



One minute guide

Working with lesbian and gay young people

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What do we mean by lesbian and gay, and how should services work with lesbian and gay young people?

Lesbian refers to a woman who has an emotional, romantic and/ or sexual attraction towards women. **Gay** refers to a man who has an emotional, romantic and/ or sexual attraction towards men. Gay is also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality; some women use 'gay' rather than (or in addition to) lesbian. These terms relate to sexual attraction, which is defined as a combination of emotional, romantic, sexual or affectionate attraction to another person. Sometimes the acronym LGBT+ is used, which includes [bi](#) and [trans](#) people.

These and other useful terms are defined by Stonewall in their [glossary](#). Terminology is updated regularly through usage and increased understanding of people's experiences, and it is important for practitioners to keep themselves informed.

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

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

What is 'coming out'?

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

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

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

A lot of lesbian and gay young people do not experience any difficulties with their sexuality, and are accepted by their family, friends and community. However, some may experience difficulties and an increased risk of poor outcomes. These difficulties may include:

- Drug and alcohol [misuse](#);
- [Homophobic bullying](#);
- [Mental health difficulties](#);
- Homelessness—the [Albert Kennedy Trust \(AKT\)](#) estimates that around one in four homeless young people identifies as LGBT, and 77% of these young people believe coming out to their parents was the main factor in their becoming homeless.
- Domestic violence/ domestic abuse— lesbian and gay young people who are experiencing domestic abuse in their relationships may face additional vulnerability; if they have not told anybody about their sexuality, they may fear reporting the abuse in case they are 'outed', and this fear may be exploited by perpetrators. Young people may also fear domestic abuse from parents and/ or family members if they are living in a homophobic environment.

What is available for practitioners to support young people?

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

Also in Leeds, the [School Wellbeing Service](#) has a number of resources on their website as well as an [A-Z guide](#) of LGBTQ+ resources. They also run the annual My Health My School survey which includes questions about the experiences of LGBT pupils, so that services can respond to any challenges identified. [Forward Leeds](#) provides support for young people and adults experiencing substance use difficulties.

[Diversity Role Models](#) is a charitable organisation that creates safe spaces where young people can explore difference and consider their role in creating a world where we all feel accepted. They offer student workshops that feature LGBTQ+ or ally role models who speak openly about their lived experiences, building young people's empathy so they can understand (often unintended) impact of their language and actions. They also train school governors, staff and parents/carers.

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

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

The Stonewall LGBT charity has information and resources available on their [website](#).