feel clear and confident that:

- The contribution it makes to school ethos and values is understood and agreed by staff and parents within the school;
- School governors, parents and colleagues are clear about your motives and will support your action;
- It makes sense in terms of the existing programme of sex education, PSHE and other aspects of the taught pastoral curriculum;
- You have selected the right materials and strategies for use with the young people;
- You are meeting the needs of the young people.

If you are not sure on any of these points you need to refer to earlier sections of this chapter which deal with talking to governors, parents and colleagues.

Most of the talking about homosexuality that goes on in the classroom will be with groups of young people. These groups, in most schools, will be of mixed sex. The strategies described below have been developed and piloted with mixed sex groups between the ages of 13 and 18. However, such is the diversity of needs and abilities from one group to another that we advise you to consider the particular characteristics of the group you want to talk to and exercise your professional judgement in selecting the appropriate strategies.

There are two kinds of strategies for talking as a group. Strategies 13, 14 and 15 involve talking about the way the group is facilitated and talking about rules, appropriate language for the classroom and safe-guarding confidentiality. The general theme is making the group a 'safe' place and it is essential that at least one of these strategies is used before starting to talk about homosexuality directly. This is because however 'safe' a group seems to be it is important to review things when it comes to talking about a very sensitive subject like homosexuality. It can raise all sorts of new issues, for example, between members of a group and between the group and the teacher.

Strategies 16 to 19 involve talking about homosexuality with a group. You can use them in sequence as a programme beginning with talking about what information is needed and ending with talking about attitudes towards homosexuality.

A good overall approach is to follow up on one of 13, 14 or 15 with two or more of these strategies. One choice might be to use Strategy 13 and 14 then 16 in order to set an agenda of questions and needs that you can respond to with information you give out through Strategy 17.

Some of the strategies for talking about homosexuality with young people are closely related to the strategies for use with governors and teachers and other school staff. This means that with some groups of young people you will be able to use or adapt strategies for talking with other groups. The strategies are as follows:

Strategy Thirteen – Important things in this group

This strategy aims to enable young people to talk about rules that operate in groups and ways of making groups safer, through discussing case-studies.

Strategy Fourteen – Confidence

This strategy aims to enable young people to talk about how disclosures by young people should be treated in school through use of disclosure situations.

Strategy Fifteen – Word match

This strategy aims to enable young people to talk about which words associated with sexuality are appropriate for use in the classroom, through the use of a quiz.

Strategy Sixteen – Question time

This strategy aims to enable young people to help the teacher identify their needs through the use of an anonymous suggestion box.

Strategy Seventeen – My story is...

This strategy aims to enable young people to talk about what it is like to grow up lesbian or gay, through the use of extracts from leaflets and books.

Strategy Eighteen – Answers please

This strategy aims to enable young people to talk about the problems and concerns of young lesbian and gay people through the use of letters to magazines.

Strategy Nineteen – Why are you picking on me?

This strategy aims to enable young people to talk about homophobia through discussing accounts of young people who have been victims and perpetrators of bullying.

Strategy Twenty – Talking with an individual young person

This strategy aims to enable a teacher to develop some techniques for talking with an individual young person.

Strategy Thirteen – Important things in this group

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the case-studies below and on the page opposite.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of young people. A good way of working is to ask them to get into small groups of four or five and talk about one of the case-studies. Each group can consider the following questions in relation to their example:

- How will the people in the story react?
- What rule can you make to stop someone being upset by what happens?

Processing

You can ask each small group to talk about their case-study and responses to the questions above. You can also ask each group to make a presentation about their story to the other groups and at the end propose a rule for the whole group to discuss and try to agree on.

Following through...

You can follow through by talking about what special rules the groups want to propose for talking about homosexuality.

13e

A boy in Year 8 is quite small for his age. He doesn't like sport very much and is quite popular with girls but isn't going out with any of them. He has to avoid one part of the corridor in the English block at lunchtime because the Year 10 boys who stand there call him 'gay' and tease him by emptying his bag out and tripping him up.

13f

In a sex education lesson a Year 10 group are working in groups on a quiz about human reproduction. A small group of girls start to say that two girls in the class don't need to do this work because they're lesbians.

13a

In an English lesson this morning a Year 8 class read a story called 'An Embarrassing Moment'. The teacher asked the people in the class if any of them could describe what being embarrassed felt like. A boy said he could because he had been really embarrassed once when he had wet himself in primary school. Soon the story spread around the school about what the boy had said. Some people started to tease him and make up rumours.

