OMG MY
FRIEND'S
QUEER

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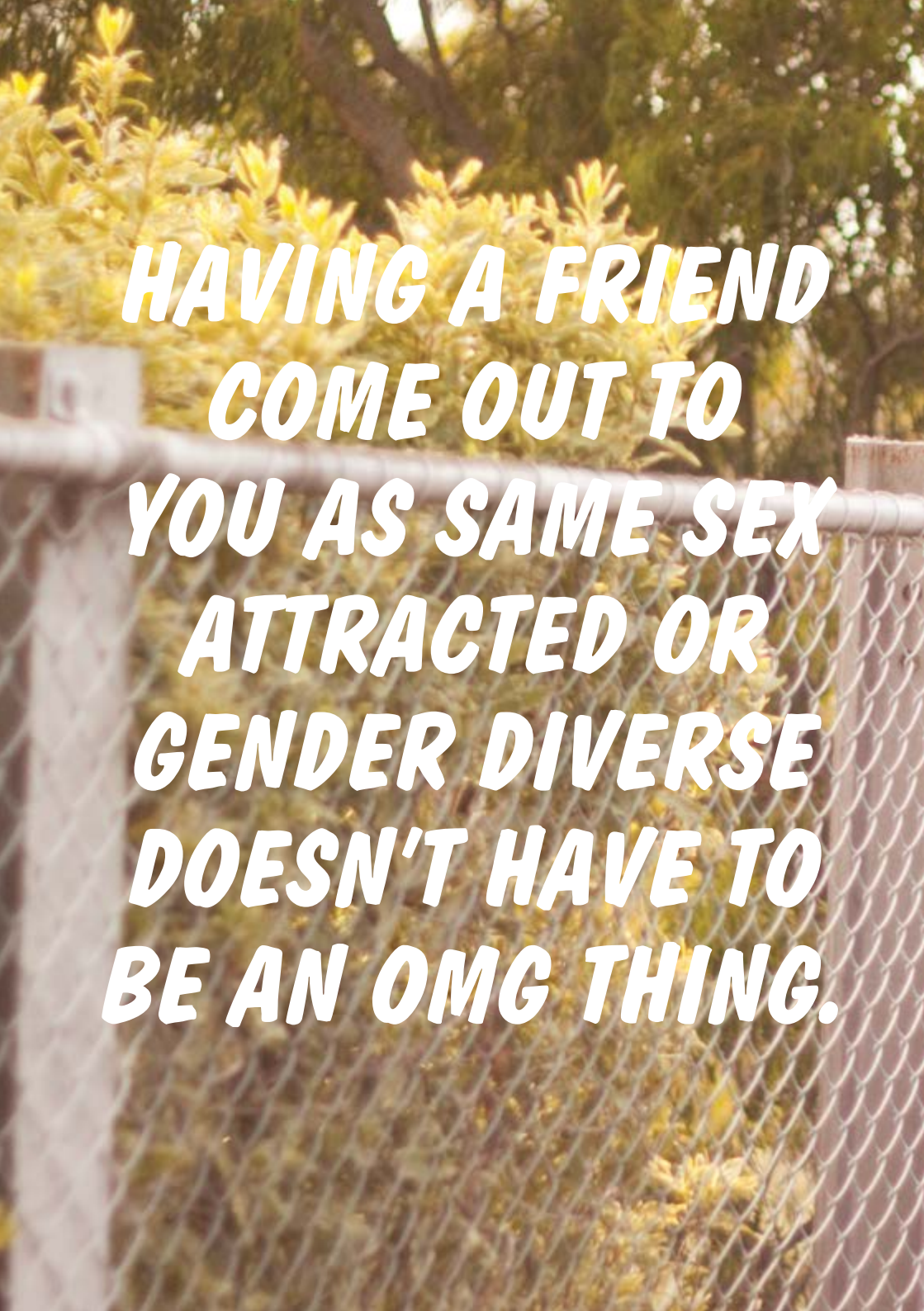
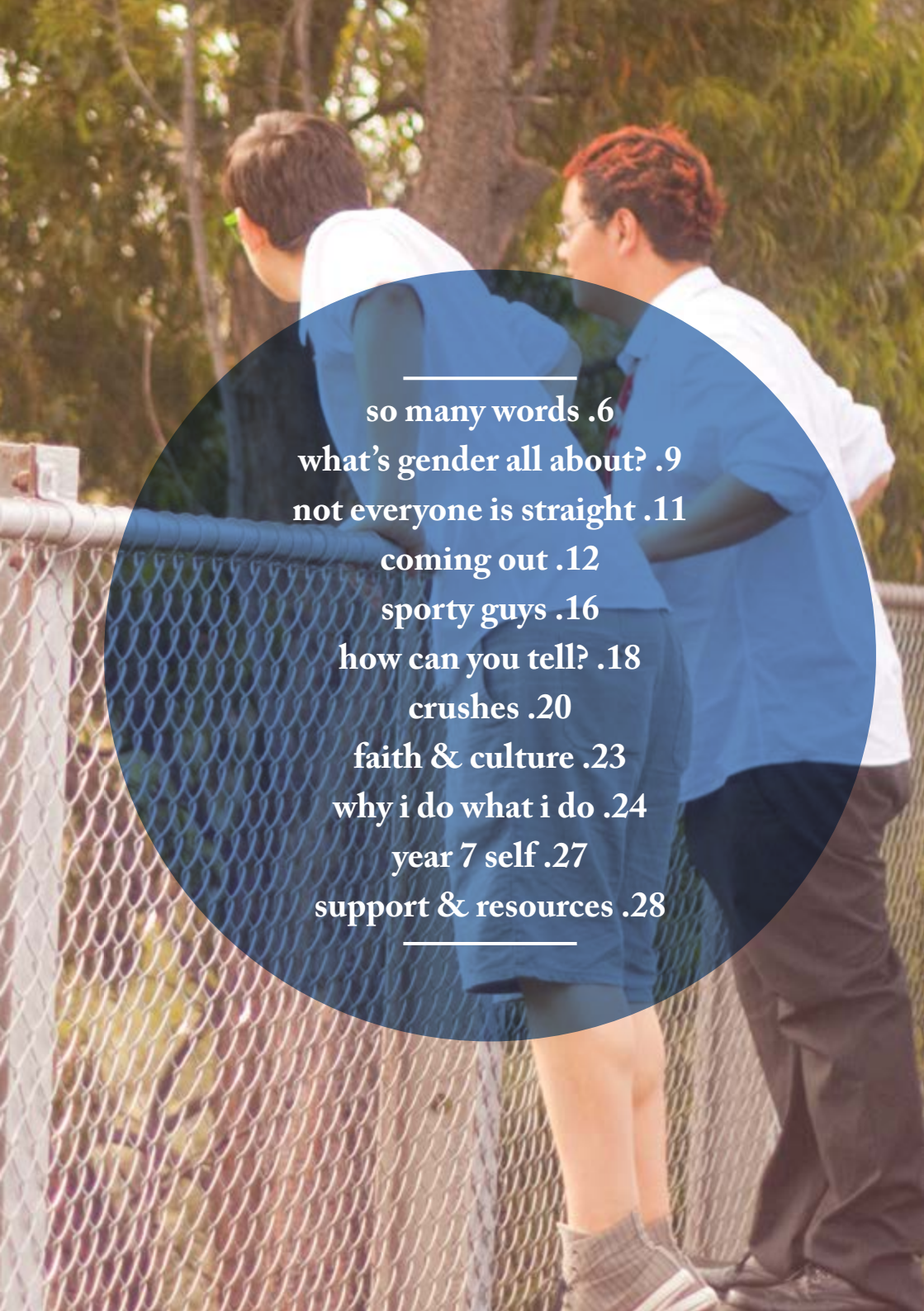

