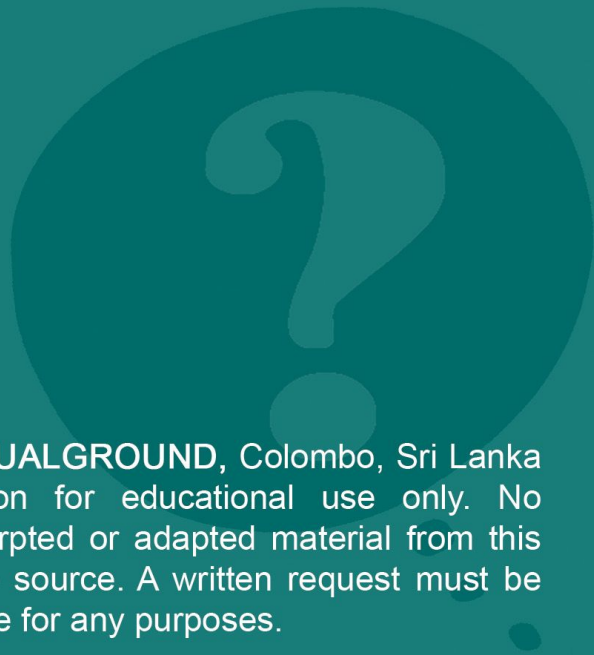




**EQU  L GROUND**

# **I MIGHT BE GAY**

An information booklet for young men



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# What does it mean to be Gay?



A gay person is a person who is physically, emotionally and/or spiritually attracted to someone of the same sex; usually used to describe men. Men who are gay are sexually attracted to and fall in love with other men. Their sexual and emotional feelings toward men are normal and natural for them. These feelings emerge when they are young , and can continue throughout their life.

Although some gay men can also be attracted to women, they usually say that their attraction and feelings towards men are much stronger than their attraction and feelings towards women.

Analysis has shown that one in 10 people in the world may be gay or lesbian (Lesbians are women who are attracted to other women), which means that in any large group of people, there are usually several gay or lesbian persons present.

However most often, no one can tell whether someone is gay unless he or she wants it known. Gay people frequently blend right in with other people, but they often feel different from other people. Young Gay men may not be able to specify just why they feel different. They may notice that all the other young men are attracted to girls. So, young gay men don't always know where they fit in, and they may feel uncomfortable talking to adults or their peers about their feelings.

# How do I know if I'm Gay?

For as long as I can remember I've always had feelings for boys and it's still the same. So, I'm pretty sure I'm gay.  
Dion, 20

I've always had feelings and been attracted to the same sex. I felt I was slightly different at a very young age and as I grew up all the people who won my heart over were men. So, I am 100% sure that I'm gay.  
Chathuranga, 21

You may not know how to identify your sexual feelings. However, You don't have to rush to decide how to label yourself right away. Sexual identity develops over time. Most young men are intensely sexual during the years around puberty when the body starts changing and hormones are flowing.

Your sexual feelings may be so strong that they are not directed toward any particular people or situations but seem to emerge without provocation or cause. As you get older, you will figure out who you are really attracted to. You may find your attraction to guys becomes more and more concentrated. You may find yourself falling in love with or having a crush on a classmate or a friend.

You may find these experiences pleasurable, troubling, or a mix of the two. Some gay youth begin thinking about what to call themselves at an early age, while others need more time and clearness on the subject. If you think you might be gay, here are some questions you might ask yourself:

- When I dream or fantasize sexually, is it about boys or girls?
- Have I ever had a crush on or been in love with another guy?
- Do I feel different than the other guys?
- Are my feelings for guys clear?

If your answers to these questions are unclear, don't worry. You will be more certain, as time goes by, of your sexual identity.

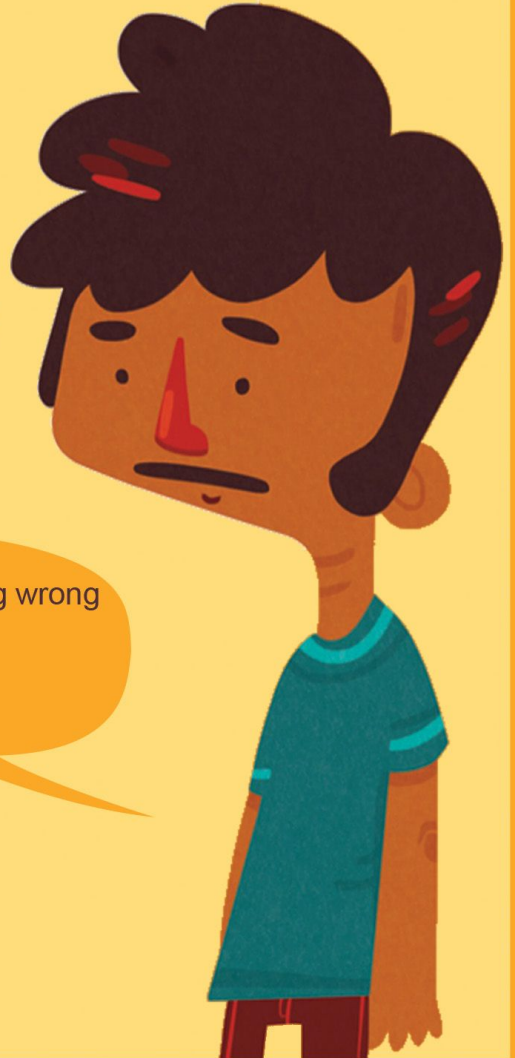
# Am I Normal?

