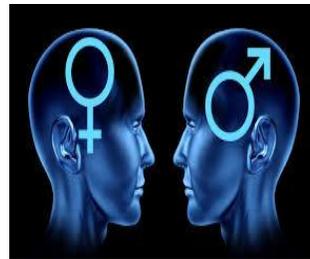


SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexuality is an important part of who we are as humans. Beyond the ability to reproduce, sexuality also defines how we see ourselves and how we physically relate to others. Sexual Orientation is a term used to refer to a person's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to individuals of a particular gender (male or female).



Sexual Orientation Generally Is Divided Into Three Categories:

- **Heterosexual:** attracted to individuals of the opposite sex
- **Bisexual:** attracted to members of either sex
- **Homosexual:** attracted to individuals of one's own sex

Sexual orientation involves a person's feelings and sense of identity; it may or may not be evident in the person's appearance or behavior. People may have attractions to people of the same or opposite sex, but may elect not to act on these feelings. For example, a bisexual may choose to have a monogamous (one partner) relationship with one gender and, therefore, elect not to act on the attraction to the other gender.

Why Are Some People Homosexual or Bisexual?

Most scientists today agree that sexual orientation (including homosexuality and bisexuality) is the result of a combination of environmental, emotional, hormonal, and biological factors. In other words, there are many factors that contribute to a person's sexual orientation, and the factors may be different for different people.

However, homosexuality and bisexuality are not caused by the way a child was reared by his or her parents, or by having a sexual experience with someone of the same sex when the person was young. Also, being homosexual or bisexual does not mean the person is mentally ill or abnormal in some way, although there may be social problems that result from prejudicial attitudes or misinformation.

How Do People Know Their Sexual Orientation?

For many people, their sexual orientation becomes evident to them during adolescence or young adulthood, and in many cases without any sexual experience. For example, homosexuals become aware that their sexual thoughts and activities focus on people of the same sex. It is possible, however, to have fantasies or to be curious about people of the same sex without being homosexual or bisexual, or choosing to act on these impulses/attractions.

Can a Person's Sexual Orientation Be Changed?

Most experts agree that sexual orientation is not a choice and, therefore, cannot be changed. Some people who are homosexual or bisexual may hide their sexual orientation and live as heterosexuals to avoid prejudice against people who are homosexual and bisexual. They may live as heterosexuals in order to avoid their own moral dilemmas when their sexual orientation is incompatible with their personal beliefs.

Are There Support Groups for People Struggling With Their Sexuality?

Yes. There are a number of different support groups and organizations available to those struggling with sexual orientation. They can help a person develop strategies for dealing with the prejudice associated with homosexuality and the damaging effects of bias and stereotypes.