HAVING A FRIEND COME OUT TO YOU AS SAME SEX ATTRACTED OR GENDER DIVERSE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE AN OMG THING.



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so many words.

julian gurrieri

Man oh man, this stuff might seem a bit complicated at first. Some words in this magazine might be new to you, so instead of needing to google every single one, here are some terms you might find useful:

Gay
Someone who likes people of the same sex. Gay usually refers to boys liking boys, but a lot of girls use it too.

Lesbian
A girl who likes girls (physically or emotionally).

Bisexual
Someone that is attracted to both guys and girls. Bisexuals aren't usually "going through a phase" and they aren't being greedy. Some like guys and girls equally, and some have a preference.

Same Sex Attracted (SSA)
Same sex attracted is exactly what it says. It describes someone who is physically or emotionally attracted to someone of the same sex. This term's used more and more these days as it's a much better way to describe people who are not straight.

Gender Diverse (GD) / Genderqueer (GQ)
Describes a person who feels that their gender identity does not fit into the "categories" associated with their biological sex. For example, someone who is born a female may feel as though the categories of female/feminine are restrictive or don't apply to them. Questioning how gender stereotypes relate to you is normal - and some people identify as gender diverse or genderqueer, rather than (or as well as) male or female.

Transgender
Sometimes gender diverse people feel that their gender doesn't match their sex, ie - someone born with a penis might feel like a woman on the inside - this is refered to as transgender. Sometimes trans people change their name, their clothes, or their sex. Sometimes they don't.

Gender
Check out Page 9 for a full run down on gender, as well as a bit more insight into what gender diversity is all about.

Intersex
People are born with different kinds of bodies. Intersex is an umbrella term, often associated with a medical diagnosis of DSD, that describes people who have natural variations that differ from conventional ideas about 'female' or 'male' bodies, including genital, chromosomal and a range of other physical characteristics.

Heteronormativity
The assumption that everyone is straight. It's pretty easy to do, especially when you don't know many SSA or GD people. It's also the assumption that you have to act a certain way because of your gender.

Queer
Some people identify as queer to mean different, or not aligned to stereotypes. For some, queer means same sex attracted, for others, it means gender diverse. For some, it simply means different.

Pansexual
Someone who is attracted to people of all identities. Pansexuals are generally attracted to the person inside. Unlike people who are bi, pansexuals aren't really concerned with a person's gender.

Questioning/Unsure
Most people will question their sexual or gender identity at some point throughout their life. Even if you're straight, it can be confusing stuff, but it's also pretty normal.

Stereotyping
Generalising that all people belonging to a particular group have certain characteristics. Like believing that all gay men like Lady Gaga. (OK bad example! But you get the idea).

Gaydar
The "ability" to tell if someone's gay. Unless you see someone sucking face with their same sex partner, or they tell you their sexuality, your gaydar isn't going to be exactly accurate. Assuming someone's sexuality or gender identity can actually be pretty sucky. Check out 'how can you tell' on page 18 for more info.

Homophobia
The fear, hatred or ignorance towards same sex attracted people and people who are attracted to more than one gender. Homophobia usually leads to discrimination or abuse, like using the phrase "that's so gay."

Transphobia
The fear and hatred of gender diverse or transgender people, their desires and behaviours, that often leads to discriminatory actions or abuse.

Discrimination
Treating someone like crap, or less than equal because they have a certain characteristic, like a school not allowing same sex partners to the formal. Discrimination due to sexuality or gender identity is nearly always illegal in Australia.

what's gender all about?

alice chesworth & micah scott

Maybe it's time for a reality check on what gender is really all about. It's not exactly rare for guys to wear makeup these days, or spend a ton of time making sure their hair is perfect, and it's likely that a girl is into sport, or hates wearing dresses.

The idea that you've gotta act a certain way just because of what bits you have between your legs is pretty outdated.

The basics are that sex is your physical aspects (ie your wibbly wobbly bits) and gender is how you feel in your mind in terms of masculine and feminine. Sometimes, physical sex and gender don't match up, so you could be born with lady bits, but feel quite masculine.