13b

In PSHE with a Year 11 group a teacher was talking about different people's attitudes to people with HIV and AIDS. The teacher asked the group to brainstorm a list of groups of people who are stigmatised in relation to HIV and AIDS. Someone said, 'gay men'. Someone else said, 'What, poofs and queers?' and then someone asked the teacher 'What do you think of gay men, do you think there are any in this school?'

13c

In a Maths lesson the teacher wants the young people in 10G to get into small groups to do some work on a problem. The teacher says it is a sort of competition between the groups to see who can get it finished first. So, to make it fair, she is going to mix up people of different abilities in each group. A girl is picked to work with a group of three boys. She doesn't get on with them.

13d

In a Science lesson with a Year 9 group the teacher is talking about some of the different ways animals care for their babies. One person in the class asks the teacher if he has children. He says he has. Another person asks him if he saw them being born. He says he did. A third person says, 'How did you make the babies, Sir?'

Strategy Fourteen – Confidence

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the disclosure statements below and on the page opposite.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of young people. A good way of working is to ask them to get into pairs and talk about each of the disclosure statements considering the following questions:

- How does the person/people in the story feel?
- Should the person/people they tell do or say anything about it?
- Should people pass on secrets or personal things about other people?

Processing

Ask the pairs to get into groups of four and talk to each other about what they have said. Ask the groups to try and reach a consensus on the questions and to consider the following question:

- What would you say to the person in each situation?

Following through...

You can follow through by talking about the following:

- What qualities make people good for telling secrets too?
- How does it feel to hear a secret?
- A time when you told a secret you should have kept.

14a

I'm Sam, I'm 14 and being bullied at school because I am heavy and tall for a girl. People call me names behind my back.

14b

I'm Steve. I'm in 9F. In a sex education class last week we were talking about sex and I said that I masturbated.

14c

I'm Jo. I'm 15 and I think I might be pregnant.

14d

We're Jo's parents and we think Jo is having sex with her boyfriend.

14e

I'm Leo. I'm 16 and I think I'm gay.

14f

I'm Roger, I teach 11D. Last week I think that some kids from my class saw me out in the town with my boyfriend.

14g

I'm Maureen. I'm 37 with two teenage children and I have just found out I'm pregnant again.

Strategy Fifteen – Word match

Preparation

You will need to make copies of the column of words and definitions on the page opposite and cut them up.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of young people. A good way of working is to ask them to get into pairs and match the words with the definitions.

Processing

Check the answers with the group. (The correct pairing of words and definitions is as currently arranged opposite)

Following through...

You can follow through by talking about words which people use to talk about sexuality. You can suggest that the group work in pairs to make a list of words which they feel comfortable and uncomfortable with and which they think adults feel comfortable and uncomfortable with. You can then talk about what the similarities and differences are.

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| SEXUAL ORIENTATION | Either being basically attracted to men or to women |
| HETEROSEXUAL | Having sexual feelings for people of the opposite sex |
| HOMOSEXUAL | Having sexual feelings for people of the same sex |
| GAY | A positive word used to describe homosexual men and women |
| LESBIAN | A positive word used to describe homosexual women |
| ATTRACTION | Feeling interested in, drawn to or admiring something |
| HOMOPHOBIA | A fear and hatred of people who are lesbian or gay |
| SEXUALITY | The combination of a person's sexual attitudes, emotions, experiences and desires |
| COMING OUT | When a person comes to term with being lesbian or gay and begins to tell other people |
| BISEXUAL | Having sexual feelings for people of both sexes |

Strategy Sixteen - Question time

Preparation

You will need a good supply of small pieces of paper (all the same shape and colour), pens and a bag or box.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of young people. A good way of working is to ask each of them to take a piece of paper and write a question or comment they have about homosexuality on it. Make sure that no-one writes their name on the paper and that everyone puts a piece in the bag or box whether or not they filled it in.

Processing

You can take the questions out of the bag one at a time, read them to the group and try to answer them. The inevitable presence of blank sheets gives you the opportunity to exclude any which are abusive. You might want to talk about other questions that this raises. Alternatively you can take the bag away and sort through the pieces of paper allowing yourself some time to prepare responses.

Following through...

You can follow through by talking about what the most common questions are and why that is. You can also invite the group to design a short leaflet for other young people containing some of the answers and other information about homosexuality.

Strategy Seventeen – My story is...

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the feelings worksheets on the following page.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of young people. A good way of working is to read each of the accounts in turn and fill in a 'feelings' worksheet before going on to the next. When you have finished reading out the accounts you can ask the group to form into pairs and make up one or two sentences about each story using the 'feelings' worksheets.

