

# Different in More Ways Than One.

## Providing Guidance for Teenagers on Their Way to Identity, Sexuality and Respect

### 6 Sexualities

- <Antonio> *This is a chat for young gays and lesbians, right?*
- <Almira> *Hi Antonio, nice to meet you. Yes you're right. Where do you come from?*
- <Antonio> *Lady, never give out such info in a chat. \*stern\* I live in Italy.*
- <Almira> *And I in Germany. There are also people from other European countries.*
- <Antonio> *Have you been here long?*
- <Almira> *Yep.*
- <Mark> *Hello there everyone*
- <Koray> *I'm also new to this chat, hi.*
- <Elsa> *Hi guys 😊*
- <Mark> *How are you Elsa? Is everything okay with Chloé, I miss her*
- <Antonio> *A big hello, especially for Koray ;-)*
- <Koray> *Lonely greetings, likewise*
- <Elsa> *Chloé's still not OK, but I'm slowly getting better*
- <Mark> *Sorry for the others, but I must chat with Elsa for a while – if it bothers you we'll retreat to the whisper corner, okay?*
- <Almira> *I'm listening with great interest*
- <Koray> *Joining in*
- <Antonio> *Have got a thousand questions, am sitting on tenterhooks, but I'll be patient ;-)*
- <Mark> *I'm happy to hear that. Elsa, did you get anything out of the counselling?*
- <Elsa> *Yes, the woman is really great. She's been very helpful. I hope that Chloé will come today, then we could decide together how to help her. That would be good. I'm really not feeling as helpless as a few weeks ago. How are you Almira?*

to be continued on page 8 and 9

# Framework

## First of all

The question of what exactly the difference between gay sex and straight sex is gets often asked. There is a lot of curiosity about the subject. Homosexuality is often reduced to its sexual aspects. People are curious what lesbian women do with each other in bed and why gay men seem to be very sexual beings. The reason is that most people have a fixed idea about sex in their head. It is usually a heterosexual framework of what sexuality is. You learn that as you grow up. Other forms of experiencing sexuality are not in that logical framework and are easily perceived as strange or perverse.

In many cultures, even today sexuality is a taboo. It is something you do in the privacy of your bedroom or for the purpose of reproduction. It is not something you talk about unless it is to joke around. If sexuality is a difficult subject to discuss, sexual diversity is even more difficult. Because there isn't the purpose of reproduction, some people reduce non heterosexual sex to "perversity". Sexuality is often linked to shame, even in the current Western society which is perceived often as "sexualised" due to many TV programs, magazines etc that assume an open attitude towards sex. But the link with sin is, in every culture, easily made.

Sexuality is dealt with differently in the multitude of cultures and nations on Earth. Current sex education curriculum identifies four functions of sexuality: 1. it provides lust and is an important motor in the reproduction of human life, 2. it can deepen relationships and is a code of intimate communication, 3. it plays an important role in the development of our identity because by experiencing sexuality, our identity as man or woman is confirmed (and we, in turn, confirm others), 4. it can enrich our lives on different levels. For instance, a sexual relationship can result in the conception of a child, or may also lead to other forms of creation (e.g. a house, a book, or another common project). These four functions of sexuality can be identified in relationships between two men, two women or a man and a woman.

## Basic information

The actual difference between gay sex, lesbian sex and straight sex is not easy to explain. So many people, so many ways of having sex. The traditional penetrative sex between a man and a woman can also take place between two men or two women. Two women can use fingers, vibrators or dildos and two men can have anal and oral intercourse. These are just examples. The fact that gays and lesbians often have penetrative sex has got nothing to do with the "lack" of a penis or vagina, as is often suggested. It has got to do with wanting to feel close to each other and lusting after each other. The only difference with heterosexuals is that having sex can't in itself lead to children. Gays and lesbians have to protect themselves against STIs and HIV, but not against pregnancy. Aside from penetrative sex, all other forms of sexuality exist between gays and lesbians as well.

