

6 Sexualities

Introduction

First of all

Long gone is the time when classical culture considered Eros as the union of spirit and sex, of poetry and carnality.

In most cultures, love is still separated from sex, sexuality is a taboo subject and easily associated with “sin”.

It is something to be done in private and is not talked about, unless when making sex jokes, because it is often linked to shame. This is true also in Western cultures, where TV programs and magazines deal with sex even too often, trivialising it.

If sexuality may be a difficult topic to tackle, talking about “different” sexualities is even more complex. Often, the questions asked about homosexuality exclusively focus on sexual intercourse. There is plenty of curiosity about this. Thus, the lives of people are reduced just to sex, and the affective and relational components are ignored or downplayed.

We are educated in an apparently heterosexual culture, and other forms of sexuality that do not fit into such orientation are easily perceived as strange or perverted.

This view can change when we consider sex as one of the basic ways in which individuals can express themselves to the world and establish an intimate and profound communication with themselves and the other through pleasure. In this perspective, sexual behaviour is a component of one’s identity-building process. Indeed, it is a personal journey in search of the self that goes on and changes over time; it is a knowledge-building experience separated from the reproductive function and from any dichotomy, including the male-female, active-passive, dominance-submission, heterosexuality-homosexuality ones.



Basic information

For LGBT people there are many ways of having sex which, notwithstanding their specific differences, share the common goal of expressing intimacy and finding mutual erotic pleasure in the relationship with the other. The only difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals is that homosexual intercourse cannot lead to procreation. Gays and lesbians still have to protect themselves, not in order to avoid unwanted pregnancies, but rather against Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs).

Studies report that gay men are more likely to have more sex-partners than lesbian women. This difference doesn't have so much to do with a difference between gay people and heterosexual people, but rather with differences between men and women and how they experience their sexuality, based on traditional stereotypical models of "masculinity" and "femininity". For (heterosexual or lesbian) women, sexuality is more connected to affective intimacy, while men are more inclined to have sex just for the sex. Therefore, this is a difference connected to gender, not to sexual orientation. So, if two men or two women have sex, the way they experience that sexuality will be exclusively "male" or exclusively "female". In other words, in gay or lesbian sex there can be a doubling of the male or female experience of sexuality, depending on the stereotypes internalised by each partner. Since men tend to separate sex from intimacy, they will more likely have sex with multiple partners over time, or even during a stable relationship. Similarly, two lesbian women are more likely to be monogamous as women as women seem to prefer a combination of sex and intimacy. However, that also in the lives of homosexual people, there is a large scale of different behaviours, both within stable couples and when looking for a partner.

Explaining differences in sexual behaviour from the gender point of view and not from the sexual orientation one makes it easier teachers, but also for psycho/social/healthcare professionals as well, to LGBT sexuality, because it will be easier for them to empathise with experience of each person, as man or a woman, regardless of his/her sexual orientation.

What does this mean for me?

We have already seen that talking about sexuality is quite difficult in a culture that is still sex phobic. Moreover, our sexual life is part of our intimate sphere, and makes us particularly vulnerable and sensitive when talking about it. Sometimes, even when we are talking about it in general terms, we fear we are disclosing something about our personal life. These statements might seem in contrast with young people's behaviour, as they experiment with sex and are often very outspoken about sexuality, although this might be a sort of self-defence, hiding their embarrassment and, at times, shame.

Therefore, when discussing sex with teens, it is extremely important to address the topic in a professional yet not "aseptic" manner.

All teens, regardless of whether they define themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual persons, need information and guidance as they grow up and explore their body and sexuality. For those adolescents who have erotic thoughts or feelings for same-sex partners, this support may be even more important.

Aspects you may take into account when working with gay, lesbian and bisexual teens, are as follows:

- 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 living together, you could present homosexual sexuality as a natural and legitimate way of expressing feelings and living together with others, just like heterosexual sexuality.
- Try to increase your awareness about your sexual experiences and your vision of (homo-bi) sexuality.
- Provide teens with brochures, leaflets, etc. that contain supplementary information on any type of sexuality and the addresses of counselling institutions where they could go to talk about any sexuality-related problem. Make sure to also include associations for LGBTs.

