

# I think I might be gay . . .

Distributed to boys in public schools in Massachusetts - Paid for with public money.

## . . .now what do I do?

### A Brochure for Young Men

Information for gay youth and young men questioning their sexuality.

### • What does it mean to be gay?

Men who call themselves gay are sexually attracted to and fall in love with other men. Their sexual feelings toward men are normal and natural for them. These feelings emerge when they are boys and the feelings continue into adulthood. Although some gay men may also be attracted to women, they usually say that their feelings for men are stronger and more important to them.

A Lie →

We know that about one out of ten people in the world is gay or lesbian (lesbians are women who are attracted to other women). This means that in any large group of people, there are usually several gay people present. However, you cannot tell if someone is gay or not unless he or she wants you to know. Gay people blend right in with other people. But they often feel different from other people.

Gay teenagers may not be able to specify just why they feel different. All of the guys they know seem to be attracted to girls, so they don't know where they fit in. And, they may not feel comfortable talking with an adult about their feelings.

Ask yourself- how would this affect emotionally vulnerable teenagers?

### • How do I know if I'm gay?

*"I don't remember exactly when I first knew that I was gay, but I do remember that the thought of sex with men always excited me."*

Alan, age 19

*"I never had any real attraction towards women, but I really knew that I was gay when puberty began. I felt an attraction toward the other boys and I was curious to find out what they were like."*

James, 17

*"One day I was flipping through a magazine, there was a cute guy, and bam! I knew."*

Antonio, age 16

You may not know what to call your sexual feelings. You don't have to rush and decide how to label yourself right now. Our sexual identities develop over time. Most adolescent boys are intensely sexual during the years around puberty (usually between 11 and 15 years old), when their bodies start changing and their hormones are flowing in new ways. Your sexual feelings may be so strong that they are not directed toward particular persons or situations, but seem to emerge without cause. As you get older you will figure out who you are really attracted to.

## Trying to convince confused teenagers that maybe they're really "gay"...

Boys with truly gay feelings find that, over time, their attractions to boys and men get more and more clearly focused. You may find yourself falling in love with your classmates or maybe developing a crush on a particular adult man. You may find these experiences pleasurable, troubling, or a mix of the two. By age 16 or 17 many gay kids start thinking about what to call themselves, while others prefer to wait.

If you think you might be gay, ask yourself:

- When I dream or fantasize sexually, is it about boys or girls?
- Have I ever had a crush or been in love with a boy or a man?
- Do I feel different than other guys?
- Are my feelings for boys and men true and clear?

If you cannot answer these questions now, don't worry. You will be more sure in time. You and only you know how to label yourself correctly.

### • Learning to like yourself

"I had to reject a lot of negative heterosexual and religious programming that made me feel lousy about myself as a gay person. I began to like myself by meeting other gay people and going to a gay support group. After that I was content with myself."

Bill, age 18

"My aunt is a lesbian, and she made it clear to me, before I even knew I was gay, that being gay was OK."

Antonio, age 16

"I accepted the facts, which means that I don't deny being gay and I don't pretend to be someone I'm not."

Alan, 19

It's not easy to discover that you are gay. Our society makes it very clear what it thinks of gay people. We all hear the terrible jokes, the hurtful stereotypes and the wrong ideas that circulate about gay people. People tend to hate or fear what they don't understand. Some people hate gay lesbians and gay men. Many people are uncomfortable being around lesbians and gay men.

It's no wonder that you might choose to hide your gay feelings from others. You might even be tempted to hide them from yourself.

You may wonder if you are normal. Perhaps you worry about people finding out about you. Maybe you avoid other kids who might be gay because of what people will think. Working this hard to conceal your thoughts and feelings is called being in the closet. It is a painful and lonely place to be, even if you stay there in order to survive.

It takes a lot of energy to deny your feelings, and it can be costly. You may have tried using alcohol or other drugs to numb yourself against these thoughts. You may have considered suicide. If so, please consult the phone

book for the Samaritans or another hotline. There are alternatives to denying your very valuable feelings. Check out the resources listed on the back of this brochure.

### • Who should I tell?

"I only tell other people that I'm gay if I've known them for a long time and if they are accepting and tolerant. I think it's important that they know about this special part of me."

Bill, age 18

"Since I'm normal, I don't have to hide how I feel. But you should make sure that you are comfortable with your preference before you blurt it out to just anyone."

Nathan, age 19

"I tell people that I'm gay if I know that they won't reject me, will accept me for what I am, and won't try to 'straighten' me out. I test them, I suppose, then I judge if I want to risk telling them."

John, age 17

More and more gay kids are learning to feel better about themselves. As you start to listen to your deepest feelings and learn more about what it means to be gay you will begin to be comfortable with your sexuality. This is the process called coming out.

Very dangerous