Generally speaking, gay men are more likely to have sex with more numerous partners than lesbians. This difference doesn't have so much to do with a difference between gay people and straight people, but with differences between men and women and how they experience sexuality. For most women (straight or lesbian), sexuality is more connected to intimacy than for men. Men are more capable of having sex for its own sake than women. This is a difference in gender, not in sexual preference. So if two men or two women have sex with each other the way they experience that sexuality is either "female" or "male" for both partners. In other words, in gay or lesbian sex there is a doubling of male and female sexual experience. And that is specific to gay and lesbian sex about it. So gay men are more likely to have sex with different partners because men are more likely to separate sex from intimacy. Similarly, two lesbians are more likely to be monogamous because women are more likely to want a combination of sex and intimacy. However, bear in mind that there is always a large scale of different behaviour within each sex.

Explaining differences from this gender point of view and not from a gay/straight point of view also makes it easier for heterosexual professionals to deal with questions about gay and lesbian sexuality, because most people can imagine and/or know that there is a difference in the way men and women experience sex, whether they are gay, lesbian or straight.

### **What does this mean for me?**

The ability to even speak about sexuality is the key to improvement. Sexuality is a difficult subject to talk about. It makes everybody vulnerable, because it is an intimate part of life. People are also afraid that if they speak openly or teach about sex in general, others might think that they are talking about their own personal sex life. At the same time young people are experimenting with sexualities and are often very outspoken about sexuality. So it is a subject that should not be ignored because of the taboo. It is a daily reality in most young people's lives.

For all young people, regardless of whether they define themselves as homo-, bi- or heterosexual, it is important to be empowered and to have guidance as they become acquainted with themselves and discover their bodies and sexuality. For those adolescents who have erotic thoughts or feelings for partners of the same sex, support is even more important because their attraction for same-sex partners is normally frowned upon by important social groups.

- When talking about sexuality, the possibility of same-sex experiences is often forgotten or is only briefly mentioned out of political correctness. When speaking about love, sexuality, or partnership, in general, you should also mention the same-sex option in such a way as to make it self-evident that same-sex contacts are an equal and legitimate manner of expressing feelings and/or way of living together among others. Give positive signals to your surroundings that you judge tenderness or erotic relationships between same-sex partners to be of equal value as those relationships between a woman and a man.
- Make sure you are aware of your own vulnerabilities towards (homo)sexuality and try to have a clear picture of how you value your own sexual experiences. Talking about sexuality can be a matter of asking questions.
- Provide information in the form of brochures or leaflets where youngsters can find supplementary information if they have questions regarding sexuality or the addresses of counselling institutions if they feel the need to talk about problems. Be sure that there are also addresses for gays, lesbians and bisexual teens.

# Education

## **Bear in mind**

Before you start teaching your class about homosexuality and sexuality in general, it is important to consider several aspects of sexuality yourself. Young boys and girls can be very focused on sexuality, especially during puberty. They tend to think in very black-and-white terms; things are either good or bad. Remember that talking about sexualities requires authenticity and intimacy, so be prepared to be asked personal questions about your own experiences and views. Take the time in advance to think about what information you wish to share and what you do not. You have a right to protect your private sphere just as much as the students have.

To prepare yourself for the sensitive topic of sexuality you can ask yourself the following questions:

- What were you taught about (homo) sexuality, at home and at school?
- What do you personally associate with gay sex and with lesbian sex? What are your prejudices when it comes to sex between two men or sex between two women?
- When were your first sexual experiences? Do you consider them positive or negative?
- Have you had sexual experiences with the same sex? How do you consider them?
- Which place do you give to sexuality in homosexual identities?
- What do you personally consider as an “appropriate” age for young people to have their first sexual experiences?

# Education

## Tools

### General remarks

Sex education should not be restricted to biological facts but should also mention emotions. You can gain access to the subject through literature, social sciences (history) or the arts (music, painting, etc.). Try to teach as a team with a colleague of the opposite sex, at least part of the time, and separate the boys and girls if you have the impression that the students don't dare to speak openly in front of each other. After they have spent some time working apart, bring them back together in one group and let the pupils tell each other what they talked about and how they liked working separately.

When discussing sexualities, it is important to include heterosexuality and homosexuality at the same time and not to rank one better than the other. Since young people feel insecure about sexuality, they often talk about it in a very provocative manner. When dealing with this subject, refer to concrete examples and touch on the experiences that the young people have had so far. The reflection on their interests and fears is a part of their sexual experiences, and it is important to remember that everyone has had experiences, not only those who have already had a sexual relationship.

