

SORTED

Pallingswick House
241 Kings Street
Hammersmith
London W6 9LP
020 8471 1879
www.naz.org.uk

Info for young Black African and Afro-Caribbean who fancy people of the same sex



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Thanks to Dennis Carney

Some young Black guys freak out when they realise they fancy someone of the same sex. Others take it in their stride. More than anything we want you to know that you're just fine, you're alright and you're not on your own.

There's no right or wrong way to deal with any of this. Sorted aims to give you some of the answers to questions you might have. Check out the listings on our back pages. You'll find details of how to find other people, like you, and how to get help if you want it.

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So life is supposed to be about boy-meets-girl, then marriage and kids? And we're all supposed to be the same?

Yeah right!

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AM I... DO I...?

So life is supposed to be about boy-meets-girl, then marriage and kids? And we're all supposed to be the same? Yeah right!

No wonder we think we're not normal, and worry what people in our community might be saying about us. No wonder that even just the idea that we might fancy someone of the same sex is scary.

We may ask ourselves 'Why me?' It feels like it would be so much easier if we could work out where these feelings come from, and stop having them. But lots of Black guys, whether they turn out to be gay or not, have sexual feelings towards people of the same sex. These feelings can show up as crushes or sometimes in dreams. It's a natural normal part of growing up.

So if you fancy people of the same sex, that's fine. It's something human beings do! And it doesn't matter why – what matters is that you're OK.

Even so, you might not feel OK. At this point in your life, you may feel that dealing with an attraction to another man or boy can be the most stressful thing in the world. Your religion preaches against it, popular music often disses it and maybe no one in your family has ever said anything good about gay people as far as you can remember. Gayness is often associated with being weak or unmanly. Taking the first step towards self-acceptance is scary, but will eventually be

worth it. There's loads of support out there for you. You are not alone!

And it will get easier for you to be OK with your feelings, to feel good about yourself. And being open about your sexuality, if that's what you want, will get easier too.

One last thing, We've written this booklet for young Black guys who are gay or bisexual, for those who aren't sure and for those who fancy someone of the same sex but don't feel like it makes them gay or bisexual.

For lots of Black guys, fancying and having sex with or falling in love with someone of their own sex makes a big difference to how they think of themselves. It's one of the most important things about them. They're clear this makes them gay or bisexual.

But this is not always so. Lots of Black guys want to have sex with other guys. For some, having sex with another guy is something that they happen to do, but is not something that they want to be defined by. For them, it doesn't feel right to call themselves gay or bisexual. This reasoning is sometimes due to the fear of stigma that is often associated with being gay within Black communities. Other times, it is simply their discomfort with accepting a sexual attraction that sets them apart from the majority of others around them.

WHO CAN I TALK TO?

Are you struggling on your own with your feelings? Are you excited, stressed, scared? Do you feel like the only guy in your mosque, church, sports team or community, with these feelings? You really don't have to do this on your own. There's a lot of support out there for you.

Talking to someone who's been there and won't judge you can be really helpful – someone who'll just listen and help you learn how to cope. Or maybe it's not such a big deal, but you still need information and don't know where to start.

At the back of Sorted you'll find information about youth groups, helplines, support groups and websites.

A really good place to start is to call a lesbian and gay helpline like London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard:
020 7837 7324 (24hrs a day!)

You could also get in touch with a youth group for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. The youth workers are trained to work with young people in your situation and help you make decisions to take your life forward.

SAY MY NAME

There are different words used to describe people according to who they fancy. The ones we have used throughout this booklet are the more accepted ones.

Straight & Heterosexual: is for men who fancy women & women who fancy men.

Gay Man & Homosexual: is for men who fancy men.

Bisexual: is for men who fancy men and women & women who fancy men and women.

Lesbian & Gay Woman: is for women who fancy women.

'Homosexual' started out as a medical term and is a bit old-fashioned; especially as we now know being homosexual isn't an illness. Some lesbians, gay men & bisexuals call themselves 'queer'. They feel it is a positive way of saying that they are different. Both 'queer' and even 'gay' are still used as insults by many people. Some lesbians prefer to call themselves 'gay women' or 'dykes'. Terms such as 'batty-man', "chi-chi man", "bullah" or "anti-man," are slang terms that are widely used to

insult Black gay and bisexual men.

What you decide to call yourself is your choice. Some people may call you things you don't like and insult you. In this booklet we talk about ways you can deal with people who insult or bully you because of who you are. Homophobia means hatred or fear of lesbians, gay men and bisexual people. It is often used to describe prejudice and discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual people.

DEALING WITH HOMOPHOBIA



Homophobia is cruel and just plain wrong. Even when you know this, it can still hurt you. It can make you angry, hurt, bitter and scared. Homophobic abuse often has the effect of making you feel weak. You can feel like you have failed your community or betrayed your religious or cultural values. In short, homophobia attacks your self-esteem.

Homophobia can take the shape of bullying or verbal attacks at school, work or at home- or yet more insults on TV or in the press. The tricky thing is that you don't always notice what it's doing to you.

For example: because homophobia is all around, you can end up believing that what it says about you is true. It may make some Black guys end up hating themselves, feel so worthless that they hurt themselves, or think about killing themselves. Some men may become withdrawn, or develop eating

disorders or addictions.