Processing

You can ask the pairs to share their sentences with the group and talk about them.

Following through...

You can follow through by talking about the following questions:

- Are feelings the same for gay and straight people?
- Are feelings the same for males and for females?
- What books, films, television programmes, etc., have you seen that showed you how lesbian and gay people feel? Were they helpful?

How I felt when I heard the story

| | | | |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|----------|
| bored | interested | angry | confused |
| questioning | challenged | like laughing | upset |
| sad | sympathetic | uncertain | warm |
| thoughtful | excited | caring | |

How I think the main person in the story felt

| | | | |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|----------|
| bored | interested | angry | confused |
| questioning | challenged | like laughing | upset |
| sad | sympathetic | uncertain | warm |
| thoughtful | excited | caring | |

Can't stop thinking about Sandra by Tony Mitton

Can't stop thinking about
Sandra,
how when I call her name
she turns and waits

Can't stop thinking about
Sandra,
the way she links arms
and grins, and says 'Best Mates!'

Can't stop thinking about
Sandra,
the way she catches my eye
and laughs, and winks

Can't stop thinking about
Sandra,
and wondering what she really
feels and thinks

Can't stop thinking of
Sandra,
before I go to sleep
last thing at night

Can't stop thinking about
Sandra,
wanting to be close to her
and hold her tight

Can't stop, can't stop
but don't know how to tell her,
don't know what to do

Can't stop wondering
how she'd take it
being as I'm a girl too

by David Onne published from *Snoggers*, by Macmillan Children's Books
(ISBN 0-330337-86-6).

Howard's Story from 'Young Gay Men Talking'

For the last few months, I've had this thing about this boy I've seen on the bus going to college. I used to get up at half past seven every morning to look out of my window – this is right opposite where the bus stops. And watch him going, you know, just to watch and see him waiting and then getting the bus. I'd walk my dog round the estate where he lives every time when I knew the bus was coming back and I've memorised all the times so I know what time he'll be there. And I always make sure I'm ready to look out the window or be walking my dog round the estate so I pass him when he comes off the bus and things like that.

But then I think, 'Do I really want to be with men, or do I just think I do?' And I start thinking maybe it's the security I want because I didn't get it from my Dad. But when I look into it deeper, I would feel worse. I wouldn't feel secure. I'd feel frightened that everyone was going to find out and people would know and I would hate it. So it can't be that at all. Because I'd rather go out with a girl and then I'd be able to walk down the street with her and people would expect that of you. So I think it can't be that.

But then I can change so quickly. One minute I'll be out walking my dog, hoping this bloke from the bus is going to look out of his window and see me. I'm dying for him to just see me. And I can come home and cry about it and think, no, I'll ring Vicky, and I'll think, yeah, you know, I want to be with her. Trouble is I think, if I go out with Vicky then I'm cutting off everything else. I'll go somewhere or start a new job and there'll be a bloke there who really fancies me and really likes me in the way I fancy and like him and I won't be able to take that opportunity then.

Young Gay Men Talking is written by Jo Frankham and available from AVERT.

Monica and Marya met when they were both nursing during the war. Their relationship was frowned on by the hospital authorities who separated them at work. Thirty years later they were reunited when Marya saw Monica in an advert on television and was able to trace her. Marya sat down and wrote to Monica immediately. Monica picks up the story from the day that letter arrived.

'I was... having coffee at 11 o'clock and I opened this letter. I can't describe the feeling, it was great excitement and I rushed and got my best writing paper and started to write... and I thought, well she hasn't mentioned whether there's a husband there or not – do I need this? Well, I thought, I'd better stop and think about this before I write.'

Before long Marya had moved down south and she and Monica set up house together. Monica says, 'she used to say that her greatest dream was to have a house in Rye, a boat on the river Rother and a French maid. Well, she got a house near Rye and we could see the river Rother from our bedroom, and she got me instead of a French maid, but I think she was quite pleased with the deal.

We were going to live and love until we were ninety and make up for that waste of time, but, sadly, she got ill after we'd been together for about seven and a half years. It was cancer... and she had some very tough times... but she was very, very brave and her love for me shone through to everyone. She made no secret of the fact to all the consultants; nurses, everyone knew. She was, and is, the love of my life'.

adapted from Jivani, A. (1997) *It's not Unusual: A history of lesbian and gay Britain in the twentieth century*. London: Michael O'Mara Books Ltd. pp.203–204.