Some people identify with aspects of none or both traditional genders and feel they are 'genderqueer', 'gender neutral', 'inter gender' or feel like they are another gender altogether. For genderqueer people, what they call themselves is very personal and entirely up to them.

Other people feel connected to the gender that doesn't 'match' their physical sex. This is called being transgendered. Some people have a 'fluid' gender – it changes over time.

Expressing your gender is a personal thing, everyone does it, and everyone does it differently. Also, just because someone DOES fit a stereotype, like a girl acting girly, doesn't mean they can't be gender diverse.

Labels

Think about it: one of the most common ways we express gender is through the way we label ourselves. For some, changing this label is an important part of expressing their true gender. They might change their label from 'female' to 'male', or even 'genderqueer', 'trans', 'other' or something completely different that they feel expresses their gender properly.

Some people change their name, or ask to be referred to as different pronouns. Michael might ask you to call them 'Mandy', or refer to them as 'she' instead of 'he', or even 'they'.

Appearance

The way you look will usually determine how people see you, and clothes are probably the easiest way to change your appearance. What you wear and how you dress will usually depend on what you want to say about yourself, and what makes you comfortable. Your interests, style, income, culture - and yep, even gender – can all be expressed through how you look. Sometimes people feel more comfortable in oversized jeans and tshirts, and sometimes people like tight clothes.

But clothes obviously aren't the only way people change their appearance; hair products, piercings and make up are used by most people in different ways. The point is, they're used to express how a person feels – and that's something completely up to them.

Some people have surgery to alter how they express their gender, some people have hormone treatment. Some people legally change what's written on their birth certificate.

But like all changes, when someone adjusts the way they express their gender, especially when you've known them for a while, it can take some time to get used to. Gender is different for everyone; some people might change the way they express their gender over their life. Some people won't.

Basically, the rule of thumb is not to assume anything about someone's gender – it's theirs.

If you want to find out more about gender diversity, keep in mind that it's not your friend's responsibility to give you all the answers. You can find out more information and places you can get support on Page 28.

Priority Seat
Please offer this seat to passengers with special needs

not everyone is straight.

annie hooper

Everyone has their own unique sexual identities and a lot of them aren't straight. Our mums, dads, teachers, friends, classmates and neighbours all have a sexuality.

Sure, for some people this sexual identity is "straight", but for a lot of people, they're same sex attracted. How many exactly? Oh, about 10% of the population. So in your school, youth group, church, sports team, and even home life, chances are someone is attracted to people of the same sex. Australia wide, we're looking at more than 300,000 same sex attracted young people - not such a small group now, eh?

When someone identifies as same sex attracted, all they're saying is that they have the capacity to be attracted to / want a romantic or sexual relationship with someone of the same sex. This includes people who are exclusively gay, lesbian, those who identify as bisexual, or people who are straight, and might have had these feelings at some point in their lives.

Who you like isn't black and white either. Sometimes you might be more attracted to guys, and then other times more attracted to girls.

It can be easy to think you don't know anyone who's same sex attracted, but there's a pretty good chance you do – you just don't know it yet. There's no flashing neon sign above someone's head that says "THIS PERSON IS GAY!"

Usually people have to 'come out' (tell people they are same sex attracted or gender diverse) for others to actually realise (but that doesn't stop people from making assumptions). Some people coming out may not surprise you, and some people coming out might shock your socks off.

Accepting, exploring and expressing sexual and gender identity is all part of growing up. For those who are opposite sex attracted, expressing sexual identity can be relatively easy. Opposite sex attracted people can ask out a classmate, flirt with someone on the tram or school bus, tell a parent about a recent heartbreak, or list our celebrity crushes to a friend without fear of being harassed or bullied because of sexual identity. There aren't quite so many worries when it comes to coming out as 'straight' and possibly being rejected by family and/or friends. Exploring your sexual identity should be an exciting time for everyone - but feeling like you are same sex attracted can sometimes be more stressful.

People who don't express themselves in ways expected of them can be bullied or bashed. It's pretty crap, particularly for gender diverse people. GD young people are more likely to feel isolated, especially when you throw ignorance and fear into the mix.

