



## **If a student comes out to you...**

Here are a few suggestions for teachers and counselors on how to respond when one of your students reveals their bisexual or same-sex-oriented sexual orientation.

- Recognize that there are many gay, bisexual, and lesbian young people. Until now, you may not have been aware of your their sexual orientation but this is the same child they were before coming out to you.
- Be yourself.
- Remember that the child may be terribly afraid since most teens know society says they are "wrong."
- Use the vocabulary they use. If they say "homosexual," follow their lead. Likewise, if they say "gay" or "lesbian," use that term. Use the term "same-sex feeling" if they appear uneasy with other vocabulary.
- Be aware of your comfort and limitations. Do not add pain resulting from your judgment about sexuality, in general, or homosexuality, in particular.
- Do your homework. Find out about sexuality and sexual orientation. PFLAG, a support organization for parents, can help: <http://www.pflag.org>
- Remember, it doesn't take a homosexual adult to help a homosexual child.
- Thank the child for trusting you.
- You have an obligation to respect the child's right to privacy and confidentiality. Don't discuss their personal details with others.
- If the child is having trouble with harassment or bullying because of their sexual orientation, take it seriously and act on it if it is happening at school. Contact the Kitsap Safe Schools Network for support and resources.
- Tell the student there are local resources to support him or her.
- Ask yourself these questions:
  - Does the child have friends he or she can trust with the information?
  - Do parents know? What would happen if they knew?
  - If parents cannot be supportive, are there other adults available for support?

### **Don't say:**

- How do you know?
- Are you sure?
- I don't agree with it, but I still like you.
- Have you tried dating the opposite sex?
- You will grow out of it. It's only a phase.
- Some of my best friends are.
- Have you tried to change?
- You are not normal! You are sick.
- You don't look like one.
- How did that happen?
- Don't you want to have children?
- I don't want to hear about it.
- You do have a problem.
- What is wrong with you?
- You will embarrass the family.
- Your parents won't love you.
- You need counseling.
- Where did I go wrong? (Parent)
- Why are you doing this?
- You won't be able to have a happy life.
- It's just a phase.