

Pointers For Parents

Talking To Teens About Sexual Orientation

(NAPSA)—The teen years can be tough for parents as teenagers come closer to understanding who they are and who they are not.

One of the most important issues teens come to terms with involves their sexuality. Parents can do a lot to make this issue a more comfortable one.

Puberty is not an easy time for any teen, and it is extra difficult if your teen is realizing that he or she is attracted to people of the same sex. This is not an easy time for you, the parent, but it is important to keep the lines of communication open in this challenging environment and be supportive of your teen.

“Most of the emotional disturbance experienced by gay men and lesbians around their sexual identity is not based on physiological causes, but rather is due more to a sense of alienation in an unaccepting environment,” according to a statement published by the American Medical Association’s Council on Scientific Affairs in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Nevertheless, many people may try to tell teens that they are sick and need professional help to change. There is, however, no scientifically valid evidence that shows people can change their sexual orientation, although some people do repress it, according to the Human Rights Campaign, the nation’s largest gay and lesbian political organization. Indeed, the most reputable medical and psychotherapeutic groups say you should not try to change your sexual orientation.

As with any significant step in their lives, teens may seek help in understanding their sexual orientation and telling people about it.

Some teens come out when someone asks them if they are gay, lesbian or bisexual. Others



Teens should know that it’s okay to get help dealing with confusing feelings about sexual orientation.

make a point of pulling people aside and saying, “There’s something I have to tell you.”

If a teen chooses the latter option, he or she may want to approach the most open-minded and caring person they know, the person least likely to be shocked, threatened or put off. Teens may talk to a friend or a teacher before they talk with their parents. As a parent, you can help by being visibly open and willing to discuss sexuality even before the topic arises.

“If you are going through the coming out process yourself, remember that you are not alone,” said Candace Gingrich, the manager of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s National Coming Out Project, a public education and outreach program that promotes honesty and openness about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender on campus, in the workplace and in the community.

The National Coming Out Project also publishes the *Resource Guide to Coming Out*, a popular and helpful tool for those going through the coming out process. For more information, or to download a copy of the guide, visit the Human Rights Campaign at www.hrc.org.