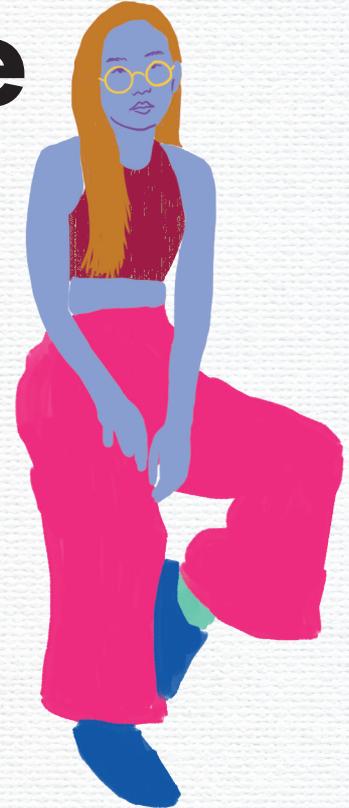


I Think I Might Be Lesbian



Rights.
Respect.
Responsibility.

 **Advocates
for Youth**
Rights. Respect. Responsibility.



**“Your life experiences and
your own preferences are the
most important ways to define
yourself.”**

- Lara

What Does It Mean to Be Lesbian?

Generally speaking, a lesbian is a woman who is attracted to and prefers intimate relationships with other women. Attraction and relationships can be sexual, emotional, romantic and/or spiritual. Some women may use different language to describe themselves, such as umbrella terms like 'gay' or 'queer'. Different people may be comfortable with different language, and it's always better to ask and respect their preference.

Sex - when you're born, the doctor decides if you are male or female based on if you have a penis or vagina

Gender - What defines someone as feminine or masculine, including how people expect you to behave as well as how you feel and identify

Sexual orientation - to whom you are sexually attracted. Sexual orientation isn't dictated by sex or gender; trans folks can be any sexual orientation.

Cisgender - When your sex assigned at birth and your gender match up as society expects, as in, someone born with a vagina feels like a girl.

Intersex characteristics - Someone with intersex characteristics has genitalia and/or chromosomes that don't fit into the typical medical binary of female and male sex.



AT LEAST 1.5% OF
WOMEN IDENTIFY AS
LESBIAN;¹ THAT'S *Wm*
ALMOST 5 MILLION
WOMEN IN THE
UNITED  STATES²

How Do I Know I'm Lesbian — And Is It Normal?

Being lesbian is definitely okay! It's completely normal, and nothing new- lesbians have always existed.

Figuring out your sexual orientation might be difficult, or confusing, or take time. And that's okay. Some lesbians know from a young age that they aren't attracted to boys, and like girls instead. Some may have relationships, sex or even love men before they realize they're attracted to women. These are just two examples of how someone might know, and they're both valid.

If you think you might be lesbian, try asking yourself these questions.

- When I dream or fantasize sexually, do I think about other girls?
- Can I picture myself dating, having sex with, loving or being married to a woman?
- Have I ever had a crush on or been in love with another girl?
- How are my feelings towards men and women different?
- Do I feel uncomfortable or different from my straight friends when they talk about the guys they like?

It's okay if you don't have answers for these questions yet, or if your feelings are still unclear. Discovering your sexuality can take time, and sometimes what you call yourself or how you identify might change. It's normal for sexuality to change and develop. Only you will know how to label yourself correctly.

**“For me, connecting
with other queer/
trans youth and
building a community
is the best part of
being a lesbian.”**

- Rahina, 21



What is it like being young and Lesbian?

Young people are paving the way for greater acceptance, less stigma and equal rights. Still, homophobia (disliking bisexual and LGBTQ people for their sexuality) exists and some lesbians do face discrimination. It's important to remember that your sexuality is only one part of you and everyone has different experiences. Some lesbians may be worried about their friends or peers responses. Some might be uncomfortable talking about sexuality with family or friends, while other may feel confident having these discussions. There isn't one right or wrong way to feel about your sexuality, coming to terms with it or coming out, if you choose.