It might be useful to involve lesbian and gay guest speakers, for instance peer projects that offer sex education (see References), but make sure that you do not pass the topic of homosexuality completely on to someone else. The young people could see this as a signal that you avoid treating homosexuality and that you feel embarrassed about it.

### Carousel Game

**Aim:** To overcome shame and to encourage youngsters to talk about sexuality.

**Method:** Write 25 questions about sex on cards. Make as many sets of these cards as there are pupils.

The questions should be varied: some should ask for facts and some for opinions, ranging from very simple to quite difficult and ranging from very impersonal to very personal. Be sure to include a good number of questions about homosexuality.

Put your students in two's on chairs opposite each other. The chairs should be in a circle or row. Explain the game to the young people: "Each person gets a pack of 25 questions about relationships and sexuality. Please read the first question before you ask it to your partner. Decide if you would like to answer it yourself. If you would not, put the card back in the pack and read the next question. When you find a question that you would answer yourself, read it out to your discussion partner. The partners should not answer right away; they also get the chance to decide if they want to answer the question or not. If not, they say: 'next question'. If they do, they go ahead and answer the question. After one question is answered, the two people swap roles. Now the second partner looks for a question and the first one passes or answers. This goes on until I say 'shift!' I will do this every five minutes. After the shift, everyone sitting in the inner circle (or in a row) will move one place to the right. Then we go on looking for questions with our two new discussion partners." After about half an hour or 5 shifts, stop the game. Ask the pupils how they experienced the game. Was it fun, difficult or both? Can they say something about why they chose not to answer some questions? Be careful to respect all the reasons teenagers might have for this, shame should not become something to be ashamed of!

**Please note:** During the game, take care that the participants' enthusiasm does not overtake them in such a way that they lose their personal limits. In groups where cultural norms make it difficult for women to talk openly about sex with men, consider doing this game in same-sex sub-groups. An extension of this game could be to ask the girls' group to formulate questions to

the boys and vice-versa. Then, a representative of the girls reads out the group's questions to the boys. The boys retreat and answer the questions as a group. Afterwards, one of them reads out their group's answer. In this way, less attention is placed on the individual, which should circumvent some feelings of shame, while the students can still satisfy their curiosity about how the other sex thinks about important questions.

## **Sex Education and Homosexuality**

**Aim:** To open up a discussion about homosexuality within sex education; to encourage participation of the pupils in the school programme.

**Method:** This exercise has three steps. Tell the pupils you want their input in developing better sex education lessons. The first step is to ask the teenagers where they are currently getting their information and opinions about sex. If they only reply by giving factual information (e.g. that you should use a condom), then stress that you would also like to know who helps them form their opinions and feelings about sexual issues. The second step is to focus on their needs for sex education in school. Here too, take care that they do not limit their needs to 'neutral' facts. The third step is to ask how the school should deal with sex education aspects that might be different for minorities. If they don't understand this, give examples from the intercultural context (special needs for girls, boys, specific facts and norms in different cultures) and from sexual minorities (gays, bisexuals, lesbians, transsexuals). If the pupils ask for specific attention to intercultural issues but would like to skip over or pay no attention to the issue of sexual minorities, ask them why and where minorities should get alternative information, if the school does not provide this.

**Please note:** This exercise will work best in schools that are already paying attention to the larger social situation. If the school is only focusing on cognitive results, elaborating the discussion from facts to opinions and personal growth will be difficult. Be sure that you take the final step; together with your fellow educators, try to find ways to integrate the results of the discussions so as to improve the sex education curriculum, otherwise you are not taking your pupils' input seriously.

## **From Discrimination to Sexuality**

**Aim:** To open up a discussion about homosexuality without focusing on sex.

**Method:** This exercise has three steps. The first step is to ask the young people if they can give some examples of discrimination. In an intercultural group, racist examples will probably come up more easily. The second step is to steer the discussion towards gender. Ask for example: "You mention examples of discrimination by people who really don't know each other very well. Is there discrimination as well between people who know each other, like within relationships?" This question will likely bring up examples like the lack of power balance in relationships and the different expectations of men and women. The third step is to steer the discussion towards diversity in relationships. For example you can ask the pupils: "Can such problems be solved by reorganising a relationship?" and "Do you know of examples of 'other' kinds of relationships? How do you think these problems are solved within a lesbian or gay relationship?"