Education

(Teachers)

Bear in mind

Before starting to talk about homosexuality and sexuality in general in class, it is important to take a few considerations into account. Boys and girls can be very interested in sexuality, especially during puberty. Moreover, they tend to think in terms of black-and-white: things are either good or bad. Remember that talking about sexuality requires authenticity and a certain level of 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 with your students and what information you do not wish to share. Both you and your students have the right to protect your private life. We suggest you consider the following questions to prepare yourself for discussing this sensitive topic with your students:

- What were you taught about (homo-/bi-) sexuality, at home and at school?
- What do you imagine when you think about gay and lesbian sexual behaviour? Do you think you have any prejudice when it comes to sex between two men or two women? What are your prejudices? Can you guess where they come from?
- Have you already had any sexual experience?
- When did you start having your first sexual experiences? Do you consider them as positive or negative?
- Have you had or imagined to have any sexual experience with same-sex partners? If so, how would you define them?
- What do you personally consider as an “appropriate” age for young people to have their first sexual experiences?

Education - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the psycho/social/healthcare professionals

Is it true that homosexual behaviour exists among animals?

Researchers have observed homosexual behaviour in more than 470 species of animals (chimpanzees, dolphins, swallows, butterflies, amphibians, reptiles, fish and domestic animals like cows, sheep, pigs, rabbits, horses, dogs and cats). It is interesting that, in the animal kingdom, sex is not exclusively aimed at reproduction but also can have social functions. Many animals are sexually active outside the mating season and are able to feel pleasure having sex. Monkeys engage in different types of sexual practices, including fellatio. Male black swans pairs are very good parents to their cygnets. During the summer period, killer whales spend 10% of their time in homosexual activities. Thirteen species of lizards in the American Southwest have exclusively female populations that are able to reproduce on their own (*for further information, refer to the references section included in the Crossing Diversity Handbook*).

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 a derogative word for a man who takes the passive role when having sex with another man (the same concept is expressed by the Turkish word "ibne"). The word refers to the sin of "liwati", which is having anal sex as a "passive" partner. In many cultures, it is considered humiliating for an adult man to be "passive" during anal sex, while it is not as reproachable for a man to take an active role. In Muslim cultures, the concept of an equal relationship between two men does not exist, so some people equate "liwat" to "homosexuality" and 'zamel" to "homosexual".

Who plays the male role and who plays the feminine role in gay or lesbian relationships?

Studies show that there are no fixed roles in homosexual couples; the traditional rules and models of heterosexual couples do not apply to same-sex unions. Moreover, even in heterosexual couples there is a wide variety of behaviours which are dealt with only in art and scientific literature. The link between gender and sexual behaviour does exist but be careful not to reinforce stereotypes! Homosexual sexual relations between men are often talked about as bestial or brutish behaviours. Sex between men is said to be very "hard" and "dirty, with reference to anal penetration. In general, sex between two women is rarely talked about, as there is no stereotyped erotic imagination; female homoeroticism is usually said to be a little bit softer and gentler, although equally "disgusting".

The preconceived ideas and prejudice that characterise such stereotypical images make it difficult to investigate and discover one's own sexuality in an autonomous manner. Teenagers who are insecure about their sexuality tend to attach excessive importance to norms and don't allow themselves or others to deviate too far from them.

Do all gays like anal sex? Does it hurt?

Anal intercourse is not exclusively practiced by gay men. Some heterosexuals 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 touched gently). However, there are many gay men who don't like anal intercourse at all. As it happens with vaginal penetration, anal penetration can hurt, especially if it is practiced in a vehement way without thinking that it could hurt. Anyway, it is recommended to use a certified condom and water-based lubricants in order to be protected against STDs and HIV.

Education - Tools

General remarks

Sex education should not be restricted to biological facts but should also address the emotional sphere. You can introduce the topic through literature, social sciences, history or the arts (music, painting, etc.). If you work in tandem with a colleague of the opposite sex, you will be able to present a different gender point of view to the class. Separate boys and girls if you have the impression that it's not easy for the students to speak openly in front of everybody. After they have spent some time working apart, bring them back together in one group and let the teens speak about what they talked about and what they liked about working in separate groups, maybe having them select a "brave" mouth speaker, who can answer the question while others might add some remarks and details. An exchange of "opinions" should then follow.