Being Gay in Britain in the 1950s

If a man was under suspicion of being gay the police would raid his home, go through his belongings, particularly diaries, and contact his circle of friends. Jim Alexander was one of the men who found his life turned topsy-turvy as a result of these tactics. A friend of his had been stopped by the police who found a letter in his pocket with Jim's address on it. Jim's friend eventually admitted that they'd been having a relationship. The police called on Jim's home – where he lived with his mother and sister – in the dead of the night. The family was woken up by a hammering on the door and Jim was carted off to the police station on the spot with just enough time to pull on a pair of trousers over his pyjamas.

Jim was strip-searched, 'I was taken down to the police station where I was told to drop my trousers and bend down... by a group of policemen who made remarks about what they could do with their truncheons... Every now and then they would send me back to the police cell which was a horrific thing. It had a wooden board for you to sleep on with the toilet at the end of the wooden board... and they kept shutting me in and locking the door on me. And every hour or so they'd come and wake me up again and take me back to question me. This went on from shortly after I arrived at the police station right the way through till about 6am in the morning. In the meantime, neither my mother nor any of my family were told that I was being kept at the police station.'

The ordeal left Jim in state of fear, 'I was so terrified that I was totally numb at first. It didn't sink in. It felt like a strange nightmare that I was going to wake up from. I kept saying to myself, no, you're asleep, you're going to wake up soon. But I never woke up. I was already awake.'

In the end Jim was taken to court and fined fifty quid. He says, 'I wasn't earning that much money and I had to go back to prison. Then after a short while my mother managed to raise the money and came to buy me out. I did actually serve about three-and-a-half months in prison while she was getting the money together.' To cap it all, Jim discovered when he came out of prison that he'd been fired from his job.

adapted from Jivani, A. (1997) *It's not Unusual: A history of lesbian and gay Britain in the twentieth century*. London: Michael O'Mara Books Ltd. pp.101–102.

A Happy Ending

I remember the day I suddenly realised that I was in love with Tony. We had known each other for almost all our lives and always been close and, I suppose, we already loved each other but it all just changed into something else on that day. What I mean is that I have known Tony for nearly all my life. We lived quite close to each other as children and played together, went to school together and have always been in touch even though over the years there have been times when we haven't seen much of each other. In a way we have had quite different lives. He stayed at school and did A levels and I went out to work. But we always went out drinking and did things together. Over the years we saw our friends marry and settle down and each of us had girlfriends ourselves. But always things came to an end and we ended back looking after each other sort of thing.

I could have carried on like this forever, I think. Maybe we both could have. I think we had accepted that we were mates and that we both might never find Mrs Right. It all changed one night walking home late. In the summer we often walked along the beach and sometimes would paddle in the sea a bit if it was warm, and we weren't in a hurry. That night we were in paddling and I even went in for a swim. Tony took off his clothes and was splashing about too and then we sat in the edge of the water for a while gossiping. I just remember there being a long pause and then him putting his hand on mine and just asking if he could kiss me. I felt very surprised but quite calm as well somehow and I can remember just thinking, 'Do I want to kiss him?' and then thinking 'Yes' so I did. We didn't even talk about it much then. I knew that something had changed between us.

We did talk later though, over the next days and weeks, and Tony just said he suddenly realised that night that he loved me. I didn't even have to think about it really, it was as though I suddenly knew he was right and that I loved him too.

Of course everything changed and nothing changed. I mean we couldn't have been any closer really. We already told each other everything and were each others greatest support all along – so that didn't change. But somehow, with knowing and saying you're in love with someone everything changes. You feel like you have something that will keep you safe forever.

Martin, 28, Personal communication

Strategy Eighteen – Answers please

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the letters below and on the following pages.

Method

This is a strategy for talking with a group of young people. A good way of working is to ask the group to get into pairs with one person reading out the letter and the second suggesting a response. In some groups you may be able to confidently ask the pairs to carry this out as a role play.

Processing

Ask the whole group to talk about the following questions:

- How does it feel to read these letters?
- Are there things in common between them?
- Where would people with these questions go for advice?

Following through...

You can follow through on this by talking about local and national support agencies which offer support to lesbian and gay people. You can ask the group to evaluate material relating these agencies and design a poster or leaflet based on it.

18a

“Can my parents tell if I’m a lesbian?”

I’m 17 and I’ve been confused about my sexual identity for a few years but now I’ve come to accept that I’m a lesbian. The trouble is, my parents are anti-gay, but I know I’ll never be happy with myself until my Mum and Dad know how I feel. I’m scared stiff of being near them in case they twig. It has affected me so badly that I’m thinking of killing myself so I don’t have to live a lie any more. What should I do?

