



REMEMBER

- Most young people don't believe they are 'choosing' a sexual identity any more than they have chosen their eye colour. They feel it's just who they are. Understanding this perspective can help us recognize how confusing and hurtful it can be when a youth worker's approval seems to be based in them changing that identity.
- A student's questions (or even experiences/ experimentation) are often part of identity exploration which is part of adolescent development. With all the information available, it makes sense that they would want to explore sexuality as part of discovering who they really are. Having a trusted sounding board for this exploration helps them discover and navigate the questions for which they are seeking answers.
- We need to embrace God's process rather than set our own preferred course. Teens often need to find a sense of belonging before they will consider believing. If they are a believer already, we need to trust the Holy Spirit to lead, shape and refine them in the same way as he does with us." It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict, it is God's job to judge, and it is my job to love." (Billy Graham)



RECOGNIZE

- 11% of male/18% of female students identify themselves as bisexual or unsure of their sexual orientation; 1% identify as trans.
- We need to recognize the extreme level of vulnerability these youth have:
 - ▶ LGBT kids are 14 times more likely to attempt suicide
 - ▶ LGBT kids are 190% more likely to abuse substances
 - ▶ Almost 40% report to having extremely low self esteem
 - ▶ 40% have been sexually abused; 61% have been physically abused.
 - ▶ Nearly 1 in 5 have been physically assaulted at school in the past year.
- Young people are exploring newly popular orientations such as intersex, asexual, and pansexual in their search for identity. Many feel the freedom to move around on the sexuality spectrum rather than declaring one identity.
- The word "homosexual" is seen and felt as a negative and judgemental label. Teens will guide you in respectful language if you ask them. Learning and using appropriate words builds trust and respect.
- Gen Z is highly empathetic and supportive of the LGBTQ+ community and quick to mistrust the hearts of those who are not. The human rights issues of this community can not be ignored by those wanting a voice in the lives of youth.
- Open and exploratory conversations without any coercion best represent the example of Jesus and make space for God's beautiful gift of freedom.



RESPOND

- **Manage your tension.** Often our poor responses come out of our own discomfort. This isn't about you and how you feel - it's about them. Focus on listening and understanding. Don't avoid conversation around things like same sex romance and diverse sexuality. They need a place to process. Be that place.
- **Pay attention to words.** Ask the young person how they feel about all the labels and terms around sexually and then ask them about the journey toward deciding how and why they use the terms they do when describing themselves. Consider using the pronoun they use for themselves as an act of hospitality. This communicates that you care about what they care about.
- **Be a safe place.** Don't let declarations about sexuality change anything about the way you relate to them. Put the focus on relationship, on trust and on meeting them where they're at. Ask them to help you learn what it would look like to be an adult they could trust and apologize when you don't get it right. Learn to love without harm.
- **Stand with them.** Don't allow those around the youth to speak negatively or jokingly about sexual and gender minorities. Protect them from the injury of words and actions directed toward them or toward the community they feel identified with.
- **Explore identity, not just sexuality.** Ask them what other parts of "who they are" they are exploring. Continue telling them what you see forming within them in terms of gifts, abilities, interests. Notice the places you see that they are made in the image of God - whether they believe in him or not yet - and tell them.



RESOURCES

itspronouncedmetrosexual.com - An informative website to help understand terms and definitions.

Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministry - A helpful book by Mark A. Yarhouse.

www.centerforfaith.com - The Centre for Faith, Sexuality & Gender offers tools for journeying alongside those questioning sexuality.

www.sexualidentityinstitute.org - Research & articles from a faith-based perspective.

vimeo.com/121699242 - A video by Christopher Yuan focusing on patiently meeting people where they're at.