When discussing sexualities, it is important to include homosexuality by presenting it as one of the expressions of sexuality, one of the possible outcomes of the normal affective development of an individual. Bear in mind that, since teens feel insecure about sexuality, they often talk about it in a very provocative manner.

When introducing the topic of sexuality, it's better to use concrete examples and to have the students reflect on their own interests, preferences and fears.

It might be useful to invite gay and lesbian guest speakers and/or people trained in conducting sex education projects (see Appendix 2 of the Handbook), but make sure that you do not completely delegate the task to someone else. The teens could see this not only as a signal that you are embarrassed by the topic or unable to deal with it, but also as your personal disagreement regarding that topic and, in order to please you, they might not get involved in the activities.

Carousel Game

Aim: overcoming embarrassment and shame and encouraging teens to talk about sexuality.

Method: write 25 questions about sex on a set cards. Prepare one set of cards for each student.

The questions should be varied: some should ask for facts and some for opinions, ranging from very simple to more difficult and from impersonal to personal. Be sure to include a good number of questions about homo/bi-sexuality. Have your students sit in two circles or rows facing each other in pairs.

Explain the game: "Each person gets a pack of 25 questions about relationships and sexuality. Read the question and ask yourselves, first, if you would answer that question. If you would not, put the card back in the pack and take the next card. When you find a question that you would answer yourself, read it to the person sitting in front of you. This person also gets the chance to decide if he/she wants to answer that question or not. If they don't want to answer, they say: 'Next question'. Otherwise, they go ahead and answer the question. After one question is answered, you swap roles and the other person starts asking the questions. This goes on until I will say 'Shift!' I will do this every five minutes. After the shift, everyone sitting in the inner circle (or in one row) will move to the chair on their right. The two new partners will start with the new questions." After about half an hour or five shifts, stop the game.

Ask the students 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, embarrassment should not become something to be ashamed of!

Please note: during the game, participants might get too "carried away"; so, make sure confusion does not prevail, with people laughing and joking, for instance. In groups where cultural norms make it difficult for women to talk openly about sex with men,

consider doing this game in same-sex subgroups.

An extension of this exercise could be to ask the girls' group to ask questions to the boys' group and vice versa. A spokesperson of the girls will read the questions to the boys. The boys discuss the questions as a group and agree on a final answer together, then one of them reads the answers out loud. In this way, attention is placed on the group and not on individuals, so students may express themselves freely without feeling embarrassed and can satisfy their curiosity about how the opposite sex thinks about important issues.

Sex Education and Homosexuality

Aim: to promote discussion about homosexuality within sex education programs

Method: this exercise has three steps. Tell the students you want their input in developing better sex education programs. The first step is asking them what they know about sex and where they are currently getting information about sex. If they only reply by giving normative 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 what they need from school sex education. Here too, take care that they do not just talk about 'neutral' needs (such as more classes dealing with this topic). The third step is to ask how the school should teach sex education in order to take into account cultural minorities. If they don't understand this question, give concrete examples regarding multicultural contexts (e.g. showing that both genders have specific needs, that roles and norms are different in the various cultures) and sexual/gender minorities (gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals). If the students focus on intercultural issues but would like to skip over and ignore the issue of sexual and gender minorities, ask them why and where these minorities may get information on sexuality if the school does not provide them.

Please note: this exercise will work best in schools, associations, groups that encourage learning from experience. If the school or its delegates are only focusing on cognitive results, the shift from the discussion of opinions to personal growth will be more difficult. Be sure that you take the final step: together with your colleagues, discuss on how to use the inputs received from the teens to improve the way you teach sex education!

From Discrimination to Sexuality

Aim: to promote a discussion about sexuality that is not focused on sex.

Method: this exercise has three steps. The first step is to ask the teens if they can give some examples of discrimination. In multicultural groups, racist examples will usually come up. The second step is to steer the discussion towards gender. Ask for example: "You mentioned 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 well, like discrimination within romantic relationships?". This question will likely lead the teens to bring up examples like intimate partner violence 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 students: "Can such problems be solved by reorganising the relationship?" and "Do you know of examples of 'other' kinds of romantic relationships? How do you think these problems change in a gay or lesbian relationship?".