If you find yourself feeling low, or doing things to harm yourself, taking risks with unprotected sex, or simply neglecting yourself, please ask someone for support. You may find that you're drinking or taking drugs in order to cope. It might be that you're feeling down about everything, or giving other gay people and yourself a hard time. Remember you are not alone.

There are people who can help you to feel better about yourself and sort things out. They'll help you develop ways to cope and they'll work with you to build your confidence and self-worth. They can encourage you to look at your skills and achievements, and even think about long-term goals. Contact London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard on 020 7837 7324 or call one of the services below.

Samaritans
National Drugs Helpline
Drinkline
Alcohol East – Young Lesbian & Gay Project
ACAPS – Lesbian & Gay Alcohol Project
Project LSD Hungerford Project –
Lesbian & Gay Drugs Advice
PACE – Lesbian & Gay Counselling & Advice
NAZ Project London –

08457 90 90 90 www.samaritans.org
0800 77 66 00 www.talktofrank.com
0800 7437 3523
020 7702 0002
020 7737 3579 www.acaps.co.uk

020 7439 0717 Thursdays 6.00 – 9.00pm
020 7700 1323 www.pacehealth.org.uk
020 8741 1879 www.naz.org.uk



Positive Action

Homophobia can destroy your sense of your life being your own and can push you into a corner where you concentrate on just surviving. Here are some ideas for taking back some control, celebrating yourself and actively choosing your life.

- What are your dreams and ambitions? Make a list of things you want from life: do you want to travel, start a family, have a career, learn a new skill or go into business? What do you want from relationships? Then

make another list of what you need to do to bring you closer to your goals.

- You'll probably need information and support to plan your future. So ask for it.
- Make a list of at least 10 things you like about yourself right now.
- Make another list of what you've achieved in your life. It's almost certainly more than you give yourself credit for.
- Treat yourself. Do something just for yourself and nobody else.
- Make a contribution – volunteer for a charity or a community group. You'll get experience of making a difference, of being useful.
- Get involved in a campaign e.g. Big Up at GMFA or the Stop Murder Music Campaign. You'll experience your own power to change things for the better.
- Exercise, not to be a superstar rapper, but because you want to take care of your body.

For a quick boost to your self-esteem why not check out some of these feel-good books, videos and DVD's:

Respecting the Soul - Daily Reflections for Black Gay Lesbians and Gays – Keith Boykin.

Black Like Us – A century of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual African American Fiction. A great collection, including work by James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Rosa Guy, Melvin Dixon, Alice Walker, Langston Hughes, Samuel R. Delany, Thomas Glave and many others.

Beautiful Thing - A heart-warming film about coming to terms about being young and gay in East London.

Get Real - A cinematic and well-played film about boy meets boy in school and standing up for who you are and not chicken away. Set in UK.

Brother to Brother - A collection of poems and short stories by Black Gay writers by Essex Hemphill and Joseph Beam

The Darker Side of Black and Looking for Langston – documentary on dancehall homophobia and film about the life of Langston Hughes, by Black Gay British filmmaker Isaac Julien.

Noah's Arc and The DL Chronicles – contemporary soap opera series about Black Gay men available on DVD.

James Earl Hardy and E. Lynn Harris – contemporary fiction writers who write about the life experiences of Black Gay men

Assertively Gay - A best seller on building self-esteem for gay men, by UK author Terry Sanderson.

The Gay and Lesbian Self-Esteem Book: A Guide to Loving Ourselves and Queer Blues: a Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Guide to Overcoming Depression by Kimeron Hardin. This speaks for itself – it's published by Harbinger Publications.

Most large music stores, bookshops and local libraries have a Lesbian and Gay section where you should find something to your taste.

THE INS AND OUTS OF 'COMING OUT'

'Coming out' means telling other people you're attracted to people of the same sex. It doesn't mean that one day you just decide to tell the whole world about yourself, and everybody's cool and then it's all over! In reality coming out usually takes time, and most people find it easier in stages.

Some important things about coming out:

- You don't have to! It's your decision. It means you've decided to share some important information about yourself. If you're not ready, don't let yourself be pressured – it's your choice.
- Coming out to yourself is often the hardest bit. Even just thinking that you might have sexual feelings for other boys can feel strange. The sooner you get support the better.
- Plan it. Choose your moment, and talk it through with someone in advance. Think about the words you want to use – and what questions you will and won't answer. Talk to someone at a helpline or a youth group.
- If you plan to come out to your family or friends, or at school or at work, get support. Avoid coming out during a family row or crisis.
- In general, coming out will help you feel better about yourself. It's great to be more open, and meet other people like yourself.

For the long term, the more (visibility –that Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) (you need to write this out in full as this is the first reference to this that I can see. Then in brackets put it as an abbreviation) people have in the wider community means that their concerns cannot be ignored or treated as non-existent.

- Some people do react badly, but sometimes it turns out that people have been wondering all along if you were gay, and how to support you. Sometimes it turns out they're gay or lesbian too.
- You can choose if and when you come out as gay or bisexual. You might want to talk to someone about having sexual feelings for other guys without using those words.

