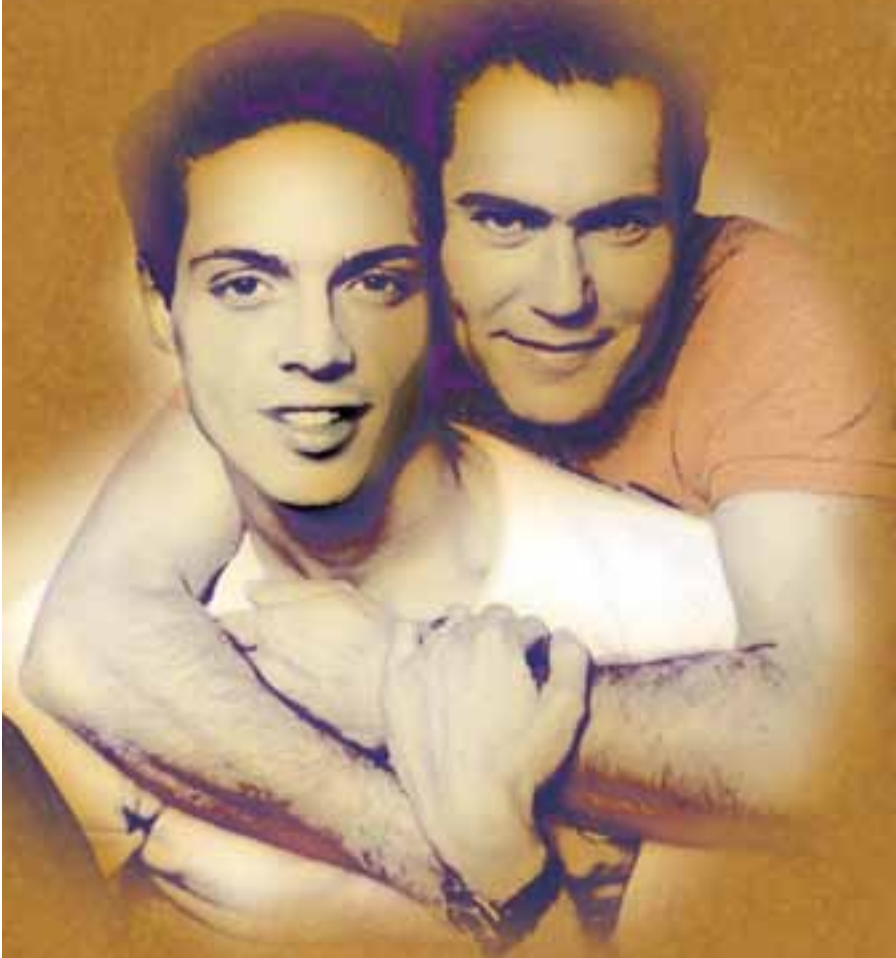


Feeling comfortable with *your* **SEXUAL ORIENTATION**



Québec 

Men and homosexuality

This brochure was prepared in collaboration with the Centre local de services communautaires (CLSC) des Faubourgs. Its contents were inspired in part by a series of leaflets produced by the McGill University Health Services.

The production of this brochure reflects department orientations aimed at adapting health and social services to homosexuals, published in 1997.

Produced by:
Direction des communications, ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux

To obtain a copy of this document, send your request

by fax to: **(418) 644-4574**

by e-mail to: **communications@msss.gouv.qc.ca**

by mail to: **Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
Direction des communications
1075, chemin Sainte-Foy, 16^e étage
Québec (Québec)
G1S 2M1**

This document is available in the "**Documentation**" section of the Website of the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, at the following address: **www.msss.gouv.qc.ca**.

Legal Deposit
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 1999
National Library of Canada, 1999
ISBN 2-550-34214-3

Reprint : june 2003

© Gouvernement du Québec

Any reproduction of this document, in whole or in part, is authorized with reference to the source.