Please note: this exercise requires that teachers have good discussion skills. You have to listen closely to the students and adapt to their needs, while at the same time steering the discussion towards a specific direction. Of course, this process cannot be planned ahead in detail – just schedule at least one and a half hour for this exercise.

A STORY...



<Antonio> I am in the right chat, the one for young gays and lesbians, right?

<Almira> Hi Antonio, nice to meet you. Yes you're in the right chat. Where do you come from?

<Antonio> Young lady, never give out this kind of info in a chat! :-) I live in Italy.

<Almira> And I live in Germany. Here there are also people from other European countries.

<Antonio> So you have been on this chat for a long time?

<Almira> Yes.

<Mark> Hello everyone.

<Koray> I'm also new here, good morning.

<Elsa> Hi guys.

<Mark> How are you Elsa? Is everything okay with Chloé, I miss her.

<Antonio> A warm hello, especially for Koray :-)

<Koray> Likewise.

<Elsa> Chloé's still not OK, but I'm slowly getting better.

<Mark> Sorry guys, but I must chat with Elsa for a while – if it bothers you, we'll retreat to the whisper corner, okay?

<Almira> I'm interested.

<Koray> Join us.

<Antonio> I have got a thousand questions, I am sitting on burning coals, 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 helped me a lot. I hope that Chloé will join the chat today, then we could see 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?

<Almira> The advisor of the support group spoke 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 about you. All the best.

<Almira> thx

<Koray> I didn't understand, but I wish you all the best :-) What questions do you have?

@Antonio

<Antonio> Ok, I'll cut to the chase ...

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

<Mark> Congratulations.

<Koray> Oh, if only I could have a relationship like that :-)

<Antonio> Wait guys, the best is yet to come.

<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 re-define 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.

<Mark> Does your boyfriend know that you are attracted to her?

<Antonio> To be honest, he does not.

<Mark> That's 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 that perhaps you might have some suggestions for me!!

<Mark> You should speak to your boyfriend.

<Almira> This is a chat where there is no counselling. But there are chats – maybe also in Italy, I don't really know – in which counsellors participate and can help you.

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

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

<Mark> Same here. I just don't feel anything for girls.

<Elsa> I really don't understand you, Mark. I think that girls are spectacular :-)

<Almira> I agree with Elsa.

<Koray> What about telling your boyfriend the truth?

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

<Mark> That you're probably bisexual?!

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

<Antonio> Why not?

<Elsa> They want to have it all, without having to make up their minds. I think that's cowardly.

<Mark> Hey Elsa, what are you talking about?

<Almira> I understand Elsa, if Julie suddenly came to me saying that she was attracted to a guy, I would leave her immediately. I can't even think about something like that.

<Koray> If I fell in love with a girl I think it would be okay ;-)

<Mark> Exactly, Antonio. What would you say if your boyfriend came to you and told you a thing like that?

<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> How are you, Antonio? Have you decided to do something?

<Antonio> I spoke with Paolo and I told him everything.

<Mark> I am holding my breath.

<Koray> Tell us about it.

<Antonio> Like Almira predicted, he left me.

<Mark> WHAT? Oh, I'm so sorry, Antonio, really.

<Aaron> What happened? Tell us, please.

<Antonio> I'm probably bisexual but my boyfriend doesn't accept it.

<Aaron> I'm sitting in front of the monitor and I am shaking 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> Both.

<Julie> I would like to say what I think, Almira told me about you. For me, the most important would be that everything would be out in the open and that I'd be informed. Then I could deal with it.

<Antonio> That's so easy to say, Julie. But I was so upset, I couldn't even 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. And what would you do after that, Julie? If only I hadn't started anything with that girl!

<Julie> We would have to decide together how to create a situation in which all parties involved would feel secure.

<Antonio> Do you really think that it would work?

<Julie> I think that's the only way!

<Aaron> I am almost certain that everyone basically can fall in love with men and women. We are the ones that define sexual orientations so rigidly. There's nothing to be ashamed of. 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 an utopian goal and let's help each other on the way there!! Maybe one day it will come true!!!

<Antonio> I agreed. Thx to you all, guys!