Tips for Coming Out:

- Talk to other people first, to find out what happened when they came out.
- Avoid coming out at Christmas or other religious festivals.
- Never come out during an argument with your parents.
- If you can't tell your parents face to face, then try sending a letter, an email, a text or phone them.
- Ask someone whom your parents trust to tell your parents.
- Have a plan of what you'll do if your parents take it badly – like somewhere safe you can stay.
- It's not a good idea to come out if you are drunk or have taken drugs.

Coming out to: FAMILY

Being young and gay puts you in a tricky situation in relation to your family. You want them to know because you need support, and keeping a secret can be hard work. And, after all, they are your family. But no matter how many times you go through it in your mind, you just don't know how they're going to take it.

Who should you tell first? For example, do you want your mum to know, but no one else? Can you trust her to respect your wishes? Is it fair to ask her to keep your information secret? And are you ready to answer a lot of questions about your sexuality? Questions like: Why do you have these feelings? Have you had sex yet? What about HIV? How long have you been like this? Don't you want to have children? Who else knew before we did?

It might be worth thinking about your answers to questions like these. Just because you're coming out doesn't mean you suddenly have all the answers, and no right to any privacy. On the other hand it's only normal for your family to want to know some of this stuff – especially if you're asking for their support.

Choose your moment. Do some planning. If your family reacts badly, you'll need some support to fall back on. Some families do respond quite well, and others are confused and need some time to get used to the idea.

But some families are hostile and young gay people do end up homeless and very hurt. All the more reason to sort out some back up for yourself if things go wrong.

FFLAG (Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is a group, which can provide support for your parents if they are having problems dealing with the fact that you are lesbian or gay. They can be reached on 01454 85 24 18 or www.fflag.org.uk

Coming out to: ADULTS

You might decide you want to talk to someone you can trust like a teacher, a youthworker, a care-worker, a school nurse or a Connexions personal advisor or learning mentor.

You should be treated well, but not everyone is used to talking about these issues. You might not get the response you hope for. Even so, you should be treated with respect, and put in touch with someone who can help you.

Once again, using a telephone helpline or contacting a youth group will help you decide who to talk to next

Coming out to: FRIENDS

Try and think how your mates might react. Can you trust them? Have you heard them talking about gay celebs or lesbian soap stars? Are they generally OK? Or are they hostile? Do they gossip a lot about their other friends?

Some young Black men have told their best friend in secret, their best friend has told a few more people and, suddenly, it's not a secret anymore. Once again, be clever, get some support in advance and choose your moment carefully. Timing is important.

MEETING PEOPLE LIKE YOU

There are loads of ways to do this, depending on how confident you feel and what's available in your area. The easiest way in is to phone a helpline like London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard 020 7837 7324, or try Internet sites such as www.queery.org.uk

If none of these are your sort of thing you could try telephone chatlines, personal adverts in magazines, gay bars or clubs.

If none of these are your sort of thing you could try telephone chatlines, personal adverts in magazines, gay bars or clubs. (will this not put young men at risk – as one of your focus group participants said in response to Q4: “believes that this might put young people in a very vulnerable position, like using drugs or getting into a wrong company.”)

- **YOUTH GROUPS**

Youth groups are a good way to meet other people in a safe and friendly space. There will be other young Black guys there too who will be going through the same stuff as you. Usually, a youth worker will meet you for a chat before your first visit. They'll then take you to the group, so you don't have to arrive on your own. Or you can take a friend, who doesn't have to be lesbian or gay.

All youth groups are different. Some are mixed, whilst others are for young men or young women only. You can join as many as you like. They are a great way of meeting people and making friends. Most provide advice about housing, welfare rights, health, sexuality and safer sex. Or you might just have a chat and a laugh.

Sometimes your first visit to a youth group can be a bit of a disappointment and it doesn't quite live up to how you imagined it would be. It can sometimes feel like everybody knows everybody, and you're on the outside. Keep going. Youth groups won't solve all your problems but you will get more out of them if you give them a chance. You're more likely to make friends over a couple of visits.

- **STUDENT GROUPS**

Most large universities and colleges have LGBT* societies. They organise social events and can provide you with support and advice. Being Black and gay at college can be lonely – especially at first – so these are particularly useful if you've moved to a new town and want to make new friends.

*LGBT = lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

- **THE INTERNET**

The Internet can be a useful way of getting information, finding out about places to go and meeting other people. To start with, check out some of the sites we recommend. They'll give you detailed and reliable information, and they also have links to other sites.



There is misinformation out there too, and if you want to use chatrooms as a way of meeting people, be wary. It can be easy to get carried away and tell them everything about yourself which may leave you feeling vulnerable afterwards. People don't always tell the truth, and some older men lie about their age to lure young Black guys into meeting them. Remember! Telephone chatlines are very expensive and they'll show up on your phone bill. Using the Internet leaves a record on your PC that other users can read.

- SAFETY FIRST

If you're answering a personal ad, or talking to someone on the net or on a telephone chatline, only give a mobile number or your e-mail address. Never give your home address or phone number. If you're meeting someone for the first time, arrange to meet in public, in a café for example, and preferably somewhere you know well. Maybe even ask a mate to be there too.

If you don't feel safe just leave. Just make your excuses and go. Trust your instincts!