18b

"Am I gay?"

I'm very confused. Just recently I've started to notice I'm having feelings for my mates. I've had quite a few relationships with several girls but they have never lasted longer than a couple of months because I start to feel guilty that I'm leading the girl on. Am I gay?

18c

"What can I do about my feelings?"

There's someone at school I really fancy and I am worried because I can't get them off my mind. Even when I'm supposed to be working in class my mind wanders and I think about them. A teacher told me off and asked if anything was wrong. I want this feeling to go away, but I think it's love. Is something wrong with me?

18d

"They think I'm gay and I'm not"

I'm a boy who can't get a girlfriend because everyone thinks I'm gay. It's not true, but because I get bullied a lot because of this, I hang around with girls more than boys. People tell me I look like a girl, and say I'm "sad", so I stay indoors most of the time to hide from this horrible life. I don't want to end up a loner. Please help me, what should I do?

18e

"I want to get some advice"

I'm 15 and my boyfriend wants me to have sex with him. I really want to but I'm nervous. We have talked about taking precautions but I don't know where to go for help. I know that if you can't use protection then people say you aren't ready for it but I am ready. What should I do?

18f

“Am I lesbian?”

I'm a 14 year old girl and I can't help having strong sexual feelings for my biology teacher who's a woman. I'm so confused because one minute I'll drool over a poster of Keanu and the next my mind wanders back to my teacher. Am I lesbian, bisexual or straight?

18g

“We are in love and want to tell our parents”

I've had boyfriends in the past but recently I fell in love with my best girlfriend. We talked about how we felt a lot and have been really careful to keep it a secret that we are going out and in love. We are just about to leave school now and want to move in together. We don't want the happiness to end or the secrets to have to go on. We both agree that we want to tell our parents about us but are scared that they will not take us seriously. We are completely in love and it is serious. How should we approach them?

18h

“I need some advice about sex”

I'm a 16 year old gay young man. I have met another young man and we are in love. I want to make our relationship sexual but I'm really scared. I know that gay men can be at risk of HIV but I don't know exactly how or why. What's safe and what's not?

18i

“What do gay people do?”

I have read something about lesbian and gay people in magazines and talked a bit with my friends but I don't know what to believe. Some people say you can tell gay people by the way they look and talk, and that they do certain jobs. But what I want to know is how do they have sex?

Strategy Nineteen – Why are you picking on me?

Preparation

You will need photocopies of the stories and statements on the following pages.

Method

This strategy is best used when talking with a group of young people. A good way of working is to ask them to get into small groups of about four or five people and to ask each group to talk about a different story and the associated statements.

Processing

You can ask each of the small groups to put the statements relating to the story they read in order on the floor along an imaginary line at one end of which is 'strongly agree' and at the other end 'strongly disagree'. Taking each statement one at a time you can talk about where other people think it should go on the continuum and why.

Following through...

You can follow through by talking about the following questions:

- Why does so much bullying involve calling people 'gay'?
- Why do people think other people are gay?
- Do males and females feel different about gay issues and people?
- What is the school's attitude to bullying which involves calling people names?

Sara's story

It was really difficult at school. Girls kept on asking me if I was a lesbian because I had short hair and wore DMs. One day I just said 'yes'. Rumours started spreading all over the school and within a couple of days it seemed that everyone knew. From then on my life was a misery – I was constantly bullied.

All the friends I had before wouldn't talk to me. I got really depressed and didn't want to go to school. I finally plucked up the courage to speak to a teacher who was really supportive.

Society encourages people to be anti-gay. It seems like there's this unwritten rule which says if you don't get married and have 2.4 children, then you're weird or abnormal. But loads of people don't live like that anymore. There are lots of different relationships nowadays.

A lot of straight girls assume that I fancy every girl I see. But they don't fancy every boy that walks down the street do they?

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements from and about this story:

Agree a lot/Agree a bit/neither Agree or Disagree/Disagree a bit/Disagree a lot

- It seems like there's this unwritten rule which says that if you don't get married and have 2.4 children you're weird or abnormal.
- There are lots of different relationships nowadays.
- A lot of straight girls assume that lesbian girls fancy every girl they meet.
- Society encourages people to be anti-gay.
- Girls who have short hair and wear DMs can be stereotyped as lesbians.