Counselling

(Psycho/social/healthcare professionals)

Bear in mind

Counselling entails a meeting between two individuals that takes place in a given space and time, i.e. in a specific historical and cultural context. From the constructivist point of view, we can say that any given society in any historical period “forges” specific meanings of sexuality. Counsellors and the people they counsel exchange views about them, thus developing a common ground for working together.

The rise of the middle-class family in Western cultures coincided with the development of specific views on gender roles, love and sexuality. At the same time, the term “homosexuality” was invented to distinguish same-sex behaviour from the heterosexual one, which was considered as being the “norm”, not only statistically, but also in terms of “normality”.

In recent years, the homosexual movement claimed the right to self-definition and suggested the use of terms that don't are not based on sexual behaviour but on affectivity and on the sense of belonging to a group. For example, LGBT activists prefer the use of the terms “gay” and “lesbian” instead of “homosexual” to underline the importance of gender diversity and also because the word “homosexual” in the past was linked to a paradigm that pathologised homosexuality. Terminological issues are not just a matter of form but have an impact on the content that is conveyed; they are indicators of the values and emotional world of the speaker, which also awaken significant emotional experiences with the listener.

Counselling sessions are also influenced by the communication and relational dynamics that develop between counsellors and and the people they counsel. One competence a counsellor needs to have is authenticity, since the counsellor's own convictions will inevitably influence the counselling process. However, authenticity requires a certain degree of self-awareness about doubts, unanswered questions and “blind spots” that should be discussed with colleagues and during supervision. Counsellors should take time to think about these themes and ask themselves how their own views could influence the relationship with the people they counsel. Useful questions they might ask themselves are:

- What do you know about same-sex lifestyles and relationships? Where do you know this from and with whom do you exchange your views?
- What did you learn about same-sex lifestyles during your professional training? What do you know about the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity? (see the *Identity and Sexual Orientation* section in the *Crossing Diversity Handbook*).
- What attitude do you have towards women who have relationships and sex with other women? To what extent do these attitudes differ from those you have towards men who have relationships and sex with other men?
- During your sexual development, have you ever had a homosexual experience? How do you view this experience today?
- What meaning or value do you think sexuality has for the identity of a lesbian woman? And for the identity of a gay man?
- What experience do you have in counselling LGBT persons?
- Do you think that LGBT persons would prefer to work with a LGBT counsellor? If so, why and in what way do you think the identity of a gay and lesbian counsellor will affect the counselling setting or process? If not, why and what would be most useful for heterosexual counsellors?

Counselling - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the education sector

How can I react if a person is scared because he/she has sexual experiences and/or fantasies with people of both genders and he/she cannot understand who he/she is anymore?

People who define themselves as heterosexuals can also have same-sex fantasies or experiences.

Similarly, gays and lesbians can have sex with persons of the opposite sex. Encourage the person you are counselling to think about love or attraction (regardless of gender) in a positive way and help him/her to express these feelings in an appropriate way. Bring more flexibility into mainstream sexual categorisation. The boundaries between heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality are rather fluid and we do not find them defined as such in “Nature”, as they are the expression of by men’s culturally produced needs. These categories are therefore “artificial” and can be changed if they no longer suit our current needs. Individuals don’t have to conform to these definitions, it’s the definitions that need to change and adapt to the feeling of individuals!

For instance, if a person has sexual relations with both sexes, it is not always necessary or advisable to define him/her as a bisexual person. There are people who identify as heterosexual and have sex with partners of the same sex. At the same time, there are also people who define themselves as homosexual and have erotic experiences with partners of the opposite sex. You should focus on the person’s needs without stressing the need for clear identification, and help them enjoy the apparent contradictions of human life.

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

Sex between two women or two men can be as fulfilling as heterosexual sex. There is no predetermined or compulsory set of good sex practices. People of both orientations can engage in more or less the same range of practices but everyone can have different preferences. Male-to-male sex is not limited to anal penetration or oral sex. Similarly, two women can decide if they want anal or vaginal penetration or not and how to do that. The sex practices that two men or two women want to try have to be negotiated between them, just as those between a man and a woman, and no predefined conventional rule applies.

How can two women have sex since they don’t have a penis?

