

**Maryland School Mental Health Alliance\***  
*Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth*  
*Information for Parents and Caregivers*

**Definitions**

**GLBT/LGBT** is a collective term to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people.

A **lesbian** is a female who is exclusively emotionally, sexually, romantically and/or aesthetically attracted to other females.

The term **gay** is used to refer to same-sex sexual orientation (both male and female).

The term **bisexual** is the human sexual orientation that refers to the aesthetic, romantic, or sexual desire for people of either gender or of either sex.

**Transgender** is an overarching term applied to a variety of individuals, behaviors, and groups involving tendencies that diverge from the normative gender role (women or men) commonly, but not always, assigned at birth, as well as the role traditionally held by society.

The process of “**coming out**” describes the voluntary public announcement of one’s (often homosexual or bisexual) sexual orientation, sexual attractions, gender identity, or paraphilia.

-“**being out**” is when an individual does not try to hide these characteristics.

-“**being outed**” occurs when these characteristics are made public against one’s wishes or against one’s consent.

If an individual is said to be “**questioning**,” it most often means that they are going through a phase of exploration and possible transition regarding his/her sexual orientation. Another definition is that the “**questioning**” period is the initial phase prior to “coming out.”

**Homophobia** is the fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals. It can also mean hatred or disapproval of homosexual people, their lifestyles, sexual behaviors or cultures, and is generally used to assert bigotry.

**Why do we care?**

- GLBT students are far more likely to skip classes and drop out of school.
- GLBT students are at a higher risk for substance abuse.
- GLBT students are subjected to harassment, violent threats, physical/sexual assault, slurs, insults, and jokes (the average high school student hears 25 anti-gay slurs daily).
- GLBT students are more prone to depression and loneliness.
- GLBT students attempt suicide 2 to 3 times more frequently than their heterosexual peers.

**What can you do about it?**

- **Get your questions answered.** There are many books, articles, and internet resources on the topic of GLBT youth. In addition, support groups are available for parents and family members of GLBT youth, and can offer support and education.

- **If homosexuality is a difficult topic** consider therapy. Many parents blame themselves or feel ashamed. Support groups are available to share experiences with other parents of GLBT youth.
- **Be sensitive to language and jokes.** Don't allow discriminatory behavior to occur in your child's presence.
- **Ask your child about their experiences in school;** ensure that they are in a safe place. Schools can be a big source of difficulty for GLBT youth, identify faculty and staff that are allies and can provide a positive atmosphere for your child while s/he is at school.
- **Get involved in the GLBT community.** Support organizations that take a stand against discrimination. Help your child feel proud of who they are, attend meetings and celebrations with them to show your support.

### Key Resources/Links

- Resource for parents whose child has recently come out to them:  
<http://www.bidstrup.com/parents.htm>  
The author of this site is willing to speak directly with parents regarding GLBT issues.
- Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays: PFLAG has dedicated itself to provide support, education, and advocacy for GLBT individuals and those close to them.  
[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)
- Brochure for parents of GLBT Youth includes commonly asked questions, addresses concerns that many parents have, stories from other parents, as well as positive religious outlooks on homosexuality: [www.outproud.org/brochure\\_for\\_parents.html](http://www.outproud.org/brochure_for_parents.html)
- This site has useful information including common myths, and statistics regarding GLBT individuals.  
[www.gayfamilysupport.com](http://www.gayfamilysupport.com)
- <http://members.tripod.com/~twood/guide.html> is a resource guide for different strategies to keep schools safe for GLBT students.
- <http://www.lambda.org/youth.htm> is a website designed specifically for GLBT youth. It includes information about how to handle bullying and discrimination as well as safe places and activities for GLBT youth.

*\*Developed by the Center for School Mental Health (<http://csmh.umaryland.edu>) in collaboration with the Maryland School Mental Health Alliance (<http://www.msmha.org>).*