**Please note:** This exercise demands good discussion skills from the educator; you have to listen closely to the students and adapt to their needs while at the same time nudging and coaxing the discussion in a certain direction. Because this process cannot be planned very well, this might take some time. Schedule at least 1 hour for this discussion.

# Education

## F.A.Q.s (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the F.A.Q.s for the counselling and health care sector.

### **Is it true that homosexual behaviour exists among animals?**

Researchers have observed homosexual behavior in more than 470 species of animals (chimpanzees, dolphins, swallows, butterflies, amphibians, reptiles, fishes and domestic animals like cows, sheep, pigs, rabbits, horses, dogs and cats). It is interesting that sexuality among animals does not only serve for reproduction but also can have social functions. Many animals are sexually active outside the rutting season and are able to feel lust while having sex. Monkeys demonstrate different types of sexual practices, including fellatio. Pairs of male black swans are very successful at rearing the next generation. During the summer period, killer whales spend 10% of their time in homosexual activities. Thirteen species of lizards in the American south-west build exclusive female populations and are able to reproduce on their own. For further information, consult the references listed in the literature section.

### **I sometimes hear my Arabic-speaking students insult each other with the word "zamel".**

#### **This seems to be a sexual insult. What does this mean?**

You are right. "Zamel" is an derogative word for a man who takes the passive role when having sex with another man (the same aspect is described by the Turkish word "ibne"). The word refers to the sin of "liwati" which is to be "buggered" (to have anal sex as a "passive" partner). In many cultures, it is considered shameful for an adult man to be "passive" during anal sex, but this is not the case for the man who takes the active role. In Muslim cultures, the concept of an equal relationship between men does not exist, so uneducated people equate "liwat" with "homosexuality" and 'zamel" with "homosexual". A fine-tuned discussion about definitions and differing values in cultures is necessary to explain and explore cross-cultural opinions about same-sex relationships and sexuality.

### **Who is the "man" and who is the "woman" in a gay or lesbian relationship?**

The link between gender and sexual behaviour does exist but be careful not to reinforce stereotypes! Homosexuality is often talked about as a strange, animal or brutish phenomenon between men. Male sex is said to be very "hard" or "dirty" while sexuality between two women is, in general, rarely talked about or it is said to be very soft, sweet and "vanilla". This is partly true, but be careful not to generalise. Refer to the whole range of sexual behaviour in men and women and not only to the standard. Stereotypical images make it difficult for everyone to discover his or her individual sexuality. Teenagers who are insecure about their sexuality tend to look too closely at statistical norms and do not allow themselves or others to deviate too far from these norms.

### **Do all gays like anal sex and does it hurt?**

Anal intercourse is not exclusively practiced by gay men. Some straight people and even lesbians do it as well if they feel comfortable with it. The anal region is very sensitive and can provide pleasure (especially for men if the prostate gland is gently touched). There are many gay men who don't like anal intercourse at all. Some of them try it twice or more often in order to find out if they feel stimulation through it, or use other techniques instead. It is the same as with vaginal penetration, which can also hurt especially if it is practiced in a crude way and the partners don't pay attention. It is also recommended to use a certified condom and lots of water-based lubricant in order to protect each other from STIs and HIV.

<Almira> *The advisor of the support group has spoken with my parents. Now they know that I'm a lesbian and they have accepted it without making a big fuss. The main thing is that they won't lose me. But it's still a long way to go.*

<Elsa> *Sure. I think of you. All the best.*

<Almira> *thx*

<Koray> *I don't understand it all, but I wish you all the best ;-) What questions do you have? @Antonio*

<Antonio> *oops – alright then: I'll spill it all out...*

<Antonio> *I've been living for the last two years with a boy, and I really love him...*

<Mark> *Best of luck*

<Koray> *oh if only I could have such a relationship \*blush\**

<Antonio> *Be patient guys, the big surprise is on its way \*;-)\**

<Antonio> *I have been extremely attracted to a girl for the past six months. At first I didn't want to believe it. Admitting to myself that I'm gay was hard enough. And now I have to redefine everything from the start, I just don't know how to do it.*