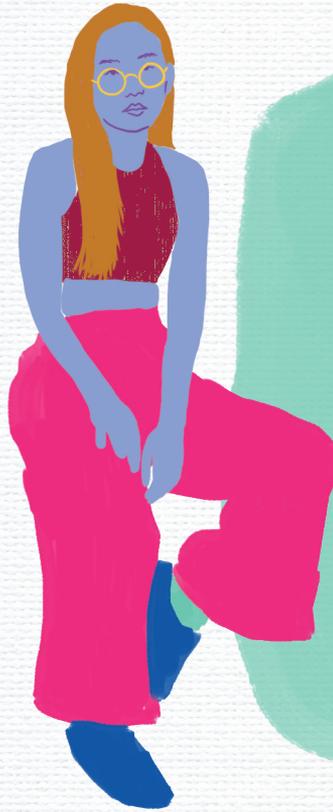
Finding people who will support you in your journey can help make it easier. Social media has enabled young people to connect and find other LGBTQ young people. Finding community may be difficult at first, but it's important to feel connected to and supported by a community that understands you. Many people have blogs or YouTube channels where they talk about their experiences. There may also be groups at your school or on your campus that you can connect with.

80% of Young People
believe we need laws to
protect LGBTQ people from
discrimination



85% of Young People
believe marriage equality
has affected the country
positively or neutrally





"For me personally, it was never a thing where I 'came out'. I just was out, I started dating the same sex/ gender as me and was always just like 'this is who I am,' accept it or not, but get out of my face either way."

- Lara

Should I/How Do I Come Out?

Coming out is the process of accepting your sexuality, figuring out how open you want to be about it and telling those you want to know. You don't have to come out if you don't want to, before you're ready, or be open about your sexuality to everyone. If you do choose to come out, it's important to put your safety first.

Start by choosing someone you trust, like a close friend, a sibling, parent, or a guidance counselor to confide in. There may be a wide range of reactions and having someone to talk to can help. Some people don't understand what it means to be lesbian and it may be hard to know who will listen and be supportive. Some friends will accept you. Others may turn away from you or tell other people without your permission.

Telling family can sometimes be difficult. Some families are highly supportive, and some are not. You may choose to tell everyone or very few people, or somewhere in between. **Coming out is very personal – there is no wrong way to do it. When LGBTQ youth accept their sexuality, most say they feel calmer, happier, and more confident.**

How Can I Have Safer Sex?

Being sexually healthy means deciding what you want and don't want to do with romantic/sexual partners; communicating clearly about your wants and needs; and taking precautions to protect yourself if you do decide to have sex.

Oral, anal, and vaginal sex, including sex with toys/dildos, all come with some risk of sexually transmitted infections including HIV, so it's never a bad idea to practice safer sex and to get tested for STIs regularly. It's also important to know that if someone with a penis and testicles, and someone with a vagina and uterus have vaginal intercourse, they can become pregnant; condoms and/or birth control are effective in preventing unintended pregnancy. Using a second method like the pill or the IUD can add even more protection from unintended pregnancy.

	Oral Sex	Anal Sex	Vaginal Sex
Risks	HIV and STIs	HIV and STIs	HIV, STIs, and Pregnancy
Protection	Condoms, dental dam/Daily use of PrEP	Condoms/Daily use of PrEP	Condoms/ Birth Control, Daily use of PrEP

What about HIV and STIs?

HIV, human immunodeficiency virus, is a virus that you get from sexual fluids, from blood, or from breast milk of a person who has HIV. If you're having sex, it's a good idea to get tested regularly so you know your HIV status. It's a good health practice to get tested once a year. Knowing your HIV status is crucial to getting the care you need to stay healthy. Talking about your HIV status with partners is important too. That way you can make a plan that helps both of you stay healthy.

For oral or anal sex, condoms and dental dams can provide protection against HIV. You can also acquire HIV if you share needles for injecting drugs with a person who has HIV. To avoid this way of transmission, either don't inject drugs, or don't share needles. If you think you are likely to be exposed to HIV, for instance by having sex with a partner who is HIV positive, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a pill your doctor can prescribe that can give additional protection from HIV.