“Help! I’m being bullied at school”

I’m 13 and I’m being bullied at school. I’ve never felt so depressed in all my life. There’s this boy who always calls me names and laughs at me with his friends. They call me ‘rich boy’ and ‘stuck-up’. We are quite well-off but we’re not rich. I’m scared even to wear any new clothes or have a new bag in school because of what they’ll say. I don’t know what to do. I don’t want to talk to my mum or the teachers. I feel like I want to move school. I just don’t understand, I’ve never done anything to them.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this story:

Agree a lot/Agree a bit/neither Agree or Disagree/Disagree a bit/Disagree a lot

- Verbal bullying can be as harmful as physical bullying.
- People are bullied because of what they look like.
- Some young people are reluctant to talk to teachers about being bullied.
- Not all teachers are able to tell when young people are being bullied.
- Teachers should be able to provide appropriate support to young people who are being bullied.

"He pinches my bum"

I'm a 15 year old girl and a boy who is in my class always wants to grab hold of my bum and pinch it. I told him I didn't like it and asked him to stop but he hasn't. I really don't know what to do or who to talk to. If I tell a teacher are they just going to tell everyone? I don't like this boy at all and I don't like what he's doing.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this story:

Agree a lot/Agree a bit/neither Agree or Disagree/Disagree a bit/Disagree a lot

- Sexual harassment is a form of bullying.
- If a young person tells a teacher about bullying they are not going to keep it secret.
- It is nearly impossible to stop this kind of behaviour in school.
- Teachers react differently when boys harass other boys to when boys harass girls.

Whole lot of hassle

I used to get a whole load of hassle. People automatically assumed I was a 'poof' and there was so many incidents where people hit me, kicked me, spat at me, just because of the way I looked. You can't go to your parents and say, 'someone kicked me today because they thought I was a poof', and you can't go to a teacher and say that. It was something that you didn't just deal with and tried to carry on as normal. And that was so difficult but... there was one incident... someone came up and grabbed me from behind and simulated anal sex with me, in front of all his friends... it was just... so bad.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this story:

Agree a lot/Agree a bit/neither Agree or Disagree/Disagree a bit/Disagree a lot

- Young people may not always be supported at home if they are being bullied.
- Bullying where people get called 'gay' and 'lesbian' goes on in every school.
- School cannot do anything about bullying.

"How I stopped bullying"

I was quite a bully for a long time at school. I didn't really think of it as bullying to start with – I was just throwing my weight around and making sure that I didn't get picked on myself. Then when I wasn't in the first year anymore and there were littler kids at school I just picked on them a bit. It reminded them of who was better than them like we were reminded by kids older than us. We didn't even think about the fact that we called little kids 'gay' and that. It was just an insult and it got them really embarrassed and worked up so we used it all the time.

I stopped bullying because I just realised one day that no-one talked to me, no-one trusted me and that it didn't mean anything. I wasn't getting bigger for being hard, just more lonely.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this story:

Agree a lot/Agree a bit/neither Agree or Disagree/Disagree a bit/Disagree a lot

- Some people are bullies and don't know it.
- It's dog eat dog in school – if they think you're weak you'll be picked on.
- People grow out of bullying.
- Calling people 'gay' is just habit – it doesn't mean anything.

Strategy Twenty – Talking with an individual young person

You might be in a situation where a young person wants to talk to you about homosexuality. You need to consider the following things:

- What guidance on your role and limitations on the support you can give are imposed by the school policy on confidentiality?
- Can you find an appropriate way of talking given your role? For example, talking hypothetically or through reiteration of information already given in talking with young people in class.
- Are you the most appropriate source of support and information? Should you consider encouraging the young person to refer themselves to someone else?
- Do you have the time and information to talk right now? Do you need to meet again or at another time?

Schools may be concerned about what is appropriate and legal in terms of providing individuals with advice and support.

The issue of confidentiality is an important one and an analysis of Circular 5/94 by The Honourable Michael Beloff QC (1994) for The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) states that there is no legislation on confidentiality – only guidance which is not binding in law.

A teacher does not have a general duty to inform the headteacher of any disclosure by a pupil. The decision to do so must be a matter for a teachers discretion, unless the headteacher issues an instruction (which ought to be in the schools policy on confidentiality) that they should be informed, in which case the teacher must comply. All teachers have an employment contract and are expected to work under the 'reasonable direction' of the headteacher. If a headteacher therefore issues a direction clearly indicating the issues they wish to be informed about, failure to do so may result in disciplinary action. Schools therefore need clear confidentiality policies.