You are normal. Sexuality is just another part of what makes each person an individual.

Yes, of course I am normal. I try not to question this as much as possible.  
Subash, 22

I'm definitely normal...I don't think there's anything wrong with me.  
Mahesh, 25

Being gay is being normal.



# What is it like to be young and gay?

It took a long time for me to come to terms with who I am. I had a terrible time with my parents especially who tried to take me to be 'cured'. The psychiatrist at a leading hospital strapped something to my head which sent vibration to my brain and gave me drugs to cure me. All it did was make me very angry all the time. I finally left home and started life a fresh – got a job, started a relationship. I am happier now.  
Sisira, 24

Actually? It's just too cool now that I am out and I know other gay friends with whom I hang out!  
Manoj 22

In this country it is really difficult to be who you are without having someone tell you it's perverted or sick. People are just downright idiotic about it sometimes. So I just choose who I want to hang out with now and I don't come 'out' to just anyone. Although if someone asks I am not ashamed to say I am gay.

Dilshan 22



There is no right way or wrong way to be gay. Growing up with society's stereotypes about gays might make you think you have to be a certain way if you're a gay man. Your sexual orientation is only one part of who you are. You probably have hobbies and interests that are the same as those of some of your straight friends.

Homophobia means some people don't accept lesbians and gay men, and lesbian and gay persons often suffer from discrimination and violence. That's why there are organizations such as EQUAL GROUND that work for LGBTIQ<sup>1</sup> human rights.



## Do you want to learn more?

In Sri Lanka EQUAL GROUND affords sensitizing and educational programs for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning (LGBTIQ) community. Log on the website at [www.equalground.org](http://www.equalground.org) or 'like' us on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/EQUALGROUND>) or call us at 011- 5679766 or 011-5734530. Alternatively, the internet provides a host of International organizations such as Advocates for Youth (<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/>) who have web sites by and for young gay people. Others include Youth Resource ([www.youthresource.com](http://www.youthresource.com)), IGLYO (<http://www.iglyo.com/>) and Stop Bullying now (<http://stopbullyingnow.com/lgbt-youth/>).


You may wish to visit these web sites. Thousands of LGBTIQ youth visit them each month; most of them visit repeatedly. Or, you may want to visit or get involved with EQUAL GROUND's LGBT youth group in Colombo and learn about yourself and others like you.

<sup>1</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning

# What about HIV/AIDS?

Safe sex is essential for everyone. When I have sex with my boyfriend who I feel I will be with forever I still do use protection. It's just better to be safe.  
Ruwan, 21

I am all for safe sex... I'm terrified of catching a STD. So I make sure that I always use protection. If they refuse to use protection then it's a big good bye from me.  
Ahmed, 23



All sexually active people need to be aware of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)-the virus that causes AIDS-as well as other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Being gay will not infect you with HIV, but certain sexual practices and certain drug use behaviors can put you at risk for infection with HIV. HIV/AIDS is incurable, but it is preventable!

Here's how to reduce your risk of HIV infection and AIDS.

- If you are injecting drugs-don't share needles.
- Using drugs and alcohol impair a person's judgment and therefore can place you at risk.



- Communicate with your partner. You do not have to have sex. Choose activities that do not involve sexual intercourse – such as hugging, normal kissing, talking or texting. Avoid unprotected anal intercourse or other direct, unprotected anal contact. Anal intercourse transmits HIV very efficiently. If you engage in anal intercourse, use a condom every time.
- Use condoms whenever you engage in any type of sexual intercourse- anal, oral or vaginal.
- Choose latex condoms that are new and undamaged. Store them away from heat. Remember: your wallet is not a good place to keep condoms for a long period of time.
- Use a condom only once. Choose condoms with a “reservoir tip” and be sure to squeeze out the air from the tip as you put it on. Hold on to the condom as you take it off. Be aware that condoms sometimes slip off.
- Do not double up: this means when some men use two or more condoms thinking that they will reduce the chance of HIV infection, what happens is when using two condoms at the same time, this increases friction and thus the chance of condom breaking is higher and the chance of getting infected is then also higher.