Ideally, let someone know where you're going. Only go to someone else's home (or to an area you don't know) once you have got to know the other person. Always call or text a friend, or leave a message at home to say where you are and who you're with. Always carry enough money to get yourself home.

RELATIONSHIPS AND FRIENDSHIPS

When you start to meet other guys like yourself, it might feel like you're living two separate lives. This can make your life stressful and complicated for a while. Maybe you haven't told your old friends, and keeping them from knowing is hard work.

Or maybe you have told them, and you're spending a lot of time talking them through it. Maybe they've rejected you altogether, which is hurtful even if you do have lots of new mates. Or maybe you're not that interested in your old friends anymore, and they're the ones feeling rejected!!

What's more, it might be that the first people you meet are not the ones you really want to hang around with once you've got to know the scene (you are assuming that they automatically know what is meant by 'the scene'. Perhaps a brief description would be useful) a bit more. Whatever's going on, and however complicated and intense it feels, take a deep breath and remember that you have the right to be treated with respect, and so does everyone else.



HOW TO SAY HELLO, HEY, HIYA OR EVEN WASSUP!

Some people are quite shy, and talking to strangers is difficult. It's so tempting to hide in the corner, looking scared, which probably makes you look scary! This doesn't make it easy for people to come over and talk to you.

The easiest way to connect with new people is to smile and be yourself. If you're nervous, say so. Most people like this kind of honesty, and it makes things easier for them too – because guess what? They're nervous too. Building friendships and relationships that work takes openness, trust and time. It might be hard to make friends at first.

BOYFRIENDS

Just because you have feelings for someone of the same sex, doesn't mean you have to do something about them. You might want to take a bit of time to get used to the idea, and to get to know other gay and lesbian people.

It is important to choose when you want to have sex or start going out with someone. It doesn't matter whether you've decided you might be gay or bisexual, or you're not sure. Take your time. Have a look around, there is no rush, do a bit of window-shopping!

If you do decide you want a regular boyfriend, don't expect to fall in love at first sight, over a candlelit supper with violins playing in the background. True love is a wonderful thing, but if you put all your energy and excitement into finding a regular sweetheart, you might just be setting yourself up for disappointment.

Remember, it's all too easy to declare everlasting love in the heat of a passionate moment. Things might look different in the morning...



Being on the lookout for that special someone can do funny things to how you behave. You might find yourself acting all hard, cool or bitchy, particularly (and this next bit is weird) when the object of your affections is around. The old saying 'Treat 'em mean, keep 'em keen' sounds clever, but it isn't true. Treat 'em mean and what happens? They'll probably just think you're mean. Be yourself. Be genuine!

Of course, it may be difficult to find social venues where there are other Black LGBT people who share your interests and values. Both the mainstream and the gay press are full of very pretty pictures; with handsome men with big shiny muscles, wearing the latest labels. You'll rarely see someone of colour or a person with a physical disability in any of the pictures.

Luckily, real life isn't as glossy as the magazines – at least, not always. But it can still be easy to find yourself chasing someone else's idea of who you should be.

Whoever you are, stay true to yourself. This can be a struggle; your hormones will affect your moods and the way you feel about yourself. Some days you may feel happy with yourself, other days you may feel too fat, too thin, too spotty, too shy, too ugly or unfashionable.

It is important to remember everyone is different. There'll be certain physical characteristics with which you were born that you

cannot change. Part of growing up is about accepting who you are, and that includes not only your sexuality but your physical characteristics too. People will like you for who you are, it won't matter to them about how tall you are, whether you use a wheelchair or what the colour of your skin is.

Just remember not everyone will fancy you and vice versa. And there is plenty of time to meet that someone special, so you don't need to rush. Respect yourself. It is good to take care of your health and looks. Just remember that's what they are – yours!

WHAT PART OF 'NO' DON'T THEY UNDERSTAND?

So you've started going out to youth groups, maybe you're going to pubs and clubs, you're getting to know more people like yourself. Hopefully you're having a good old time.

But, you're a fresh face in town, you're young and you're still finding out how it all works. This might make you vulnerable. So stand up for yourself, you've got rights. No one has the right to mess you around or take advantage of you. If someone buys you a drink, it doesn't mean you're saying yes to having sex with them!

If you do want to have sex with someone, it doesn't mean they can do whatever they like to you. You can change your mind whenever you want. Yes, that's right! Whenever you want! If you find yourself doing something you're uncomfortable with, you can change your mind right there and then.

Standing up for yourself, being assertive isn't about being rude or aggressive. It's about speaking up, saying what you want or don't want as calmly and clearly as you can. And don't forget everybody has these rights. That's right, everybody! So other people have the right to talk to you in this way too. Assertiveness skills can be useful everywhere and anywhere: at school or college, at work, at home, and out on the gay scene. If you want to find out more, then these books are a good read:

Respecting the Soul - Daily Reflections for Black Lesbians and Gays, by Keith Boykin
Two Teenagers in Twenty by Ann Heron
Assertively Gay & How to be A Happy Homosexual by Terry Sanderson
Homo Handbook by Jody Carter

Remember, No means No. If you are ever forced to have sex against your will, report it. Ideally contact the police or inform someone you trust. If you feel unable to do so, there is Survivors UK on 08451 22 12 01 or www.survivorsuk.co.uk

AT LONG LAST SEX

There's a lot of it about! Or at least a lot of talk about it, at school or at work – and lots of pictures of it too, in films, magazines, TV, pornography. From all of this you'd probably get the impression that sex just happens, and everyone just knows how to do it.