This is a question often asked by young people. The stereotypical image of sexual intercourse defined as vaginal penetration by a penis is persistent. Boys especially find it very hard to imagine how sexual pleasure and orgasm can exist without any penetration of a penis into a vagina. As already mentioned, penetrative sex is not limited to heterosexuals. The point is not the “lack of penis” but the fact that feeling someone inside you may be arousing, both for heterosexuals and homosexuals. On the other hand, penetrative sex is not the only way to experience fulfilling sex, also oral or manual stimulation can be very pleasurable. Most importantly, pleasure comes from the whole of one’s body and, hence, from the emotional involvement of an individual in the here-and-now of his/her relationship. There is a wide range of ways to get involved, and that is a personal choice.

Counselling -Tools

My Body

Aim: helping teens to better understand their emotions about sexuality and their self-image.

An essential component of a man or woman's gender identity experience is the image he/she has of his/her own body and the awareness of his/her own physical and emotional needs. The feelings, thoughts and behaviour of an individual exist as they are embodied, as they are the expression of movement and the endless transformation of our existence, as body interacting with the environment.

Method: as an essential part of a man or woman's identity is the image he/she has of his/her own body and the perception and fulfilment of his/her own needs, it will be interesting to ask yourself or the teen the following questions:

- What importance does clothing have for me? What do I feel when I undress or I am naked?
- How do I react to the images of gay men and lesbian women that are out in the 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 come? How do I handle my feelings?
- What did I learn from my mother and father about the way that the body is considered? What did I learn from them about nakedness and sexuality?
- How did my mother and father react to my outer appearance? Did their reaction help or hinder my development?
- Which parts of my body do I connect to sexual desire/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 counsellors and the people they counsel as a tool for self-reflection.

It is helpful to use this method in-between sessions as a kind of homework assignment.

As the reflection process continues, it's likely that people will begin to see how the attitudes they learned from their family conflict with their own individual values. For gays and lesbians, this conflict is difficult for two reasons: first, because they lack positive role models and, second, as in order to build their identity they might feel the need to keep at a distance from the dominant heterosexual norm in order to build up their own identity through negative or anti-identification.

Sexuality: Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow

Aim: helping people to reflect on their past, to become aware of their personal values and express their wishes for the future.

Method: you will need one poster-sized paper, one A4 sheet, coloured marker pens, scissors and glue. The person being counseled divides the poster paper into three equal parts by drawing vertical lines. One section of the poster is reserved for each one of the following questions, from left to right: How did I see my sexuality during puberty? How do I see it today? How would I like to see it in the future? Let him/her write down the answers in their own words. Next, have him/her cut off the part of the poster that contains their wishes for the future. Glue the A4 sheet to replace the piece that was cut and then glue the "future" section next to it (making a link between the present and the future). He/she will write the answers to the following questions on the poster:

- In the shift from puberty to present, which desires related to my sexuality have I fulfilled? Which resources have I used?
- If I think of my sexuality, the way I wish it to be, what prevents me from making this vision come true?
- What resources can I use to accomplish my wishes for the future?
- What would help me to overcome such obstacles?

Please note: this exercise helps the counsellor to get information about people's views on their sexuality. It also explains how they see their future and helps them identify the resources that are available to them to achieve these goals. Based on this information, the targets for the next sessions can be defined. In addition, the counsellor and the person he/she is counselling can decide how much they can and want to continue working on the person's sexuality issue.

Three-Chairs-Exercise

Aim: helping people reflect on their sexuality by trying to determine how they judge their own way of living it.

Method: add three more chairs in addition to the ones where the counsellor and the person being counselled are sitting. First, the person is asked to choose three significant persons in his/her life, one from his/her family, one among his/her friends and one among his/her partners. The names of these persons are written on a sheet and placed one on each of the three chairs. Then, the person is asked to stand behind each of the three chairs for five minutes and the counsellor asks him/her the following questions: "If I asked this person to say what they thought about how you live with your sexuality and how satisfied you are with it, what would they say?"

Please note: for the exercise to make sense, the person should be willing to conduct an in-depth exploration of his/her sexuality. When the perspective is changed, reflecting on one's own sexuality becomes easier: it is also easier to distinguish between one's own desired behaviour, attitudes and judgements and those of the others.

Once the exercise is completed, the person should have a better idea of how to improve the way he/she lives his/her sexuality and should be able to identify the most effective methods to implement change.