Table of contents

WHO IS THIS BROCHURE FOR? 5	
You're not alone...	6
WHAT DOES SEXUAL ORIENTATION MEAN? 7	
WHAT IS YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION? 10	
Discover the answer for yourself	10
Acknowledgement and acceptance	12
THE REALITY BEHIND THE MYTHS 15	
Homosexuality is born of desire, not abuse	16
There is more to relations between men than sexuality	17
Male couples do not play sexual roles	18
Gay-couple relationships are lasting	18
The gay community is diversified	21
TALKING TO THOSE CLOSE TO YOU ABOUT YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION 22	
A few questions to ask yourself before making a decision	26
Choosing the right moment	28
Anticipating reactions	29
Gay men from cultural minority communities	32
Gay fathers and men living with a female partner	34
YOUR HEALTH AND YOUR WELL-BEING 38	
You feel alone...	39
Suicide is not the answer	40
Alcohol and drug abuse	40
You don't have to put up with violence and discrimination	42
Protecting yourself against STDs and HIV	43
WHERE TO FIND HELP AND INFORMATION 44	
Your CLSC	44
Community resources	46
Other sources of information	46

Production coordinator

Michel Clermont,
ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux

Contributors

Irène Demczuk, sociologist
Gilles Savard and Benoit Vigneau,
ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
Michel Fontaine and Daniel Rocque, CLSC des Faubourgs

**We wish to thank the following people
for their comments**

Thomas Antil, ministère de la Santé
et des Services sociaux
François Béchard, Laurent McCutcheon
Gilles Jobidon, Gai Écoute
Pierre Berthelot, Régie régional de la santé
et des services sociaux de Québec
Michel Dorais, Université Laval
Yves Jalbert, COCQ-Sida
René Lavoie, SéroZéro
Régis Pelletier, Régie régionale de la santé
et des services sociaux de Québec
Dr. Marcel Bélanger, CLSC des Faubourgs
Bill Ryan, McGill Centre for Applied Family Studies,
McGill University

Photographs

Valmont Brousseau

Collaboration on page 6 photo

SéroZéro

Who is this **BROCHURE FOR?**

You've been doing some soul-searching about your sexual orientation, but you're afraid to confide in your friends and relatives for fear of their reaction. All around you, the norm is heterosexuality. You feel torn between other people's expectations and your own feelings. Just like those who have preceded you in this search for identity, you have many questions but don't know who to talk to.

You live with a man you love, but you avoid talking about the two of you as a couple to your co-workers because you fear prejudice. You have an appointment with your doctor and you tell him that you have been single for years, thinking that you would get less attentive service if you disclosed your homosexuality. On the other hand, you know that this false information can be detrimental to your health. Basically, you would like to tell the truth but you fear negative reactions.

Another kind of love. You have just found out that your child, your father or someone close to you is homosexual. You're profoundly shaken by this news because you weren't prepared. It may have caused you worry or pain, or you may even have reacted violently. Since then, you avoid bringing up the subject with this person who is dear to you. If only you could talk about it with someone who wouldn't be judgmental.

You're not alone...

If you're reading this brochure, chances are you're attracted to people of your own sex or are asking yourself questions about your sexual orientation. You may find some answers in these pages. Other answers will come from your meetings with people in health and social services agencies or from talks with community workers. The most important answers will come from yourself. You are not alone, and the difficulties you are facing are not insurmountable.

A great many gay men are perfectly comfortable with their orientation but they do occasionally encounter difficulties. Among other things, this brochure is intended to help you become better informed about various health problems which may concern you.



Scientific studies on sexual orientation in North America have shown that fully 8% of the female population and 10% of the male population may have a homosexual orientation. Moreover, some people may go through homosexual experiences at a given time in their life without being homosexual. Exploring and experimenting do not define a person's sexual orientation; they may, however, help them discover their feelings.

Some research has also shown that exclusive homosexuality and heterosexuality are in reality two poles of human sexuality, with bisexuality in between. This means that bisexual individuals are attracted to both sexes, usually with a marked preference for one or the other. In the course of his life, a bisexual man may at one time be in a loving relationship with a man and at another with a woman. It is estimated that there are more bisexual than homosexual individuals.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IS DEFINED BY THE SEX OF INDIVIDUALS FOR WHOM WE FEEL AN ATTRACTION AND AFFECTION, BOTH PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL. IT IS PART OF OUR PERSONAL IDENTITY IN THAT IT IS HOW WE PERCEIVE OURSELVES AND HOW OTHERS PERCEIVE US.¹

1 According to Brian Huskins, *Sexual Identity - The Journey Begins*, Regional Health Association of Calgary, Health Canada, May 1998.