It's also important to know about sexually transmitted infections (STIs). These include chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, HPV, and herpes. Some are chronic and, left untreated, all can have major impacts on your health. STIs don't always come with symptoms so it's important to ask your health care provider about them and get tested regularly. Condoms or dental dams also provide protection against STIs.

In a healthy relationship, both partners:

Respect one another.

Enjoy activities independent of one another, as well as together.

Discuss things calmly, allow for differences of opinion, and make compromises.

Use each others' preferred name and pronouns. Never use the wrong pronouns or name to intentionally hurt your partner.

Trust one another.

Respect sexual boundaries and are able to say no to sex.

Have room to develop and mature, and value each other through these changes.

Embrace each other's differences.

Share sexual histories and sexual health status with one another.

Respect each other's need for privacy.

Approach sex and discussions about sex with the same mutual respect and trust applied to other issues

What about healthy relationships?

In unhealthy relationships, one or both partners are controlling, demanding, mean, and/or physically or emotionally abusive. Sometimes it's not so easy to decide if a relationship should be maintained the way it is, worked on, or ended before it goes any further. Partners should examine what is bothering them and what they would like to see change. Talk over these questions with each other, or with someone you trust, like a friend, teacher, or counselor. Think about what, if anything, you can each do to make the other feel more comfortable in the relationship.

Healthy relationships rely on clear communication. Saying what you mean in a way that others will understand can eliminate many stresses on relationships. **You have a right to leave the relationship if it is not happy and healthy.**



"I never had an official 'coming out',... In middle school, I had my first girlfriend and when people said 'oh, I didn't know you weren't straight,' those conversations were my 'coming out.'"

- Ose, 19

What are my rights?

Everyone has the basic human right to be who they are. No one but you has the right to determine your sexual orientation or how you live.

But sometimes, especially for young people, laws, school policies, and authorities don't reflect our basic rights. It's a good idea to look up laws and policies in your state and school.

If your school isn't supportive of LGBTQ youth, and you're interested in working to change that, visit www.advocatesforyouth.org to find a community of youth activists who are working for acceptance and legal rights for LGBTQIA young people.

Where can I go if I am feeling unsafe or need support?

Think about supportive adults you know – is there a friend, neighbor, teacher, or school counselor you can trust?

Search online. There may be supportive groups in your area, or online networks which can provide support.

Check out communities of faith that might be supportive – many congregations have a mission of acceptance of LGBTQ people.

Title X clinics must offer confidential and affordable health care to young people, and many offer counseling services. Find by searching “Title X clinic near me.”

Check out [AMAZE.org](https://www.amaze.org), a fun and informative animated videos about sex, your body, and relationships.



“Coming out is a long process. I have learned to do it on my own time. My identity is ever-evolving and I have my whole life to come out to the world. My identity is mine.”

- Tyunique

THINK YOU MIGHT BE
LESBIAN?

YOU ARE LOVED &
VALUED AS YOU ARE,
FOR WHO YOU ARE.

Visit www.advocatesforyouth.org/ithink to see the entire I Think I Might Be series:

I Think I Might Be Lesbian

I Think I Might Be Gay

I Think I Might Be Bisexual + Pansexual

I Think I Might Be Asexual

I Think I Might Be Transgender

ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH'S MISSION:

Advocates for Youth partners with youth leaders, adult allies, and youth-serving organizations to advocate for policies and champion programs that recognize young people's rights to honest sexual health information; accessible, confidential, and affordable sexual health services; and the resources and opportunities necessary to create sexual health equity for all youth.



www.advocatesforyouth.org



[YouTube.com/AdvocatesForYouth](https://www.youtube.com/AdvocatesForYouth)



[Twitter.com/AdvocatesTweets](https://twitter.com/AdvocatesTweets)



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Citations:

1. Copen CE, Chandra A, Febo-Vazquez I. Sexual behavior, sexual attraction, and sexual orientation among adults aged 18–44 in the United States: Data from the 2011–2013 National Survey of Family Growth. National health statistics reports; no 98. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2016.
2. Pew Research Center, 2019. Generation Z Looks A Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues