

PROTECTING our GAY/SSA YOUTH from SUICIDE & OTHER RISKS

Same-sex attraction is complicated. As Elder Oaks has said, "There is so much we don't understand about this subject." But we do know every child needs to feel safe, be surrounded by loving adults, and feel connected to a community. And we know many youth who identify as gay or lesbian, or who have same-sex attraction, are NOT getting this love and support they need. Instead, they are rejected at home, bullied at school, and ostracized in their community.



TERMS

LGBT, SSA or SGA? Q?

The terms we use to describe ourselves or others can be confusing and even controversial. Some people don't like the words Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual. Others don't like the terms Same-Sex Attracted or Same-Gender Attracted.

In this pamphlet, we don't want to be controversial. We allow people to identify themselves and strive to love everyone regardless of the way they identify.

Q is for 'Questioning.' Questioning sexual attraction can be a normal part of adolescence and even adulthood. Families and communities can help by expressing love, acceptance and respect.

According to the American Association of Suicidology, numerous studies show that gay youth are MUCH more likely than other youth to commit suicide. But they also show that being gay is NOT, in itself, a risk factor for suicide or the other challenges! Rather, the risk factor is the way gay youth are treated.

Three Examples:

- Family connectedness, caring adults, and school safety all serve as protective factors from suicide for LGB individuals (Eisenberg and Resnick, 2004).
- LGB young adults who had higher levels of family rejection as adolescents were 8.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to have high levels of depression, [and] 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs . . . (C. Ryan et al., 2009).
- LGB youth living in a "supportive social environment," including their schools and communities, are much less likely to attempt suicide (M. L. Hatzenbuehler, 2011).



In other words, it's clear that what we do as parents, families, and church members—whether we are loving or rejecting—can dramatically affect suicides and other risky behaviors of our youth who are gay or have same-sex attraction!

As we show Christ-like love and acceptance, instead of rejection, we can teach our youth of their own inherent worth. In doing so we can prevent suicides and other high-risk behaviors.

I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" I Nephi 11:17

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Consider the following suggestions. The accompanying quotes (*in italics*) come from the Church's Website, MormonsandGays.org.

- Show love: "*Family members with same-sex attraction need our love and understanding. God loves all his children alike, much more than any of us can comprehend, and expects us to follow.*" (See section on "Love One Another...")
- Be aware of your reactions: "*Initial reactions are critical.... [T]he temptation that people often have is anger or rejection.*" (Elder Christofferson)
- Show support: "*As a church, nobody should be more loving and compassionate. Let us be at the forefront in...expressing love, compassion and outreach. Let's not have families exclude or be disrespectful of those who choose a different lifestyle....*" (Elder Cook)
- "*Do not blame anyone—not yourself, not your parents, not God....*" (God Loveth His Children)
- Have hope: "*Though at times this path will be difficult, there is always hope. Where love is there is hope also.*" (See section on "Hope")
- Be patient: "...[I]t's important ... to begin to talk and begin to listen and to begin to try to understand.... We don't have to resolve everything in a month or a week or a year." (Elder Christofferson)
- Be aware of your language. The way you talk about LGB individuals, especially in front of your children, can show rejection even before a child is aware of his or her same-sex attraction.

- Become informed: *[Bishops] have resources that they haven't had in the past..... There are resources online, there are resources in print.*" (Elder Christofferson)

RESOURCES

The Church's Website is: MormonsandGays.org

- The Family Acceptance Project (FAP) has a booklet specifically for LDS families. It can be downloaded for free or purchased online. <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/publications>
- The American Association of Suicidology has a Fact Sheet on suicidal behavior among LGBT youth. <http://www.suicidology.org/home>
- Several organizations provide resources and support for LDS families and for gay members. To find those that match your goals and needs, start with a Web-search using search terms such as LDS, Mormon, gay, SSA, and LGBT.
- The Trevor Project provides a 24/7 crisis "lifeline" for LGBT or Questioning youth. (866-488-7386) <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

[Questions/feedback: LDShandout@aol.com] [3/29/13]



No one is, or ever could be, excluded from the circle of God's love or the extended arms of His Church, for we are all His beloved sons and daughters.

(God Loveth His Children, p. 15)