Whatever the exact figure, this means there are tens of thousands of women and men in Quebec who experience feelings of love for someone of their own sex. All of us, regardless of our sexual orientation, rub shoulders with homosexuals in everyday life without being aware of it most of the time. That's because sexual orientation is not a discernible characteristic even though some people choose to identify themselves. For the most part, homosexuals and bisexuals are not generally a highly visible minority. They come from all ethnic groups, all regions of Quebec, belong to all age categories and are found in all occupations.

**YOU ALONE KNOW WHETHER YOU ARE
COMFORTABLE WITH THE WAY YOU LIVE.
TRUST YOUR FEELINGS.**

**Discover
the answer
for yourself**

There is no particular age at which a person discovers an

attraction to people of the same sex. Some men become aware of it at a very early age while others only do so when they're adults.

Many gay men have said that the first hint they had of their sexual orientation was a feeling of intense affection for a best friend during adolescence. Others reported feeling different because they weren't attracted to girls. To a certain degree, this feeling of «difference» can translate into being attracted to men or fantasizing about them. A secret curiosity about homosexuality can also be a sign.

The period during which you become aware of your attraction to men or your bisexuality may be marked by ambivalence. One day, some event in your life gives you undeniable proof that you're attracted to people of your own sex. Yet, the next day you're convinced otherwise. This is part of the process of becoming aware of your sexual orientation and accepting it. At this stage of your life, the best attitude to adopt is to look after yourself, understand your feelings and learn to trust them.

ONLY YOU KNOW WHAT YOU REALLY ARE.

DISCOVER



INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA: AN OBSTACLE TO YOUR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

ACCEPTANCE

Acknowledgement and acceptance

You are most likely confused because of the contradiction

between your feelings toward men and the negative things you have heard about homosexuality. You don't know what to think any more – that's normal. Often, all we know of homosexuality are the stereotypes that circulate around us. This may result in fear and disparagement. Because of the negative perceptions surrounding you, you may have difficulty accepting your sexual orientation.

At first, fear, denial or refusal are feelings that are shared by the majority of homosexuals when they start discovering themselves.

Some men may even harbour a hatred of their homosexuality because they fear being marginalized or succumbing to their attraction.

This is called internalized homophobia.

If this is your case, you may have a tendency to devalue homosexuality as an aspect of your personality. You're probably uncomfortable around other homosexuals, or you lead an active heterosexual life in order to hide your true sexual orientation.

Fear of rejection by those around you may also be an obstacle to accepting your sexual orientation. Perhaps you try to behave like the majority of heterosexuals by constantly watching what you do or say in order to conform. You try as best you can to hide your real feelings by eliminating any suspicion in other people's minds that you are gay. Some men even go so far as to try to bury this part of themselves by focusing all their energies on other areas such as work, studies or sports.

All these behaviours, which are linked to the difficulty of accepting one's homosexuality, have repercussions on health and well-being. Disturbed by their sexual orientation, some men may, for example, suffer from anxiety and depression, drink excessively or abuse drugs. For all these reasons, it is preferable to acknowledge your homosexuality or bisexuality. Preferable for yourself, first of all, but also in order to improve the quality of your relations with others. Many gays will tell you how happy they are that they stopped "hiding" from themselves and those close to them. By accepting this fundamental dimension of yourself, your relations with others become more genuine, more real.

The simple fact is this: You are attracted to and feel affection for someone of the same sex. Those feelings and that mutual attraction constitute the same kind of relationships between men and women. This is why it is important to make the distinction between received ideas and the reality of loving relations between men.

GENUINE

You may have heard it said that gays or bisexuals are abnormal, sick, immoral, even perverse. These are in fact prejudices against homosexuals that can sometimes lead to homophobia, a manifestation of fear of or unjustified intolerance to people whose sexual orientation is other than heterosexual or who are suspected of not being heterosexual.

There is a tendency to believe that heterosexuality is the only acceptable model of loving relations between human beings. Traditionally, religion, education, television, music, popular psychology and so on have fostered the image of the female-male couple as the only possible model. It is only normal, therefore, that you yourself have assimilated this notion. Although things are changing, we still live in a world where it is taken for granted that all individuals are or should be heterosexual.

Several myths persist about homosexuality and loving relations between people of the same sex. Here are a few facts to help you dispel the myths surrounding reality as experienced by gay or bisexual men.

