

Sexuality Case I

Max is a 15 year old who comes to you because he thinks he might be bisexual. He says he is trying to figure things out. For about two years Max has been having dreams about having sex with other guys. When he masturbates, his fantasies are more often about guys, but also involve girls. He does not have any close male friends. His best friends are girls. He has been going out with Suzi, who is 14, for two months. They are talking about having intercourse, but are waiting for her to go on the Pill. He has never had any kind of sexual activity with another male.

What is your goal for this meeting with Max?

Is there information that you would like Max to have before leaving today?

What are some of the possible consequences of Max identifying himself as bisexual?

If Max was having sex with other guys, what would you do in your physical exam (including lab tests)?

Sexuality Narrative I

What is your goal for this meeting with Max?

- 1) It's great that Max feels that he can talk with you about this. Your main goal is to have him leave feeling that he has been listened to and **not judged**.
- 2) Sexual orientation is **not a diagnosis**. You don't have to figure out what Max is, whether that be gay, straight or bisexual. In addition, even if you are sure what his sexual orientation is, imparting this to him is not all that helpful.
- 3) Find out from Max what he wants. He may just want to talk it through. There may be specific information he is seeking.

Is there information that you would like Max to have before leaving today?

- 1) That many young people have sexual feelings towards people of the same sex. Some of these people turn out to be bisexual, some heterosexual, some homosexual.
- 2) That people go through a process of figuring all this out, and that this process varies from person to person. That nothing is written in stone. He can identify himself however he wants, and that doesn't mean that he has to hang on to this self-definition forever.
- 3) That sexual orientation involves desire, fantasies, dreams and behaviour.
- 4) That having sex with a girl doesn't mean you are straight or bisexual, and having sex with a guy doesn't make you gay or bisexual.
- 5) That identifying himself with a particular orientation doesn't mean he is stuck with a limited number of life choices. He doesn't have to be a hairdresser, doesn't have to talk or dress in a stereotyped way, can be a parent...
- 6) That many sexual activities involve some level of risk, whether that risk be physical or emotional, and that he needs to think about those risks and how to minimize them (for instance, by using condoms with his girlfriend even if she is on the Pill).

- 7) Deciding to whom to disclose and when is a big decision. Max should think carefully about this. You can encourage him to discuss this with you.

What are some of the possible consequences of Max identifying himself as bisexual?

- 1) There is not a huge amount of data available on bisexual teens. Many people who end up identifying as gay or lesbian start off identifying as bisexual, perhaps because this seems safer. Many young people are also saying that they don't want to have to fit into a rigidly defined orientation, that orientation is somewhat fluid. They may use a more general term, such as "queer" to identify themselves.
- 2) Max may feel he has to prove (to himself or others) that he is bisexual and not gay by having intercourse with his girlfriend. It would be important to help him explore his readiness for this.
- 3) Many teens who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual do not experience any major psychosocial difficulties. However, there is an increased risk of:
 - a) Negative self-perception—what is often referred to as internalized homophobia
 - b) Ridicule, violence
 - c) Depression
 - d) Substance use
 - e) Suicide Risk factors include:
 - i) Gay identity at young age
 - ii) Gender non-conformity
 - iii) Family conflict
 - iv) Runaway/throwaway
 - v) Non-disclosure of orientation
 - vi) Conflict regarding orientation
 - f) Limits on career goals
 - g) Early school leaving
 - h) Homelessness
- 2) Positive consequences may include:
 - a) May feel good that he has figured out something important about himself
 - b) Stronger sense of identity
 - c) Alliance with a peer group

If Max was having sex with other guys, what would you do in your physical exam (including lab tests)?

- 1) A good history is essential. There are many ways that men have sex with each other, and only a few are high risk. You would not be looking for anything in particular on a physical exam if Max is involved with kissing, fondling and mutual masturbation. Not every gay male has anal intercourse.
- 2) If Max is having receptive oral sex without a condom, he is at risk for developing gonorrhea and HIV. It is unlikely that you will find anything on physical exam. He can be screened with a throat swab and HIV testing (after the appropriate counseling—see HIV handout)
- 3) If Max is having unprotected anal sex, you should check his perianal area and penis for any lesions (herpes, fissures...) Lab tests to include:
 - a) Anal swab, urethral swab for gonorrhea

- b) Urethral swab or urine for chlamydia
- c) Anal cytology
- d) Stool culture, ova and parasites
- e) HIV antibody
- f) VDRL
- g) Viral culture of herpetic appearing lesions