

Sexuality Case 2

Sandy is a 16 year old who plays the cello and is on her school's soccer team. Her parents have brought her in because she has just told them that she is a lesbian and is in love with another girl. They are quite upset, but sure that she is heterosexual. They would like you to tell them what her sexual orientation is and if she is a lesbian, help get her therapy to make her normal.

What additional information do you need?

What do you tell Sandy's parents?

What health care will you offer to Sandy in the future?

What additional information do you need?

- 1) You need to **talk alone** with Sandy and explain about confidentiality. You start by asking her how she came to the decision to tell her parents. She tells you that she met Alice a year ago, when she came to her school after moving from another city. They were on the soccer team together and she found herself feeling closer and closer to her and then realized that she was sexually attracted to her. She wanted to say something to Alice, but was afraid that she would lose her friendship. Then one day another kid on the team made a homophobic comment about their coach. Alice stood up for the coach and Sandy decided it was safe to talk with her. She did, and found out that Alice was feeling the same way about her. Sandy had been feeling uncomfortable about lying (by omission) to her parents, as she has always had a good relationship with them
- 2) A complete **HEADS** assessment will pick up on any current problems, both in areas of higher risk for gay teens (depression, suicide, substance abuse). Sandy tells you that she is worried about her parents' reaction, but is not depressed and has no other major issues. She had a boyfriend when she was 14 for two months. They were not sexually active. She feels quite clear that she is a lesbian.
- 3) You then elicit from Sandy what she would like to do next. She wants you to speak with her parents and reinforce that she is not heterosexual. She would like them to be able to accept this.

What do you tell Sandy's parents?

- 1) Acknowledge that this is a difficult time. All parents have an image of who their kids are and, like body image, this image is sometimes accurate and sometimes not. Most parents assume their kids are heterosexual and when this basic assumption is challenged, there is a real sense of disequilibrium.
- 2) There is no test for homosexuality. Sandy is identifying as a lesbian at this point in her life, so that's what she is. She has not been coerced into this relationship.
- 3) The parents have expressed an interest in conversion therapy. Both the AAP and the APA have stated that there is no evidence that these "treatments" work and that they are contraindicated.

- 4) PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is an organization that has helped many parents in their situation. Many communities have groups and often offer support groups.
- 5) There is no parental obligation to be thrilled that Sandy is a lesbian, but there is to let her know that they still love her and that this hasn't changed their feelings about her as a human being.
- 6) Many communities have support groups for gay, lesbian, bisexual and "questioning" youth. Sandy might benefit from one of these.

What health care will you offer to Sandy in the future?

- 1) Regular health maintenance.
- 2) There is no good evidence to suggest what a regular pap smear schedule would be for a young woman who has not had intercourse with a man and whose partner also hasn't. It seems reasonable to suggest a Pap at age 18 and then every five years. If she has sex with a man, or has a partner who has had sex with men, then more frequent testing would be in order.
- 3) Alice and Sandy could pass candida and BV between them. Sandy should be counseled that if they use sex toys they should not share them and should clean them appropriately. Silicone toys can be boiled.
- 4) Sandy can be told that when (or if) she decides to have children, there are a number of options available, and that you can help by discussing these and referring her to the appropriate services.