Homosexuality is born of desire, not abuse

Many people wrongly believe that a man becomes gay because of an unsatisfactory relation with a woman or because of a traumatic experience such as incest, rape or any other form of abuse. Yet the majority of boys who were victims of sexual abuse or violence at the hands of a man do not develop a homosexual orientation. The same holds true for men who report being dissatisfied with their marital life. Homosexuality is not a form of aversion to women. Rather, it is a physical and emotional attraction to men that explains why some men are homosexual.

**THERE IS AS MUCH POTENTIAL FOR HAPPINESS
IN LOVING RELATIONS BETWEEN MEN AS
THERE IS IN AMOROUS RELATIONS BETWEEN
MEN AND WOMEN.**

There is more to relations between men than sexuality

Upon learning that a man is gay, some people tend to think only of the sexual dimension, as if sexuality alone defined personality. Contrary to this belief, gay men do not necessarily place more importance on sexuality than do heterosexual men. As is the case between men and women, loving relations between men comprise many facets: emotional, social, economic, etc. The sexual aspect of gay life should not be overemphasized but rather viewed in its totality and diversity.

As for bisexual men, they are often perceived as being unable to make up their minds about their sexuality or as more sexually active than others. This forces many bisexual men to hide their orientation in order to protect themselves from prejudices. As a result, they sometimes have more difficulty than homosexual men in accepting their sexual orientation.

Male couples do not play sexual roles

When thinking about a male couple, many people wonder

which of the two partners plays the role of the woman and which that of the man. The assumption is that the same dynamics prevail in same-sex couples as in heterosexual ones. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, there is no division of sexual roles in male couples; on the contrary, domestic tasks are shared in accordance with the individual's aptitudes and inclinations. In most male couples, roles and tasks are shared equally by the two partners, each of whom, in many instances, is economically independent.

Gay-couple relationships are lasting

There is a widespread belief that male couples are less stable than heterosexual

couples. Many think that there is greater depth of feeling and sincerity of commitment among heterosexuals than among gays. Yet there is no evidence that this is actually the case. There is therefore no reason to establish a distinction when it comes to sincerity in gay couples.

Contrary to this widespread belief, gay men do want long-lasting relationships and are willing to make the commitment. The stereotype that immediately comes to mind is of gays flitting from one sexual adventure to the next. Even though there have been few studies on gay couples, the fact remains that many gays, including young people, are in a stable relationship.



Overall, regardless of age or sexual orientation, continuity is valued. Male couples experience the same ups and downs as heterosexual couples. Male partners manage to sustain loving relationships and are capable of making long-term commitments despite society's negative attitudes, which often force them to keep their private lives a secret. This pressure marks a clear distinction between male couples and male-female couples. In our part of the world, and in all spheres of activity (studies, work, recreation), people are encouraged to get married. Not surprisingly, society's general lack of support for same-sex relationships makes it difficult for a gay man to acknowledge the existence of a partner or talk about him openly.

The gay community is diversified

While the gay community is no more homogeneous than the heterosexual one, the fact remains that gays occasionally like to get together away from society's usually disapproving eyes.

But there is far more to the gay community than restaurants, bars and baths. In Quebec, gays are active in lobby groups, not to mention student, sports, social and service associations. At present, there are more than a hundred gay and lesbian coalitions in Quebec, many of which can be found in localities other than urban centres.

Some men choose to live in the country while others perceive rural life as an obstacle to their fulfilment and a recipe for isolation. For many, the anonymity of city life is a positive factor.



Regardless of your situation, you are free to decide whether to disclose your sexual orientation or keep it a secret. However there will probably come a time when you feel the need to talk about it with someone. At that point, it is very important to decide who that person will be, and when and how you will make this disclosure.

DISCLOSING YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION IS BOUND TO BE A TURNING POINT IN YOUR LIFE. IT DOESN'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT. RATHER, IT IS A GRADUAL PROCESS DURING WHICH YOU CONFIDE WHO YOU ARE TO A GROWING CIRCLE OF PEOPLE. THIS IS A WAY TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH OTHERS AND GIVE THEM AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET TO KNOW YOU BETTER AND ACCEPT YOU AS YOU ARE.

You may find it easier and less threatening to talk about your homosexuality to a friend rather than to your family. There's a good chance that your friends will be more accomodating, since they, unlike your family, usually don't expect you to live up to their expectations. It may be that your sexual orientation does not come as a total surprise to all those close to you; some may have already guessed as much. Be that as it may, it is preferable to choose a friend you trust, a person who respects you and is likely to have an open mind about homosexuality or bisexuality.

