

Common Myths and Stereotypes About GLBTQ Youth

All marginalized groups of people have myths and stereotypes associated with them, and GLBTQ people are no exception. It's important that child welfare professionals inform their practice with accurate information, not myths and stereotypes. Below are answers to ten of the most common questions about GLBTQ people. For more information, see the bibliography and resource list on pps. 104-105.

Can youth really be gay or lesbian?

Youth workers have probably asked themselves at one time or another, "Is this youth really gay? Is he or she just going through a phase?"

It's possible for a youth to be sure of his or her orientation as young as age 10. Society is gradually becoming more affirming about the experiences of GLBTQ persons, and as a consequence, some GLBTQ youth are coming out at earlier ages.

It is also common for some youth to shift back and forth between identifying as gay, bisexual, and heterosexual. Dealing with the ambiguity of sexual identity makes many adults uncomfortable, but gaining greater comfort with this ambiguity is an issue that youth workers must face.

Are people born GLBTQ?

According to some researchers, preliminary evidence suggests a genetic and biological basis for all sexual orientation. Although some GLBTQ persons recall always knowing they were "different," others do not agree with the "gay from birth" philosophy. Research in this area is very limited.

Is being GLBTQ a choice?

Just as heterosexual people do not "choose" their sexual orientation, most GLBTQ persons do not choose theirs. The only real choice most GLBTQ persons have is whether or not to be open about their orientation.

Can someone be seduced into being GLBTQ?

No. It is simply not possible for someone to be seduced into being gay, any more than a gay or lesbian person could be seduced into being heterosexual.

Do GLBTQ persons recruit others to become gay?

No. What sometimes happens, however, is that a youth who is struggling with issues of a GLBTQ identity meets another GLBTQ youth who is open about his or her identity. The struggling youth then realizes that he or she might be able to come out. This occurrence might make someone believe that the "formerly heterosexual" youth was recruited, but that scenario is not possible or accurate.

Are GLBTQ persons more likely to molest a child?

No. According to researchers, the persons most likely to molest children are heterosexual males.

Is a GLBTQ person someone who was sexually abused as a child?

Although some GLBTQ people—just as some heterosexual people—were sexually abused as children, no evidence suggests that sexual abuse makes someone GLBTQ. We do know that sexual abuse can make a child very confused. Consequently, some youth who have experienced sexual abuse might be categorized as questioning.

Are people gay or lesbian because they have not met the right person of the opposite gender?

No. In fact, many gay men and lesbians have been partners of or married to people of the opposite sex. Being gay or lesbian is not a matter of failing to meet the right person of the opposite sex. It is about finding the right internal sense of fit with a person, usually of the same sex.

Could gay and lesbian people be heterosexual if they tried?

Being gay or lesbian is so condemned by our society that many gay and lesbian people try to pretend to be heterosexual, at least for part of their lives. Some even try for a lifetime, never acting on or acknowledging their gay or lesbian feelings. Others find ways to adapt to their feelings through secret relationships. Still others remain married for years, but ultimately separate or divorce and seek same-sex relationships.

How can you tell if a person is gay or lesbian?

At one time, many people thought that gay and lesbian people were identifiable through stereotypical mannerisms, affectations, dress, and so on, but the only real way to know if someone is gay or lesbian is if the person tells you. Gay men and lesbians are very diverse, and stereotypes cannot confirm sexual orientation.