# How do I learn to like myself?



Everything I do, I do it well and try to live a successful life. Being gay doesn't mean that you have to be miserable.  
Senal, 21

It took a while to realize I was not sick or perverted. I had a hard time accepting myself because all around me people are disgusted with homosexuality and say it is a sin. I talked with the EQUAL GROUND counseling line and was really impressed with what they said to me and how they spoke to me. I have put into practice some of the things they suggested such as constantly telling myself "I am not alone" or "I am not a bad person".

Stephan, 25

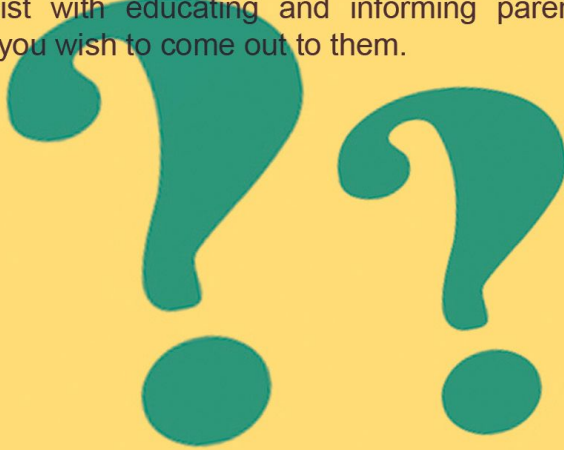
It is not easy to acknowledge that you are gay. Many people are uncomfortable being around homosexuals, and some people hate both lesbians and gay men. It's no wonder that some gay youth might choose to hide their feelings from others. You might feel this way; you might even be tempted to hide these feelings from yourself as well. You may worry about people finding out about how you feel. Maybe you avoid other young person's that may be gay because you worry about what other people will think.

Working this hard to hide your thoughts and feelings is called "being in the closet." It is a painful and lonely place to be, especially if you stay there in order to survive. It takes a lot of energy to deny your feelings, and denial can be costly.

You can find help by reading good books by and about gay men - books with accurate information about gay men who are leading fulfilling lives or read about it online. You will then discover that gay men are as diverse as any other group of people and that society is full of misinformation about lesbians.

You can say to yourself every day, "I'm Gay and I'm okay".

Additionally, EQUAL GROUND has many publications such as "Stepping Out of the Shadows: for parents of children with alternate sexual orientations and gender identities" that can assist with educating and informing parents and others of your sexual orientation, if you wish to come out to them.



# Whom should I tell?

I told some of my close friends, some of them were straight and some were gay. The friends I have understand the person I am and I'm really grateful I've got them around. They've given me the best gift...acceptance...for who I am. Angelo, 20



I've told my friends and I feel really relieved that I did... Now I've got nothing to hide. I thought about it before I did though...I figured at some point I'm going to meet someone I want to spend my life with and when that happens I'd like to share that joy instead of been judged or accused of unnecessary things...so I just came out to them. Gihan, 23



More and more young gay men are learning to feel better about themselves. As you start listening to your deepest feelings and learning more about what being gay means, you will begin to feel and be comfortable with your sexuality.

This process is called 'coming out.' The first step in coming out is to tell yourself that you are gay and to say, "It's okay. I'm okay." Later you may want to tell someone else, someone you trust to be understanding and sympathetic. You might choose a friend your own age, a sibling, a parent, or another adult. Some gay youth are able to come out to their families. Others are not. Start slow with someone you trust and the rest will unfold as it should.

In the beginning, be cautious about who you tell, but be honest with yourself. Coming out to the wrong people (people who you cannot trust or those who may harm you). This can be as costly as being in the closet. However, many youth have said coming out pays off. They feel calmer, happier, and more confident.

You may have tried using alcohol or other drugs to numb yourself against your feelings and your worries. You may have considered suicide. It is important to know that you are not alone. EQUALGROUND operates the only LGBTIQ counseling phone line in Sri Lanka. They can be reached at 011-5679766 Monday through Friday 9.30am to 5.30pm Or by email at [equalground@gmail.com](mailto:equalground@gmail.com). Your feelings and you are valuable and you have alternatives to drugs, alcohol and suicide. Don't deny yourself the right and the ability to live a normal, healthy and productive life.



# How do I find **other men** like me?

I attended a youth group recently and was really happy at being around others like me. I couldn't discuss my feelings at first but eventually I did. I was liberating to say the least to be around people of my own age group who were openly discussing their sexuality and other issues.

Shane, 20



Being a member of a community LGBTIQ youth group in your area is a great way to meet people, just like you.



EQUAL GROUND offers young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or Questioning persons (LGBTIQ) youth the space to hold group meetings, share information and experiences and conduct workshops on pertinent subjects such as sexuality, gender based violence, human rights, HIV/AIDS etc. It also provides space for young LGBTIQ persons to conduct social outreach work in rural areas to encourage others like you to find each other. For more information, call or email EQUAL GROUND.

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“Equality for all Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities:  
Human Rights for everyone”

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