REMEMBER THAT NO ONE IS FORCING YOU TO DISCLOSE YOUR HOMOSEXUALITY UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. WHEN YOU'RE READY TO TALK ABOUT IT, USE YOUR BETTER JUDGMENT AS TO WHOM, WHERE, WHEN AND HOW.

There's no way to predict exactly how the person will react. Accepting yourself and opening up to others are part of the process. Some reactions will help you talk about the things you are experiencing, others will surprise you and may be more difficult to deal with. Keep in mind that the initial reaction is rarely definitive. This is why it is important for you to feel ready and relatively comfortable with your sexual orientation before talking about it with someone you trust.

If you feel angry, guilty or fearful, it may be preferable to seek support before you make your disclosure. In this way, you will be able to continue on the path to self-fulfilment without fear of rejection. Useful resources are listed at the end of this brochure.

SUPPORT

A few questions to ask yourself before making a decision

Everybody is different and reactions towards homosexuality may vary. Family education rarely views homosexuality in a positive light. Your parents, perhaps more than anyone else, cannot imagine that one of their children might be gay or lesbian. The way you approach the subject of your sexual orientation with your parents or someone close to you must be considered very carefully. Before making your decision, ask yourself these questions:

- Are you comfortable with your sexual orientation?
- What made you decide to disclose your sexual orientation to a particular person?
- Are you close to this person? Do you get along well with this person?
- Do you depend on this person financially? Do you live with this person?

- Do you have a friend or support network to help you in this undertaking?
- What kind of reaction do you anticipate from the person you plan to talk to? What are this person's usual reactions to any controversial subject that concerns you? Is this person generally open-minded?
- Do you know enough about homosexuality to be able to answer questions or dispel mistaken notions this person may have on the subject?
- Are you willing to be patient and understanding with this person if the reaction you get is negative or disappoints you?

All these questions will help you assess your situation and decide whether or not you want to disclose your homosexuality. If need be, seek information, help or support.

Choosing the right moment

Choosing the right moment to talk about such an important aspect of yourself is not always easy. Do not, for instance, pick a time when the people you have chosen to open up to are going through a rough period (job loss, illness, divorce or death of someone close). Rather, wait until they can give you their undivided attention. If you decide to meet somewhere, do it in a place where everyone will feel comfortable.

You may also feel the need to have someone along with you. If you have already broached the subject with an understanding sister or brother, for example, you could ask him or her to help you share the news with your parents. Some people choose to do so by letter. Writing may help you express yourself more clearly and without fear of interruption. However, be prepared to answer a series of questions the next time you meet the person.

Anticipating reactions

How will they react? This is the question foremost on your mind.

It has taken you time to feel comfortable with your homosexuality. In the same way, give your parents and those around you enough time to come to terms with your sexual orientation.

Different parents react in different ways to their son's homosexuality. All of a sudden, their image of you is changed, sometimes even shattered. Many parents feel guilty. They wonder: Is it our fault? Is it because of the way we brought up our son? Should we talk about it with the rest of the family? How do we deal with a possible partner? Their feelings are often ambivalent: they want their child to be happy and, at the same time, they must give up some of their expectations and adjust to a new reality.

The road to accepting a son's homosexuality fully and completely may be long and rocky, with periods of doubt and questions. At this stage, they need you to show that you accept their feelings, knowing that they are legitimate. In reality, even though homosexuality is talked about more and more openly, you must remember that few parents or families are prepared to face such a situation spontaneously and calmly, especially when it concerns their son or someone they love. Your parents will most probably need to be reassured. They, in turn, will then be able to find support to go through this difficult period in their life.

YOUR CHILD, YOUR PARENTS AND YOUR LOVED ONES MUST, IN TURN, TAKE THE ROAD TO ACCEPTANCE. DO NOT RUSH THINGS ALONG. IN GOOD TIME, LISTENING AND TALKING WILL MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT.

Gay men from cultural minority communities

If you belong to an aboriginal

community or have a different ethnic background than the majority, the disclosure of your sexual orientation to those around you may give rise to a different set of questions.

In many cultures and cultural communities, homosexuality is taboo. It is often associated with the values of the host society and may be interpreted as an example of Western society's decadence. In this context, a homosexual is viewed as turning his back on his community's cultural values, family traditions and religious beliefs. This is particularly true for communities that place a fundamental value on marriage, traditional male and female roles, and the family.