There is also no basis in principle or authority for suggesting that there is any legal duty on a teacher, or headteacher, to inform parents of matters which a child has confided to them (subject to the headteachers power to direct). In relation to gay, lesbian and bisexual young people, the particular issues that may arise in relation to confidentiality are:

a. The disclosure of identity. There is no guidance as to how a teacher should react in this situation but a breach of such trust could be very damaging to the young person. Teachers should, however, act within any existing school guidance or framework. It is interesting to consider whether the disclosure by a young person that they are homosexual should be treated in a different way to someone who discloses their heterosexual identity!

b. A young person (gay or straight) asking a teacher for sexual health information.

White (1995) re-iterates what teachers can do:

- Teach all pupils in a general way about all types of contraception (including where they can be obtained), and any other aspects of sex education, in a sex education programme – provided this is within the school sex education policy. When this is taught outside the National Curriculum parents may specifically request for their children to be withdrawn.
- Answer in a 'relatively limited way', and in context, any questions on contraception or sexually transmitted diseases that arise spontaneously while teaching any subject, even if pupils who have been withdrawn from sex education are present.
- Provide individual pupils, whether or not they have been withdrawn from sex education, with information on where they may go to seek confidential advice, counselling and treatment on contraception and sexual health, as this does not constitute part of the sex education programme.

c. Disclosures of homosexual behaviour. The government has only provided guidance on this for schools as stated by Bibbings (1996):

... that a teacher 'should' inform the head teacher if the teacher believes that 'the pupil has embarked upon or is contemplating, a course of conduct which is likely to place him or her at moral risk or in breach of the law' (DfE 1994, para 40). Thus, where a gay male pupil under the age of 18 is the subject of such a belief, this may cause this course of action to be considered. Beyond this schools should have a policy on confidentiality which may offer guidance.

This needs to be weighed against the potential damaging effects to the young person of breaking confidentiality.

The situation may be quite different in relation to young gay men and young lesbian women as there is no law in relation to the age of consent for lesbian women, whereas the age of consent for gay men is currently 18.

Thomson (1996) provides 'a number of practical steps that schools can take to minimise situations where confidences are broken':

- By using ground rules in sex education classes, which state clearly that personal experiences will not be shared within the classroom.
- By communicating clearly to pupils the limits of the teacher's role regarding confidentiality, and to inform pupils of other sources of help where confidentiality is assured, for example the school nurse, counsellor, GP or local young people's health service. Many young people are not aware that they can get confidential advice from their GP or family planning services.

- By including confidentiality in the school sex education policy and communicating the school policy to parents. The experience of most schools is that parents welcome schools providing pupils with confidential help if the young person feels unable to confide in their parents.
- By always encouraging pupils to talk to their parents and by actively supporting this dialogue both at the moment when help is sought and subsequently.

If a young person who is growing up lesbian or gay wants to talk with you and finds it difficult to get support you can refer them to the back of the book where there is a list of helpful telephone numbers. If you need to talk with a young person growing up lesbian or gay about sexual health information and advice this list might also be useful. You might also find it useful to read the section on '*Coming Out*' on pages 22–25 and might want to talk with them about the accounts contained in strategies for working with young people as a group.

Reflecting on talking about homosexuality

It is an important part of the process of talking about homosexuality with a group to evaluate how things went. In order to take things forward it is important to know how things are going. Inviting people to reflect on what they have learnt and how they felt about the process can help you to identify their future needs and select appropriate strategies for taking things forward. You can also use the information you get about the session to inform managers and colleagues, and you may want to share it with the group.

The kind of evaluation you undertake will depend on the time available, the characteristics of the group and the amount and degree of detail of information you want. In some situations a simple round of comments might be appropriate and adequate. This is the case particularly if time is limited and when you think people may not feel confident about writing things down. However, in formal settings or where the group is quite large it can be more appropriate to use a different strategy like the traffic light evaluation or questionnaire suggested below.

Evaluation round

In this kind of evaluation you can ask people to take it in turns to say something about the experience of a session. It can be useful to ask people to try to think of two or three things to comment on. For example, something they enjoyed about the session, something they learnt and something else they would like to know more about. It is important to remember some people may not want to contribute to this kind of evaluation and to make it clear that no-one has to say anything.

Traffic light evaluation

In this kind of evaluation you can ask people to write something about the way the session went. You might be interested in the same three issues as mentioned in the evaluation round above or you might ask them to contribute on one issue like how much they enjoyed the session.

You need to make a sheet for each participant on which there are three traffic lights; one red, one amber and one green. You can invite them to write beside the red one about something they did not enjoy, beside the amber one about something that was OK and beside the green one about something that they enjoyed.

Rather than make separate sheets for each person who took part in the session you can make three large sheets, one for each colour light, and leave them out for people to write on as they leave the session.