<Koray> *Are you absolutely sure about that?*

<Antonio> *Yes, absolutely 😊*

<Elsa> *And you still live with your boyfriend?*

<Antonio> *Yes, of course, I love him as well.*

<Mark> *Does your friend know about your feelings for her?*

<Antonio> *To be honest, no.*

<Mark> *Not good, I'd say*

<Elsa> *Does she know about him?*

<Antonio> *Yes, she knows everything*

<Koray> *So what are you going to do?*

<Antonio> *If I only knew... I thought, perhaps you'd have an idea???*

<Mark> *You should speak to your friend*

<Almira> *This here is a chat in which we come together without any counselling. But there are chats – may be also in Italy, I don't really know – in which advisors take part, who could help you.*

<Antonio> *The worst part of it is I don't know if I should stay with my boyfriend any more.*

<Koray> *I understand. I'd be happy if I had fallen in love with a girl – but it looks as though I am hundred percent gay*

<Mark> *Same here – I just don't feel anything for girls 😊*

<Elsa> *I can't understand Mark. I find that only girls are wonderful :-)*

<Almira> *In solidarity with Elsa*

<Antonio> *So what should I tell my boyfriend?*

<Koray> *What about the truth?*

<Antonio> *Yeah, but what's the truth?*

<Mark> *That you're probably bisexual, isn't it?*

<Elsa> *It may sound old-fashioned, but I don't trust people who sleep with blokes and girls at the same time.*

to be continued

<Antonio> *Why not?*  
<Elsa> *They want to have it all – without having to decide – I think that's cowardly*  
<Mark> *Hey Elsa, why that?*  
<Almira> *I understand Elsa – if Julie suddenly came to me saying that she'd fallen in love with a sweet young boy, I'd dump her immediately – and I'd despair at the thought*  
<Koray> *If I personally fell in love with a girl I think it would be okay \*embarrassed grin\* but if my friend did... no way!*  
<Mark> *That's right Antonio. What would you say if your friend came to you and told you a thing like that about himself?*  
<Antonio> *Sorry, I have to think about all this. I'll be back later. Thx and Bye*  
<Antonio> *Hello, I'm back again*  
<Aaron> *Hello Antonio 😊*  
<Koray> *What have you got to, Antonio, and how are you ?*  
<Antonio> *I have spoken with Paolo and told him everything*  
Mark> *Holding my breath*  
<Koray> *Tell us about it*  
<Antonio> *Like Almira predicted, he's left me*  
<Mark> *WHAT? Oh, I'm so sorry, Antonio, really*  
<Aaron> *What happened? \*please explain\**  
<Antonio> *I'm probably bisexual: I've been attracted to this girl for a long time, but my boyfriend doesn't accept it.*  
<Aaron> *I'm sitting in front of the monitor and can only shake my head. What really matters is that two people truly love each other, isn't it?*  
<Antonio> *But in my case it's more like three people.*  
<Aaron> *What was the problem? Was it because you told him too late, or because it was a woman that Paolo couldn't accept it?*  
<Antonio> *Everything I think*  
<Julie> *Almira told me about you. The most important thing for me is that everything always be open and that I be informed. Then I can cope with quite a lot fairly well.*  
<Antonio> *That's so easy to say, Julie. But I was totally upset, I couldn't find words for my feelings.*  
<Julie> *If Almira were to fall in love with a boy I would expect her to tell me about it before starting anything with him.*  
<Antonio> *Yeah, right. If only I hadn't started anything with that girl. And what would you do after that, Julie?*  
<Julie> *We would then want to decide together how to create a situation in which all involved would feel secure.*  
<Antonio> *And do you really think that it would work?*  
<Julie> *If there's anything that works at all, then that's the way!*  
<Aaron> *I am almost certain that all people basically have the capacity to fall in love with men as well as women. It's just that there is in every person a strong distinction between the two tendencies. There's nothing to condemn, either way. I think it's really a good thing to be able to love different persons. I admire your courage, Antonio.*  
<Julie> *Let's keep this in mind as a utopia, and let's help each other on the way there!!*  
<Antonio> *Agreed. Thx to you all, guys!*

the end

# Counselling and Health Care

## Bear in mind

If same-sex lifestyles are a concern in counselling settings, it is important to be aware of many dimensions, including the cultural/historical context. The rise of the middle-class family in Western cultures coincided with the development of specific views on sex roles, love and sexuality. At the same time, the medical term of “homosexuality” was invented to distinguish same-sex behaviour differing from the heterosexual norm and to define it as an illness. Gay and lesbian activists prefer the use of the terms “gay” and “lesbian” to describe their own sexuality. They strive for recognition and acceptance of their claim that their multiple lifestyles involve much more than just the definitions outsiders give of their sexual behaviour.