Thus, instead of being perceived as affirmative, the disclosure of your sexual orientation may be interpreted as a form of rejection of parental authority and tradition. This is why it is important to dispel the myths surrounding homosexuality and engage in dialogue with those around you. Despite the difficulties, many homosexual men have remained on good terms with their family following the disclosure of their homosexuality.

In large cities, gays of various cultural backgrounds have access to support groups.

WE ALL NEED TO BE LOVED BY THOSE CLOSE TO US, AND RECOGNIZED FOR WHO WE ARE. FEAR OF REJECTION LEADS MANY MEN FROM VARIOUS CULTURAL COMMUNITIES TO LIVE SECRET LIVES AS HOMOSEXUALS. YET, AS WITH ANY SOCIAL DIFFERENCE, ACCEPTING HOMOSEXUALITY IS A SOURCE OF ENRICHMENT FOR ALL HUMAN COMMUNITIES.

Gay fathers and men living with a female partner

There is no particular age at which a person recognizes or discovers an attraction to

someone of the same sex. It can happen to a man living with a female partner or a father. Accepting this new sexual orientation in adult age is often more unsettling, particularly if the marital relation dates back several years. For the female partner and children, this change may also be dramatic and cause feelings of insecurity. No family is prepared for such a revelation. It is normal, therefore, for the members of your family to feel completely at a loss. Lack of understanding, bewilderment, sadness, anger and a strong feeling of betrayal are emotions frequently experienced by the spouse and the children.

The decision whether or not to disclose your homosexuality depends on a host of factors such as how comfortable you are with your sexual orientation, the reaction you anticipate from your spouse, the age of your children and their open-mindedness about homosexuality. The way you go about it will influence the subsequent course of events. It may not be appropriate to talk about your sexual orientation to your spouse or your children if you do not feel ready for it and comfortable with it.

BEING PREPARED AND HAVING THE SUPPORT OF SOMEONE OUTSIDE YOUR FAMILY CIRCLE IS NO GUARANTEE OF SHELTER AGAINST PAINFUL REACTIONS FROM YOUR LOVED ONES BUT THEY WILL OFTEN HELP YOU AVERT THE WORST SCENARIOS.

If you are a father, add the following questions to your list before disclosing your sexual orientation to your children:

- How do you anticipate each of your children will react? Is the reaction likely to be similar in each case? How will you deal with these reactions?
- Will you be able to reassure each of your children that there is no reason to feel your relationship with them will be threatened because you are homosexual?
- Are you willing to be open-minded, patient and understanding with each of your children if you get a negative reaction?
- How, when and in what context will you introduce them to the man you love?
- Do you have friends, relatives or a support network to help you take this important step and offer assistance to your children?



THIS WILL PROBABLY BE A DIFFICULT PERIOD FOR YOU TO GO THROUGH, BUT ONCE YOU HAVE REVEALED YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION TO YOUR FAMILY AND LOVED ONES, YOU WILL FIND LIFE EASIER, BE ABLE TO FIND FULFILMENT AND START BUILDING A NETWORK OF PEOPLE WHO SHARE YOUR SITUATION.

More and more gay fathers who want legal custody of their children obtain it. Unfortunately, prejudices still often prevail when it comes to the well-being and personal development of children with a homosexual parent. Beyond these prejudices and myths, many studies have shown that homosexuals have the same parental skills as heterosexuals, and that they are just as concerned with the well-being of their children. Moreover, children with a homosexual parent are no more likely to become homosexual than children of heterosexual parents. Contrary to what many people think, such children are no more exposed to sexual abuse within the family. As for the risk of rejection, children set up self-protection mechanisms just as is the case in any other marginalized group. They are not alone in facing this reality, and the homosexual parent plays an important supportive role.

Once the initial shock has worn off, many families end up accepting this reality and continue to have harmonious relationships, as is often the case after a divorce. There are associations of gay fathers to guide you and help you break the isolation.

LIVING

TO ACCEPT THAT YOU ARE GAY IS TO MAKE A POSITIVE CHANGE IN YOUR WELL-BEING AND HEALTH.