People all throughout history have stood up against discrimination and demanded equality. Homophobia and transphobia aren't at all different.

Nearly everyone has seen or overheard homophobia or transphobia. Think about it - how often have you heard people throw around words like 'fag', 'freak' or 'dyke'. Sometimes it can be through social exclusion, rumours, sexual harassment or even physical violence like 'gay bashing'. For SSA and GD people, experiencing this homophobia or transphobia (sometimes on a daily basis) can be exhausting and have a serious impact on their health and wellbeing.

Homophobia and transphobia can cause depression, substance abuse, self harm and suicide for young people who have experienced it. Basically, it sucks, and no one should have to experience it.

But at the end of the day, why should anyone give a damn? A person's gender, their sexuality, how they act, or who they hook up with is no one's business but their own.

Marko
Cousin, 23

I'm from a Jewish background, although I'm not religious myself. Honestly I used to be a bit homophobic, but now I've realised that being gay isn't really a big deal. Everyone makes their own paths in life and it's not for me to decide what is wrong and what's right.

I suppose being raised by a Jewish family influenced the way I'd previously thought about it all, as I'd been told being gay was 'immoral' and 'forbidden'. When I was a teenager I found out my cousin was gay and I got annoyed that he was overly flamboyant and thought a lot of really negative things about him. It just really irked me.

But about a year ago I sat down with him and we really talked about it. It's weird, up until then I had always thought of him as just my 'gay cousin,' but he's actually a nice guy, and we have a lot in common. I dunno, I guess I had all these ideas in my head, but actually talking with him made me realise I don't have an issue with gay people, they're just people.

Luana
Best Friend, 19

I have a friend who's gay - he's only out to a few people. My relationship with him is pretty good, we're close friends and I have known him for quite a few years.

When he came out to me our relationship didn't change, he is a fun, cool person and honestly I'd always had an inkling that he was gay, but was just waiting for him to tell me about it!

I don't bring his sexuality up unless he does, I let him decide when he is comfortable to talk about it. It's still a personal thing. Like for instance when we are out clubbing and he spots a cute guy; all us girls will give the the nod of approval and have a good giggle together.

COMING OUT

Compiled by chrystal moore

Peter
Brother, 16

My older sister Liz and I have always had a bit of an intense relationship. We would fight over EVERYTHING all the time. Like actually. I'd want to watch Family Guy, she'd want to watch something else. She hates Family Guy, haha. She's older though, so she'd always win. Ugh.

A bit earlier this year Liz turned 18, and asked me, mum and dad to start calling her Michael, cause she didn't really feel like a girl, and refer to 'her' as 'him'.

Michael told us he was a lesbian like 2 years ago, and we were all like "who cares" type of thing. It wasn't a big deal at all. But it's been soo tricky trying to remember to refer to the person who was my sister as my brother (and trying to explain it to my friends at school). You'd think it'd be a huge deal, but really, Michael is just Liz with a different name. The hardest part has been not calling him "Liz" when we fight. Like that's totally harsh, and I've only done it once. I still have a bruise on my arm from where he hit me. :P

Ade
School Mate, 18

I went to a private Christian school and was particularly close to one girl (but she was a lot closer to another friend of mine).

Our friend liked girls, but she didn't come out to any of us while she was at school. Basically, the school environment was really judgmental - and being different fuelled it all. She had only been at the school half a year and was trying to keep a low profile. We started to get suspicious when we heard rumours that she'd been seen at gay events and then the next week at a party she was seen hooking up with a girl. The rumours got out of control and people started treating her differently, eventually she had to make her Facebook private and delete people from school, because it all got too much.

One day my friend and I sat down with her to have a chat, I told her I wouldn't judge her like the rest of the school was. After I reached out to her we started hanging out more and she eventually felt comfortable 'coming out' to me.

Even though I was at a religious school my opinion of her wasn't influenced. The horrible thing is that I did see other students treat her differently even though they claimed to be accepting. Now that high school's over we don't hang out as much, but I know she's happy, and found a place where she belongs, which is awesome.