Evaluation questionnaire

In this kind of evaluation you can ask people to fill in a short questionnaire about the session. An example of a basic questionnaire is included on the following page.

Talking about homosexuality evaluation form

Please use this questionnaire to tell us about this session. You either have to circle a number or write in a few words.

- I enjoyed the session
very much 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 not at all
- The best thing was...
- Something I found difficult was...
- I learnt something from the session
strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly disagree
- One thing I learnt was...
- One thing I already knew was...
- Something I want to know more about is...
- Talking about homosexuality is
very interesting 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 not at all interesting
- The session was run
very well 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 not at all well
- Something good about the way it was run was...
- Something that could have been better about the way it was run...

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Useful Contacts

Below are listed some organisations who offer information on:
lesbian and gay issues;
sex, sexual health and HIV/AIDS;
further advice about school sex education.

Information and advice on lesbian and gay issues:

Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

Tel: 0171 837 7324 (Monday–Sunday, 24 hours)

Lesbian and Gay Switchboard provides information about local sources of information, advice and counselling. The switchboard is willing to talk to anyone whatever their sexuality. The line is completely confidential and anonymous. It is very busy so you may have to keep trying to get through.

Acceptance

64 Holmside Avenue, Sheerness, Kent ME12 3EY.

Tel: 01795 661463 (Tuesday–Friday, 7–9pm)

Helpline/support group for parents of lesbians and gay men.

Parents' Friend

c/o Voluntary Action Leeds, Stringer House, 34 Lupton Street, Hunslet, Leeds LS10 2QW.

Tel: 0113 267 4627 (Monday–Friday, 8–10pm)

Helpline for parents of lesbians and gay men.

Lesbian Information Service

Tel: 01706 817235 Young Lesbian Helpline

(Monday–Tuesday, Thursday–Friday, 9.30am–1pm; Wednesday, 7–9pm)

For a booklet '*I think I might be a lesbian, now what do I do?*' and other information/support.

REGARD

(National Disabled Lesbian and Gay Organisation)

BM Regard, London WC1N 3XX.

For information on living with disability. Produce a quarterly newsletter.

Albert Kennedy Trust

23 New Mount Street, Manchester M4 4DE.

Tel: 0161 953 4059 (Monday–Friday, 10am–4pm)

For homeless lesbian and gay teenagers.

Information about sex, sexual health and HIV/AIDS:

AVERT (AIDS Education & Research Trust)

Tel: 01403 210202 (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)

AVERT provides information on HIV and AIDS and can supply copies of booklets for young people on many aspects of sex and sexuality.

AVERT also has a website that provides information about HIV and AIDS and extracts from booklets for young people on contraception, sexual feelings and young gay men. You can e-mail via this page for information or resources.

AVERT's website is located at: <http://www.avert.org>

National AIDS Helpline

Tel: 0800 567 123 (Monday–Sunday, 24 hours; Freephone)

Confidential helpline offering information and advice about HIV, AIDS, sexual health and sexuality.

Health Information Service

Tel: 0800 66 55 44 (Freephone; Monday–Thursday, 9am–7pm; Friday, 9am–5pm; Tape-recorded service outside these hours)

The Health Information Service provides health information on over 450 topics. You can speak to an operator during normal office hours and they will help you choose a recorded message to listen to. The service also provides a directory, (just ask an operator) so that you can call the tape recorded message directly. There are informational messages about HIV/AIDS and homosexuality. They cover issues about what homosexuality is and 'coming out', etc.

The Health Education Authority website is located at <http://www.hea.org.uk>

The HEA homepages contain information about health-related news and research. You can access the Health Promotion Information Centre which you can search for information about teaching materials, books and videos on any subject. The HEA sends you details of your search within 7 days.

Terrence Higgins Trust

Tel: 0171 242 1010 (Monday–Friday, 12noon–10pm)

The Terrence Higgins Trust can provide advice and information on HIV, AIDS and safer sex, and can supply copies of a wide range of booklets on the subject and related areas.

The Terrence Higgins Trust also has a website that provides information on HIV and AIDS as well as extracts from some of their booklets.

It is located at: <http://www.tht.org.uk>

Further information and advice about school sex education:

Department for Education & Employment

Tel: 0171 925 5000 (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)

The Personal, Social and Health Education Department within the DfEE can provide information about the current guidance on sex education to schools.

Sex Education Forum

Tel: 0171 843 6000 (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)

The SEF can provide more detailed information about sex education in schools and provide training courses and consultancy to schools. The SEF produces a regular newsletter (to which many schools subscribe) and publishes many helpful books on sex education issues.