Your health and YOUR WELL-BEING

Of course, whether you're gay or bisexual, you're also a man like any other. However, feeling socially marginalized or excluded can have negative effects on your health and well-being. Few people can claim to feel comfortable with themselves when rejected by the people around them. It is estimated that most gay or bisexual men keep their sexual orientation a secret from their doctor. This behaviour only makes it more difficult to prevent certain diseases and, as a result, is detrimental to your well-being. It is important to choose a healthcare professional who is open to the diversity of sexual orientations and with whom you can establish a trusting relationship. Remember that anything you say to a healthcare professional or social worker remains confidential.

You feel alone...

Solitude and social isolation may become too large a part of your daily life. The absence and scarcity of role models can be very difficult, particularly without the expected support of your family. When this happens, rejection from the family and schoolmates may lead to social isolation, running away, problems in class and, in extreme cases, dropping out. It is not always easy to meet other gays. Whether you live in a large city or a small town, you may have a painful sense of isolation. You may feel that heterosexuals around you will not understand if you tell them you are gay. The temptation to avoid social contact may become hard to resist.

Many gays will tell you that they went through periods of loneliness before they accepted their sexual orientation, and that isolation can be overcome. There are groups throughout Quebec that organize not only meetings but also recreational activities in order to break the isolation. In addition, all cities have informal networks of gays who meet in cafes, restaurants and other places.

SUPPORT

You are not alone, there are thousands of gays like you in Quebec. By meeting other gay men and by learning more about their experiences, you will find it easier to open up to the people around you.

Suicide is not the answer

The difficulty of adjusting to your sexual orientation may lead you to contemplate suicide. If so, do not hesitate to contact one of the gay help lines. People who will respect your anonymity can be a great assistance, particularly when it comes to facing difficulties due to social pressure or other situations. They can also refer you to other appropriate sources of support.

Alcohol and drug abuse

Bars are one of gay people's favourite places to get together. Inevitably, going to bars on a regular basis means drinking alcohol, and the line between drinking regularly and alcoholism is very thin. Some gays also abuse drugs or alcohol to blunt the feeling of being different, alleviate painful emotions or lower their inhibitions.

If you feel you have a drug or alcohol problem, there are resources you can turn to. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) have set up support groups that can help you in your resolve to stay sober. In some places, Montreal and Quebec City among them, you will find gay and lesbian AA and NA groups. These groups offer a supportive environment in which you will feel safe and be able to share experiences. There are also detox centres, as well as counsellors working in CLSCs and private practices who specialize in alcoholism and drug addiction. Many of them are specially trained to provide gay people with assistance.

You don't have to put up with violence or discrimination

Despite the fact that the Quebec Charter of Human

Rights and Freedoms prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, discriminatory attitudes and violence against homosexuals persist in our society. If you feel you are a victim of discrimination or violence, go to the Commission des droits de la personne et de la jeunesse du Québec. There, your complaints about job discrimination or housing access will be heard.

If you have been attacked or injured in the street, file a police report. Many police officers in Quebec have received special sensitivity training in this area. On the other hand, violence in gay couples is a reality that can take many forms ranging from insults, contempt and threats to physical violence. All these manifestations of abuse undermine confidence and self-esteem. You don't have to put up with them on the part of your partner. Help is available.