It's a nice idea that two people just suddenly click with each other. This sometimes happens, but more often it takes a while for partners to learn about each other, what turns them on and what doesn't, how they fit together emotionally and sexually.

Here are a few myths about sex

- Everybody wants to have sex.
- You're not really gay or bisexual until you've done the business.
- Everyone knows how to have sex.
- Sex without an orgasm isn't sex.
- Everyone is attracted to the same sort of person for their whole life.
- Sex is the same for everyone.

None of these are true!

And perhaps it's not exactly a myth, but a lot of people think everybody else is having more romantic, sexier sex more often. Even if there are times in our lives when sex isn't so great, it's easy to imagine it's completely perfect for every one else.

So if these are some of the myths, where can you get good honest information about sex? You could start by talking to a youthworker at a gay youth group, or call one of the helplines mentioned in this booklet.

We've also listed some of the sexual health clinics in London, which offer services specially designed for gay people. A health advisor at a specialist LGBT service will listen to you and help you to think about sex and your health. They won't be embarrassed and they won't judge you. You can use these services whether or not you have been having sex.

A good way to get to know your body is to masturbate. It can help you discover the sensations you will feel when you have sex. For men, this means they usually rub their penis with their hand (having a wank!).

Why not go exploring and find out what feels good when it's touched! Many Black guys are embarrassed to talk about masturbation even though it is something that nearly everyone does - both men and women. It won't make you blind or infertile.

It's also a good idea to check your genitals regularly to make sure everything is OK. If something looks odd or feels unusual, get it checked out. Again this applies whether you've had sex or not.

SEX BETWEEN MEN

The world is obsessed with the idea that when men have sex together they always have anal sex. In fact most men kiss, cuddle and touch each other. Others rub their bodies together, suck and lick each other.

Lots of men do have anal sex and enjoy it. You can choose if you want to or not, and lots of gay men don't. So decide what feels right for you. (If you do have anal sex, use condoms and lots of lubricant.)

Condoms. If you're going to have sex with a man or a woman it's worth getting to know what condoms are like in advance. So practice at home. Try putting one on when your penis is hard and practice taking it off too. Read the instructions on the pack.



You'll need a water-based lubricant. It makes sex smoother, and means the condom is less likely to break. Make sure you're using the right size too. You might impress your mates with your extra large condoms, but you'll only embarrass yourself when your mega- condom slips off because it's too big!

You can get free condoms and lubricant from lots of places such as young people's health clinics, youth groups and sexual health clinics.

If you're having sex with women all the usual advice about contraception applies. Be prepared, have a discussion with your girlfriend about it. If she's on the pill, this won't protect either of you from STIs*, so you should still use a condom. Sometimes things don't always go to plan, like the condom may slip off or you forget to use one. If this happens and you believe that you have been exposed to HIV, you can go to your local hospital emergency department and ask for Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) treatment.

*STIs = sexually transmitted infections

Ball (Testicles) control: Testicular cancer (cancer of the balls) isn't talked about much. But it affects mostly young men aged 15 to 35. It can nearly always be cured if it's caught early enough. So check your balls every month, and if you see or feel anything unusual go straight to your doctor.

If you have any concerns about sex call SexWise 0800 28 29 30 Everyday 7am – 12 midnight www.ruthinking.co.uk

MORE ABOUT SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIs)

- STIs can be passed from person to person through sex, and sometimes through close bodily contact.
- They're nothing to be ashamed of, and they're more common than you think.
- Some of them don't have symptoms. So you can't always tell if you're infected.
- The good news is that most STIs – if they are treated – can be completely cured.
- If left untreated they can seriously damage your health.
- The sooner you get an STI treated, the more likely the treatment will be successful.
- If you notice any pain or itching in or around your genitals or any unusual discharge (for example, a creamy liquid) from your genitals or your anus, get yourself checked at a Sexual Health Clinic, (sometimes called a G.U.M. clinic - it stands for Genito-Urinary Medicine).

In fact if you think you might have an STI, stop reading this leaflet right now, and get yourself down to a clinic. Most are by appointment-only, but some hold walk-in sessions when you can just turn up and be seen. Again check out the listings to find one near you.

And if you're having sex with lots of different people, book yourself in for regular check-ups. How about every three months?

MORE ABOUT SEXUAL HEALTH CLINICS

Apart from treating STIs, the staff at Sexual Health Clinics are trained to talk to you about sex, sexual health and relationships. They will keep your visit absolutely confidential. No-one will find out about your sexuality from a Sexual Health Clinic: your family, your friends or your GP (your family doctor). The information doesn't leave the clinic.

Be prepared to talk as honestly as you can – this will help the staff to advise you. No information is given to anyone outside the clinic without your permission. Even when you go to your GP and they take notes these are [also] confidential. However, many gay people prefer not to talk to their doctor about their sexuality.

Lots of doctors are very aware of gay issues, but many are not, and some have definite prejudices. Staff at Sexual Health Clinics are trained in sexual health and are expected to be welcoming to everyone. Even so, for the sake of your health, you should register with a doctor. You have the right to change doctors if you're unhappy with the service.