The communication in counselling settings should not be disturbed. One competence a counsellor needs to have is authenticity, since the counsellor’s own convictions will influence the counselling process. The counsellor’s own positive competences, but also his or her doubts, unanswered questions and “blind spots”, should be the subjects of reflection among colleagues and in supervision. Counsellors should take time to think about the subject of same-sex lifestyles and ask themselves how their own views could have a direct influence on the counselling process.

- What did you learn about same-sex lifestyles in your professional education?
- What do you know about same-sex lifestyles and sexual relationships between men or women? Where do you know this from and with whom do you exchange your knowledge?
- What attitude do you have towards women who have relationships and sex with women? To what extent do these attitudes differ from those you have towards men who have relationships and sex with men?
- Have you had same-sex experiences in your youth as part of your sexual development? How do you judge those experiences today?
- What meaning or value do you think sexuality has for the identity of a lesbian woman? What meaning or value do you think sexuality has for a gay man?
- What experience do you have of counselling lesbian and gay clients?
- Do you think that lesbian and gay clients would prefer to work with a lesbian or gay counsellor? If so, in what way do you think the identity of a lesbian or gay counsellor will affect the counselling setting or process? If not, what would help the counselling process if the counsellor is not gay or lesbian?

# Counselling and Health Care

## Tools

### My Body

**Aim:** An essential part of a man or woman's identity is the image he or she has of his or her own body and the perception and satisfaction of one's own physical needs. The body is the basis of an individual's feelings, thoughts and actions. During puberty, sexual aspects need to be integrated into one's identity. The exercise helps young people become more sensitive to their own feelings and self-image.

**Method:** Questions for self-reflection

- What role does clothing play for me? What about undressing or being naked?
- How do I react to images of men/ women, gays/ lesbians that I see in public?
- What part of my body do I find the most beautiful?
- What parts of my body are of special importance to me?
- Which parts of my body do I dislike? How do I explain this to myself? How do I handle my feelings?
- What did I learn from my mother and father about how to consider my body? What did I learn from them about nakedness and sexuality?
- How did my mother and father react to my outer appearance? What helped me when I was growing up? What hindered my development?
- Which parts of my body do I connect to lust/ happiness/pain? How do I care for/treat them?
- How has my relationship to my body developed: in my childhood, in puberty, today?

**Please note:** This exercise can be used by either the client or by the counsellor as a tool for self-reflection. It is helpful to use this method between two sessions as a kind of homework assignment. As the reflection process continues, it is likely that the client will begin to see how the attitudes they learned from their family conflict with their own individual values. For gays and lesbians, this crisis is difficult for two reasons: first, because they lack positive role models and second, because it becomes necessary for them to keep at a distance from the dominant heterosexual norm in order to build up their own identity which, in the beginning, is a negative or anti-identification (non-heterosexual).

### Sexuality Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow

**Aim:** To help the clients reflect on their past, to help them become aware of their current personal assessment and to express their wishes for the future.

**Method:** You will need one poster-sized paper, one A4 sheet, coloured marker pens, scissors and glue.

The client divides the poster paper into three equal parts by using vertical lines. The first step is to reflect on the following questions: How did I see my sexuality during puberty? How do I see it today? How would I like to see it in the future? One section of the poster is reserved for each question. Let the client write down the answers in their own words. Next, have the client cut off the part of the poster which deals with their wishes for the future. The A4 sheet is then glued between this cut piece and the leftover part of the poster paper (making a link between the present and the future). The answers to the following questions are written on the poster:

- If I think about the future of my sexuality and the form I want it to take, what prevents me from realising this vision?
- What or who could help me to overcome these obstacles?
- Which one of my wishes for the future form of my sexuality has already come true?
- Who could support me in further realising my future vision?