Courtney
Friend, 24

Me and a group of friends had been going to a bar in the city for weeks and drooling over this amazingly hot bartender. I'd always get dressed up, and make sure I looked great, but no matter what my friends and I did, we just couldn't seem to get his attention. One night when we went to the bar, we were sad to find that the hot bar tender wasn't working.

After a while I left, and on the way home I got a phone call from one of my guy friends. "You'll never guess what I'm watching." Turns out it was the bartender and another male friend of mine.

I had no idea either of them were gay! So that's the story of how I found out the hot bartender and one of my friends are both gay.

Jen
Netball Team, 16

I've played netball since year 5. A group of us girls in our year level got together and convinced our mums to help us start a team. We always trained after school, and then on Saturday morning we'd play. After our game, we'd always go to one of the girls' houses and spend the afternoon together. Even though we aren't on the team anymore, we all played together for about 3 or 4 years, so it's safe to say we're all still pretty close.

One of my teammates Ally and I are particularly close. Last year we were at a party together, and one of the guys there was being a jerk and called her 'dyke'. I didn't really think much of it, and didn't really say anything to the guy, but I could see that Ally got pretty upset by it. Looking back, I really wish I had've said something, but I didn't really see it as an issue, you know? People say that stuff all the time.

A few weeks after the party, Ally and I were playing basketball on her driveway. She looked distracted, and I kept asking her what was wrong.

She asked me if I ever "felt like being a girl was dumb". I asked her what she meant, and she sort of shrugged, and said that sometimes she "just wished she was a boy; it would just make more sense."

I asked her heaps of questions about what she meant. I really didn't understand it, and I think the problem was neither did she. Over the next 6 or so months, we'd talk more about it, and I went to the school wellbeing officer with her.

Eventually, Ally figured out the best way to describe it all was that she was 'gender diverse', and that she didn't really feel as though she fit into the categories of what people expected a girl to be. I think because I've always been a bit of a tomboy, that I've been able to understand it all? Maybe? But Ally will always be the same person I love.

I know that sometimes gender diverse people change their name, or their clothes, or have sex changes and that sort of thing. Ally hasn't, but that might change in the future. No matter what though, Ally will always be the friend I've grown up with.

Jake
Church Friend, 14

When my mate Shiv told me she was bisexual, it was a peculiar thing for me to digest. I say 'peculiar', and not 'difficult' because it wasn't something I had really thought about too much: the reality of people being gay and bisexual that is. I'd had a really Christian upbringing with parents that believed that such sexualities are a sin and a choice.

Because of this, I had the idea in my mind that it WAS in fact a choice, because you generally believe what your parents say when you're young, but it's no longer my opinion.

People always assume I'm gay, mostly because I'm not the manliest guy in the world. I think that because I'd experienced that it helped me come to accept Shiv's bisexuality. I am still a Christian, and I am strong in my faith, but over the years since Shiv came out to me I have changed my beliefs in so many areas of my life, including the way that I

interpret the Bible.
I believe that while the underlying meanings and morals of the Bible are true, it was written to be socially acceptable for that time, and that now the Bible needs to be interpreted by the individual to be relevant to today's society. The Bible says to love your neighbour as yourself, no matter what their circumstance, and that fact often seems to be overlooked. Christians often like to look at Bible in the literal sense, and focus on specifics, but I like to look at the big picture, and the big picture includes the acceptance of sexualities other than straight.

Tim
Cousin, 20

My cousin came out to me as bi a little while ago and I was cool with it. At her birthday this year she introduced us to her girlfriend, but when my grandmother asked who her "friend" was I told her it was my cousin's best friend.

I told her that as I didn't know how my grandmother would handle it. My grandmother isn't homophobic or anything, but I thought she might not get it. My relationship with my cousin hasn't changed at all though, I always knew she was bi or gay and she is still really awesome and she seems a lot more comfortable with herself.