HIV

HIV is a virus that was discovered about 30 years ago. It can lead to AIDS and eventually death. Anyone can get HIV no matter what their age, race, religion or sexuality is. In this country HIV is passed on in 3 main ways:

- When people have unprotected (sex without a condom/female condom) sex with someone who has HIV.
- When people share drug-injecting equipment with someone who has HIV.
- From mothers who have HIV to their baby either during pregnancy, labour and/or breast feeding.

NB There is also some risk from oral sex too (open sores and/or bleeding gums). Although this is less risky, you should still take care. If you are concerned, then use a condom.

Gay Men: About 1 in 5 gay men in London have HIV. Many young Black gay men get HIV because they wrongly believe only older gay men get HIV. No matter how old you are, you can get HIV. Safer sex means using a condom for penetrative sex. And that includes sex with women too! Safer sex also includes sex where you don't have penetration. You can still get HIV from sharing needles if you use drugs.

Many Black guys have HIV and don't know it. You can only find out if you're HIV positive by having an HIV test (usually a blood test and rapid tests). Lots of HIV positive people are as healthy as anyone else, and can live for a long time before they become ill.

Some HIV infections and unplanned pregnancies happen because of condom failure – i.e. the condom breaks or isn't used properly. Make sure you take care not to let it happen to you. Phone the number below, check out the listings (page ??) or speak to a youth worker to get more information on keeping sex safe.

SexWise 0800 28 29 30 Everyday 7am – 12 midnight. www.ruthinking.co.uk.

THE SCENE

The gay 'scene' is where lesbians, gay men and bisexual people hang out and meet each other. In big cities the scene is huge and there are lots of bars, clubs, cafes and shops, hairdressers, record shops, gyms, saunas and social clubs. At many of these you'll find free magazines and newspapers with gossip, reviews and listings about the local scene. You can also find information on the Internet or at gay switchboards.



There are a small number of clubs, venues and events that particularly cater to Black LGBT community. To find out more, see:

www.ukmoc.com

www.ukblackout.com

(Also, see back of this booklet)

Some Black guys love the scene. They meet new and old friends there and it becomes their second home! Others hate it; they say it's lonely and unfriendly. Generally, what you get from the scene depends on what you put in. A good way to visit different places is to go out with your youth group, or at least go with a friend so you're not walking into a place on your own for the first time.

ON A NIGHT OUT

If you've never been out on the scene, a good place to start would be somewhere popular with young people. Most places are mixed, but some are for men or women only. You can go to pubs from the age of 16, but you can't be served alcohol until you're 18. So don't forget your ID.

Your first few nights out on the scene might be scary. You might feel as if everybody knows everybody else, and nobody wants to know you. You might feel like everyone is talking about you. Or because it's your first time in a place with so many other people like yourself, you might be surprised at how nervous you feel. You might feel like everybody is watching you, but you're probably just self-conscious because this is your first time.

All the other guys on the scene will have been through something like this themselves. Most are decent guys who'll probably be happy enough to chat. If they seem a bit cool, they're probably worried that if they come over to talk, you'll think they're chatting you up.

You're more likely to get talking if you look as friendly as you can. Lurking in a corner looking miserable will give guys the message that...well, that you're a miserable lurker! Once you find somewhere you feel comfortable, go back a few times and some guys will recognise you, and sooner or later you're bound to get talking.

YOUR FEELINGS

AND YOUR FAITH

How does your religion or your culture affect the way you feel about your sexuality? It's worth thinking through how your community and the world in general feel about sex between people of the same sex.

Being true to yourself and keeping your faith, if that's what you wish, can be challenging.

Some religions teach that fancying people of the same sex is wrong. This means that some of the very people you would normally trust, or seek help from, might disapprove of you. This can be hurtful and confusing and you might find yourself isolated in your community.

You might feel lonely at first. Whatever your faith is, there are lots of gay people who share it. Many may have set up support groups to help people deal with isolation and prejudice. There are groups for lesbian and gay Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Catholics and Humanists too. You will also find straight people of your faith who'll support you.

Once again get some support for yourself if you're worried about attitudes in your community. Remember you can call an LGBT switchboard or contact some of the websites we've listed to find out what is in your area, such as www.queery.org.uk

AND YOUR COMMUNITY

Although being gay is more widely accepted now, it can still be very tough if you live in a community or on an estate where everyone knows your business. Talking about homosexuality in some cultures is taboo.

Many gay people move away or keep their heads down (meaning that they don't come out, ever). Most of the gay and lesbian people in London are from other parts of the UK, Africa, the Caribbean and other places abroad. This is because they are much less accepted at home and it is easier to be open in a big city like London.

In some communities, being gay is seen as a white, western or a Middle-class thing. This just isn't true. There are gay people in all classes, cultures, races and religions. It is just that gay people are sometimes hard to find. This may be because they keep their sexuality very secret or because they know the prejudice they would face within their community if they were more open. It can also be that they just don't use words like lesbian or gay to describe themselves. But they definitely exist!

In fact nearly all cultures have at least one word for gay men, even if as noted earlier, these names are not very nice! However you define yourself, you are just as important as anyone else from your background. You have the right to be proud of your sexuality, and your heritage.