Please note: This method helps the counsellor to get information about the client's view on his or her sexuality. It also clarifies the client's vision of their future and helps them identify the resources available to them to achieve this vision. Based on this information, some aims for future counselling sessions can be defined. In addition, the counsellor can estimate how much they can and want to continue working on the issue of the client's sexuality.

### **Three-Chairs-Exercise**

**Aim:** To help the client reflect on their sexuality; to find out how the client judges his or her own current approach to living with their sexuality.

**Method:** In addition to the client's and the counsellor's chairs, three other chairs are needed. As a first step the client is asked to choose three important persons in their life, one in their family, one among their friends with whom they have not had a sexual relationship and one among their partners with whom they have had a sexual relationship. The names of these partners are written on a sheet and placed one on each of the three chairs. In the second step, the client is asked to stand behind each chair for five minutes and to answer the following question: "If I asked this person to say what they thought about how you live with your sexuality and how satisfied you are with your approach, what would they say?"

**Please note:** For the exercise to work, the client must be willing to get intensely involved with their own sexuality. By changing perspectives, reflecting on one's own sexuality becomes easier. Wanted and unwanted behaviour, attitudes and judgements are more easily identified. Once the exercise is completed, the client should have a better idea of how to improve the way he or she lives with his or her sexuality. He or she should also begin to identify steps to realise these changes.

# Counselling and Health Care

## F.A.Q.s (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the F.A.Q.s for the education sector.

### **How can I react if a client is dismayed by his or her need to identify him or herself 100% within a certain category of sexual orientation?**

People who define themselves as heterosexuals can also have same-sex fantasies or experiences. Similarly, gays or lesbians can have experiences with the other sex. As such, you can help people avoid becoming obsessed with defining their sexual orientation too precisely – support them to think positively if they feel love or attraction for their fellow human beings and encourage them to express these feelings in an appropriate way. Bring more flexibility into sexual categories. The boundaries between hetero-, homo- and bisexuality are fluid. These categories were not invented by “Nature”, but rather by men, and as late as the 19th century. The categories are therefore “artificial” and can be changed if they are no longer suitable to our current needs. One doesn’t have to conform to these definitions simply because they exist. In fact, the opposite is true: definitions need to change in order to fit in with our sexual behaviour and identity.

In particular, people who grew up within a fundamentalist background need help in learning to accept different (often “strange”) views about sexual orientation that seem to be incoherent with sexual behaviour. For example, if a person has sexual relations with both sexes, it is not always useful to insist on identifying this person as bisexual. There are people who identify as heterosexual and have sex with partners of the same sex. There are also people who define themselves as homosexual but have erotic experiences with partners of the opposite sex. You should focus more on supporting them without stressing the need for clear identification. Help them to enjoy the inconsistency of human life.

### **How should I react if a client who wants to try sex with a same-sex partner tells me that he/she is afraid of specific sexual practices?**

Sexuality between two women or two men can be satisfying in multiple ways. Sexual practices are not fixed in a certain programme that has to be followed. Neither heterosexual nor homosexual sex consists of an obligatory set of practices. People of both orientations can experience more or less the same range of practices with or without penetration but nobody can be forced to like every practice. Male-to-male sex is not limited to anal or oral penetration. Similarly, two women can decide on their own if they want anal or vaginal penetration or not. The types of practices or positions that two men or two women want to experience have to be negotiated between them both in a fair and equal partnership, just as between a man and a woman.

### **How can two women have real sex without a penis?**

This is a question often asked by young people. The stereotypical image of penetrative sex with a penis in a vagina is persistent. Boys especially find it very hard to imagine that sex can exist without the insertion of a penis into a vagina. Penetrative sex is not limited to straight sex. Two women can be turned on by penetrative sex. Not because they “lack a penis” but because feeling someone inside you is arousing. On the other hand, penetrative sex is not the only way to experience good sex. Oral or manual stimulation can give just as much pleasure. There is a variety of possibilities and it is a personal choice.

“It annoys me when homosexuality is reduced to its sexual aspects – as if it all were just about sex. Like ‘what do lesbians do with each other in bed?’ I think a lot of people have a set of stereotypical fantasies on what “lesbian sex” is. But sexuality is so much more and so very different for each person...”

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on Their Way to Identity, Sexuality  
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