

Questions and Answers

By David Leaman, Ed.D.

Question: My son has always felt intimidated by other boys. Now that he's 14, he still has no male friends his own age. His high school has just instituted a program run by GLSEN ("Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network") to identify "sexually questioning youth" and send them to gay counselors. I am afraid they may take advantage of his confusion and isolation, and urge him to make a lifestyle choice he will later regret. Worse yet, he could even be exposed to HIV-infection. What can I do to protect him?

Answer: Thank goodness for parents like you! It's great to hear of your compassion and concerns for your son. Those concerns are legitimate because your son is vulnerable, like many other boys his age. He is searching for companionship and is solidifying his sexual identity. The acquaintances and friends he hangs out with will impact his view of himself. If he associates with males who identify themselves as "gay and proud of it," your son could be significantly influenced by them. If he is targeted for counseling with a gay therapist, he will probably be urged to embrace a homosexual lifestyle.

What can you do?

First, try very hard to connect him with a mature adult heterosexual man who can be a mentor and friend. It would be most desirable for that person to be his father, but if that is not possible, then seek out a man in the community. Man-to-man relationships usually evolve out of shared activities, so your son needs to connect with a healthy adult male who will do fun things with him.

Second, your son should get into counseling with a heterosexual therapist to learn needed social skills. Also, if father is at home, counseling with both would be most desirable.

Third, become informed about that organization (GLSEN)



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and about homosexuality. Learn about the research and clinical aspects of homosexuality. Discuss the material at home with your son. Perhaps your son can read some appropriate material on homosexuality and "teach" you about it. One excellent source is the NARTH booklet entitled, *Understanding Same-Sex Attractions*.

Fourth, provide for your librarian the above pamphlet and other books on homosexuality that are recommended by NARTH. Get involved with selected school personnel or parent-teacher associations and disseminate appropriate information that challenges the misleading assumptions of GLSEN. This is a tough step! Get prepared for a lot of resistance and hostility. However, it's your child you want to protect. This type of bold action is greatly needed in our communities.

Question: I am a 34-year-old married man who has always been attracted to women. Lately, however, I have been unable to get the idea out of my head that I am really a homosexual. The idea continues to play round and round in the back of my thoughts no matter how much I try to get rid of it.

I am unemployed right now, so could the stress and long hours at home have something to do with this problem? How can I find out if I am really homosexual?

Answer: Persistent negative thoughts can develop from distressing circumstances. Since you are unemployed, you probably have more doubts about your worth and manhood. You are more vulnerable to worry and focusing on negative thoughts. Be careful not to falsely label yourself.

Try to identify what triggered your anxious thoughts about homosexuality. What precipitating events caused you to doubt your sexual identity at this time? Was

there a dream, some sexual fantasy, or a disturbing comment that you recently heard which made you feel uncomfortable? Honestly face your feelings and talk to a therapist confidentially to learn some strategies to reduce anxiety and negative thinking.

Realize that having a homosexual thought does not make you a homosexual. Healthy people occasionally experience a variety of obsessive thoughts. Worrying that you have cancer certainly does not mean that cancer exists in your body. Don't confuse the worrisome thought with the reality.

There is no simple test to determine if you are a "homosexual." But your lifelong self-identity as a heterosexual, along with your personal sexual experiences, do suggest a heterosexual orientation.

Homosexuality is best understood as a symptom of underlying issues. In the small child, there exists an unconscious drive for bonding with the same-sex parent. Same-sex erotic attractions develop primarily, I believe, from childhood experiences. In the case of the boy, an emotional wound with the father remains unhealed and the person seeks to resolve that unmet need through sexual activity with persons of the same gender. Additionally, there is a basic fear of intimacy with someone of the opposite sex. Thus homosexuality can be described as a same-sex attachment disorder. The individual is significantly detached from the same-sex parent, from same-sex peers, and from his own body.

If you are not actively choosing a homosexual lifestyle, you should not label yourself as such. The fact that you are experiencing some doubts about your sexuality certainly does not define you as homosexual. Consult a competent cognitive-behavioral therapist for help. Also request and read the pamphlets from NARTH on *Homosexuality: Questions and Answers*.

Question: Ten years ago I went through therapy, came out of a gay lifestyle, and thought my problems were behind me. I got married and became an elder in my church, and everything seemed to be on track. Lately, however, I find myself seeking out gay pornography on the internet. I love my wife and I love being a father. I have no desire whatsoever to go back into a gay lifestyle; that life was empty and unrewarding. So why, then, could I be regressing?

Answer: Think back. Recall what you learned in therapy ten years ago. Remember the struggles you had as you made the transition from a homosexual lifestyle to heterosexual adjustment. What key things did you learn about yourself? Write them down now and reflect on your journey and accomplishments.

Be grateful, and be merciful to yourself. Be confident of your growth, but not naïve! Did you really think that you would never have to struggle with homosexual fantasies or thoughts again?

Your initial sexual experiences as a child or adolescent were very powerful in shaping your future sexual arousal. Your early sexual stimulation formed a template for what is enticing and arousing. They became solidified by repeatedly thinking or acting on those sexual memories. You probably will not completely extinguish those arousal mechanisms, because they are very strong and pervasive. However, you do not have to be dominated by them nor feel helpless in managing them. But neither should you feed those fantasies and continue to reactivate the sexual feelings from those initial memories.

Do not condemn yourself for having same-sex attractions or homosexual thoughts. Like the alcoholic who is vulnerable throughout his life, candidly admit that you also are susceptible to homosexual temptations. Periodically, you will have to face same-sex arousal, even though you have been free from it for a long time. That does not mean you are regressing. It only means you are human.

Take all precautions to avoid homosexual pornography. It will seduce you, deceive you and destroy you. It will also eventually destroy your significant relationships. Pornography is a pathetic substitute for intimacy. It is exciting--creating a temporary high--but quickly consumes your flesh and your soul.

You definitely need accountability. Take the risk to confide in one or two persons, admitting your temptation and confessing your actions. Ask them to hold you accountable by checking on your behavior at least weekly. Block your internet access to the porn sites. If you are a person of faith, you will find that prayer helps.

Finally, consider that pornography is addictive. Try to connect with a recovery group such as Homosexuals Anonymous (610-376-1146) or Exodus International (206-784-7799) for the support you need.. ■

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