Protecting yourself against STDs and HIV

The majority of gays have heeded safe-sex warnings and protect

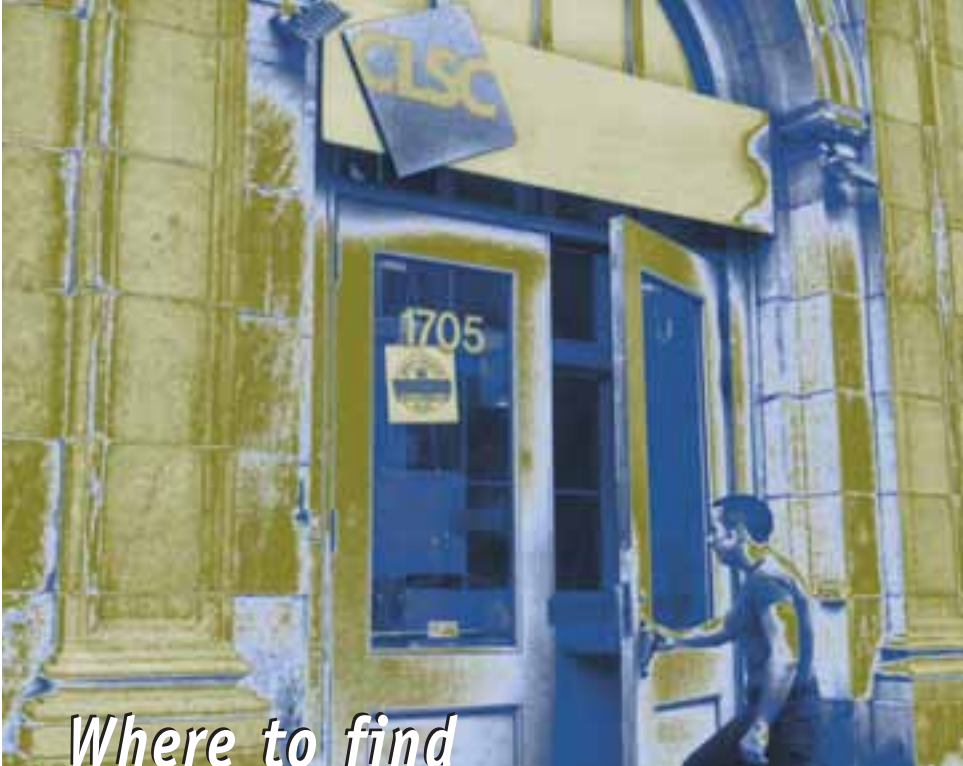
themselves against HIV and other STDs. However, gay men who have difficulty accepting their sexual orientation often have low self-esteem, which can stand in the way of safe sex. Having a positive image of yourself, maintaining harmonious relations with others and keeping informed are all attitudes that contribute to making safety a primary concern in your sexual behaviour. There are also vaccines to help protect yourself against hepatitis A and B.

Be sure to ask your doctor.

You have a responsibility to protect yourself against HIV infection and other STDs by practising safe sex. Using a condom with a water-based lubricant is a good way to prevent infections. Despite the progress made in research over the past few years, AIDS is still a reality that affects many gay men.

Safe sex does not have to mean abstinence.

On the contrary, it can ease your mind about the fear of contracting an STD or HIV. Many leaflets and brochures dealing with safe sex are available at your CLSC, as well as in medical clinics and from community groups.



Where to find

HELP AND INFORMATION?

Your CLSC

All the services offered by CLSCs are available to gay and bisexual men. **You can also contact Info-santé CLSC at any time, the telephone number is the same as for your local CLSC.**

Your CLSC can help you better understand and accept your sexual orientation or that of someone close to you. It can also refer you to the resources available in your locality. Do not hesitate to contact it.

A great many caregivers, working mostly in CLSCs and throughout the health and social services network, are trained to provide effective assistance to gay and bisexual men with the problems they may encounter.

If you are dissatisfied with the services offered, no matter where, mechanisms whereby you can express your views are available. If you consider it necessary, file a complaint; in doing so, you will help improve the services that are offered.

Community resources

There are community resources specially intended for gay and bisexual men in most regions of Quebec. Among these highly diversified resources you will find support groups for young gay men, parents of gays, gay fathers, gay men from cultural minorities, gays with disabilities, people who are HIV-positive or have AIDS, and victims of domestic or homophobic violence. Do not hesitate to make use of these resources.

Help lines are also available. The best known is GAY LINE (free, confidential, anonymous). In Greater Montreal, GAY LINE can be reached at (514) 866-5090; elsewhere in Quebec the number is 1 888 505-1010 (toll-free). This service can also refer you to other resources in your area that will be able to listen to your needs and respond to them accordingly.

Other sources of information

Other sources of information on gay and bisexual realities are available as well. If you feel the need to learn more about homosexuality, information can be obtained from the following sources:

- the Internet
- specialized books (in bookshops or libraries)
- magazines and newspapers usually found in bars and organizations or businesses catering to gays and lesbians

Some additional resources

- INFO-SANTÉ CLSC
 - Same number as your local CLSC
- THE CLSC IN YOUR AREA
- GAY LINE
 - Greater Montreal area: **(514) 866-5090**
 - Elsewhere in Quebec: **1 888 505-1010**
- DRUGS: HELP AND REFERRAL
 - Greater Montreal area: **(514) 527-2626**
 - Elsewhere in Quebec: **1 800 265-2626**

On peut également se procurer cette brochure en français sous le titre :
Bien vivre son orientation sexuelle – Les hommes et l’homosexualité.

Also available:

Feeling Comfortable with your Sexual Orientation: Women and Homosexuality.

Santé
et Services sociaux

Québec



CLSC
DES FAUBOURGS