Here are a couple of places you might want to use to help you find out about groups from your community:

www.naz.org.uk for people from Asia, Middle East, Horn of Africa, North Africa and Latin America.
www.ukblackout.com for people of African and Caribbean origin.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT



BEING BULLIED...

Bullying can make someone feel worthless. However, everyone has the right to feel good about themselves. No one ever deserves to be bullied!

Being bullied can make you feel so ashamed that you keep it to yourself. If you are being bullied because of your sexuality, or for any other reason, you have the right to get help to cope with it and to stop it.

Tell someone it is happening. Talk to someone about it. Report it. You have a right to be safe, and you have as much right as anyone else to get on with your education.

Bullying can include

- Being ignored.
- Being called names.
- Being on the receiving end of anti-gay jokes.

- Stealing.
- Actual physical or sexual assault.
- Being threatened with any of these.
- Bullies often use threats – they might threaten to tell your family, schoolmates or friends that you are gay.
- Extortion – a type of stealing, when you are forced to give someone money in order to stop them from beating you up or hurting you in other ways.

What to do if you are bullied at school or college

- Report it! Talk to someone you trust. They could be a teacher, form tutor, school counsellor, mentor, personal advisor or school nurse.
- Did you know that all schools and sixth form colleges must have an anti-bullying policy? The school is responsible for your welfare and must do something about it.
- If a member of staff is bullying you, you need to report it. Talk to someone who can do something about it. You might consider talking to the police. Each police force has a Schools Liaison Officer who is there to deal with crime in schools. They also have a Community Safety Unit, whose job is to help people who are being homophobic (or racially) abused.
- If you report it, remember the issue is that you are being bullied! You are being bullied because of somebody's opinion of your life. That's the problem. You can ask for something to be done about it without getting into discussions about your sexuality.
- If you are being bullied outside school, contact the police. Bullying is assault and the police have the power to prosecute people for homophobic behaviour.
- We've said it already, but here it is again – talk to someone at an LGBT youth group – you'll almost certainly meet other young people who have dealt with this problem.

Coming out at school.

- Our advice is that you think carefully before you come out at school.
- Think carefully about who you're going to tell.
- If you do decide to come out, make sure you have some support before you do.
- If you decide to come out at school be prepared for some hostile reactions.
- If you're leaving soon, it might be best to wait until you've left to come out.
- If you decide not to come out at school, you might still need support.

Of course all of this is unfair. You should be able to come out, be treated with respect and get a good education. But bullies like to pick on people who they think are different, or 'not normal', and they might just decide that's you.

At College or University...

All of the above still applies, but in general colleges and universities are more open-minded. Many have LGBT groups. If you are harassed, and there isn't a Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Group, speak to your Student Welfare Officer, or some one from the National Union of Students who should be able to help you find support.

AT WORK

Lots of people feel very comfortable in their place of work – their colleagues are accepting of their sexuality, and some are gay themselves. Even so, many people do come across homophobia in the workplace: they are bullied, talked about behind their backs, and ignored when it comes to promotion or training opportunities.

Bullying, when it involves violence or the threat of violence, is a crime, and can be reported to the police. But bullying at work is similar to bullying at school – it can be so frightening that you don't tell anyone.

If you are being bullied at work, tell somebody – a friend, or a colleague you feel you can trust. Speak to your manager if you can, or contact your trade union. Many workplaces have anti-discrimination policies to protect staff from homophobia.

It can be difficult to prove that some people are prejudiced towards you because of who you are.

There are laws, which make discrimination against people on the grounds of their sex, race or disability illegal. As from December 2003, new employment law aims to protect anyone regardless of their sexuality or religion against discrimination from their work colleagues and employers.

There are support organisations and contact groups set up by lesbians and gay men in different jobs. They fight discrimination at work and support each other. To find out if there are any groups in your field of work look in the gay press or contact your trade union.

See www.lager.dircon.co.uk for more information about your rights at work.

Coming out at work

It's better to be safe than sorry! Lots of people have good experiences of coming out at work – they become friends with colleagues, and even meet their boyfriend or girlfriend through their work. But if you want to come out at work take your time and be canny about it.

Before you come out listen to what people at work say about gay people on TV or in the news. Then make your decision.

If you do come out, be aware that people gossip, and telling one person might mean that everyone knows by the end of the shift! If you're lucky you might meet colleagues who are already out.

Don't take it for granted that other gay people will support you. There are some Black guys out there who are attracted to people of the same sex and are homophobic. It sounds twisted but this is how it works: they aren't comfortable with their own feelings, and may be hostile to someone who is. They may make anti-gay jokes as a way of fitting in and hiding their own sexuality.

So you can't assume that anyone will support you until you've asked them. So ask them!

YOUR RIGHTS AND THE LAW



binding by entering a civil partnership. This entitles you to the same pension and inheritance rights, as a straight marriage.

It's illegal to discriminate against women, people with disabilities and people from ethnic minorities, and many services and organisations are aware of this. However, many either forget about lesbians, gay men and bisexual people or actively discriminate against them, knowing the law cannot be used against them.

SCHOOLS

Section 28 was an infamous law, which stopped local councils 'promoting homosexuality'. This law was passed in the 1980s, successfully repealed in 2003 and no longer applies. However it has prevented many people now in their teens and twenties from receiving good sex and relationship education, and clear information about being lesbian, gay or bisexual.

DISCRIMINATION

As we've already said there are few laws to protect lesbians, gay men and bisexual people from discrimination. This means you may be treated less fairly and don't have the same rights as straight people.

Same sex relationships are now officially recognized. Since 2005, you can make your relationship with your partner legally

Recently the government has told schools that they must provide sex and relationship education that is relevant to the needs of all pupils. And that includes you! You may wish to check out www.schools-out.org.uk; it has useful information on the responsibilities. Your school has to look after you.

SEX

In England, Wales and Scotland the age of consent is 16, and it's now the same for everyone. So for both men and women sex with someone of the same or opposite sex is legal if both partners are 16 years old or over. In Northern Ireland it's 17.

So you could get into trouble if one of you is over 16 and the other under 16. It's also against the law for an adult in a position of responsibility, say a teacher or youth worker, to have sex with you if you are under 18. This applies whether you consent or not.

You could also contact GALOP on 020 7704 2040 or www.galop.org.uk. GALOP is a project that helps lesbian and gay people who are victims of hate crime, or who have problems with the police.

HATE CRIME

Homophobic crime is now called Hate Crime. Other types of hate crime are racist crimes and domestic violence. Hate crime includes verbal abuse in the street, physical assault, theft or damage to property.

Nowadays the police take hate crimes very seriously. Most boroughs have special police officers who liaise with the gay community. If you are a victim of a hate crime do contact your local police station. Your local LGBT liaison officer can provide you with specialist advice and support if you are the victim of crime. Check out www.freedoms.org.uk for listings of all LGBT liaison officers in London.

GETTING MORE HELP OR INFORMATION



There are loads of groups and services. There is only space here to list a few. Contact www.queery.org.uk or call London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard 020 7837 7324 to find out about ones near you.

PACE, lesbian & gay counselling & advice, Tel: 020 7700 1323 or www.pacehealth.org.uk.
Black Connection, monthly group aimed at Black African, Black British, and Black Caribbean gay and bisexual men. Meets on 3rd Sunday of each month, 6:00-9:00pm. Call PACE on 020 7700 1323 or www.pacehealth.org.uk
Regard, LGBT disability rights & support group,

Tel: 020 7688 4111, Minicom: 020 7688 0709, www.regard.dircon.co.uk
THT Direct Helpline, Mon – Fri 10am – 10pm, Sat – Sun 12noon – 6.00pm, www.tht.org.uk.

Sexual Health Clinics

After 5 @ Lloyds Clinic, Guy's Hospital, London Bridge SE1, Tuesdays 5 – 7.30pm, Clinic for lesbians, gay men & bisexuals, Tel: 020 7188 6666.

Rainbow Clinic @ Caldecot Centre, Kings College Hospital, Camberwell, SE5, Wednesdays 5 – 8pm, clinic for gay & bisexual men, Tel: 020 7346 3448

Some good websites to check out

www.freedoms.org.uk has listings and links to all sorts of useful services and places of help including: youth groups, sexual health clinics, drugs and alcohol projects, counselling services, housing projects, religious & faith groups, black and ethnic minority support groups. There are loads of commercial sites aimed at Black lesbians, gay men & bisexuals. Here are a few that provide a good balance between community and commercial information:

www.ukmoc.com :	UK style magazine aimed at gay & bisexual men of colour
www.ukblackout.com :	website for Black lesbians, gay men & bisexuals
www.bluk.org.uk :	website for Black lesbians
www.gay.com :	website for gay men and lesbians
www.gaystheword.co.uk :	website for gay and lesbian bookshop
www.bgmag.org.uk :	Black Gay Men's Advisory Group (BGMAG)
www.rukus.org.uk :	RUKUS! - Black Queer Arts Group

Youth groups

NRG Youth Groups, For Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual young people (25 and under) across Greater London.

Tel: 020 7816 4754, E-mail: nrg@ttht.org.uk, www.ttht.org.uk/regions/london/lgb_youth.htm

Chillin Out & Tribe @ The Metro Centre based in Greenwich, www.themetro.dircon.co.uk

Facin' South based in Southwark Tel: 020 7378 8732

Snap based in Bromley, Tel: 07811 44 06 94, www.themetro.dircon.co.uk.

WOW (We're Out West) For lesbian, gay and bisexual young people (25 and under) in Kingston, Richmond and surrounding areas. Tel: 020 7816 4754 E-mail: wow@ttht.org.uk

ASK Project

An after school club for young people 13-19 who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or bi-curious and their friends. Clubs based in south west London. Tel: 020 7816 4752 E-mail: ask@ttht.org.uk or speak to your Connexions Personal Adviser

Advice & Support

London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard provides a national information service 24hrs a day

Tel: 020 7837 7324 www.llgs.org.uk

London Friend runs support groups Tel: 020 7837 3337 www.londonfriend.org.uk

Overseas LGBT links:

African LGBT website: www.mask.org.za

Jamaican LGBT human rights organisation: www.jflag.org

African American LGBT website: www.kiethboykin.com

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020 8741 1879, www.naz.org.uk



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