Michael
Best Friend, 17

When my best mate first told me he liked guys and girls, I was definitely taken by surprise. I think my surprise may have manifested in a sort of disbelief, that my best friend and someone I thought I knew so well, and for so long, had a part of him I wasn't aware of.

I think I reacted a little bit selfishly, mainly because I genuinely didn't understand it. Marco expected a certain level of support, and truthfully I didn't feel like I was able to give that to him.

At first, I tried to ignore the whole thing and attempt to avoid the issue altogether. I don't remember the exact sequence of events but I do know I didn't make those first couple of weeks the most comfortable for him or even myself.

I quickly realised though that it was not a reflection on me at all and that my best mate was still my best mate. There was no sudden change in him, he was still the guy I'd known my whole life. If anything, he was more happy. Sometimes I wish I had reacted better, been more supportive, you know? But at the end of the day we're as close as ever. Anyone who doesn't accept you for who you are isn't someone you want to be around in the first place, so I'm glad I'm able to support him now.

Ash
Work Mate, 23

Upon starting my new job I met some amazing people, one in particular - Andy. He was warm, friendly and extraordinarily inviting. Within a few days he told me he was gay, I wasn't exactly surprised seeing as he addresses most of the staff by "Hey girl!" (Male and female alike).

He is one of the most sincere and beautiful people I've had the privilege to meet and who he likes really doesn't bother me at all (and why should it?). All I wish for him is a life of happiness and love.

Tracey
Brother, 15

I remember when I was 15 I was sitting in the lounge room watching TV and mum came in and said "we need to chat".

She told me my brother was gay, to which I replied "OK cool"... Mum tried to have a big chat about it, and make a deal over it; but the fact that my brother was gay really didn't bother me.

When I think back I remember walking to school with my brother and a group of boys from his level rode by on their bikes and spat on him. At the time I was really confused as to why they were so mean to him, when I was older he told me it was because he was gay - that's why they teased him.

It just makes me so angry now! I love my brother - he's an amazing and beautiful guy - and it makes me sad to think of how much he had to go through during high school. It also makes me realise just how much of that bullying goes on that people don't realise.

sporty guys.

micah scott

Shane and Chris (Bushie) went to school together, then met Josh at their rowing club. Even though Shane didn't invite Chris to his birthday party in year 9, that didn't stop them all from becoming mates in year 10.

Sitting down with them in their rowing club overlooking the Yarra, the boys had just finished their Saturday morning row.

"I remember the first time I met Bushie – we had an open day for young rowers, and we started doing a fair bit of training together. Though our relationship grew stronger one day, when Bushie was doing pull-ups in the gym and I dacked him and everyone saw." Shane throws his head back in laughter, and then sees Bushie and Josh shaking their heads. "Well, I thought it was a funny joke."

"When I first met him I thought 'this guy is a bit of a douche.' Haha nah. I thought he was a pretty cool guy. He was pretty big, so I thought he must have been a good rower. I mean I can't really remember. We've known each other so long. "

"It's pretty fair to say all three of us gelled together pretty quickly," Josh jumps in.

"We spend a lot of the time down at the rowing shed. We catch up after training, we're all pretty close. We go round to each others' houses. Y'know, we see each other at 5am, then 5pm, spend lots of time together on camps and that too. Sometimes we clash - it can be full on being with each other all the time. Tensions build, and we all have arguments. I've seen these guys go off at each other over how cooked pasta should be. Stupid."

"Hey - you screwed up my pasta!" Bushie cuts in.

Smiling, Josh shakes his head and continues, "So Bushie's gay. Man, I wouldn't have assumed it at all, especially because he was always like 'aw yeah let's go get that chick' or hook up with a chick. He played a very good cover game. I can see why though. He went to Carey Grammar, and you know – we made the joke 'Carey Fairy' and so we nicknamed him 'fairy boy' - this is before he came out. And then when he came out, I went 'Ugh. We've called him all these names.'"

Shane agrees that it was a non issue for him. "I didn't really care to be honest. And when he told me, I could see that he was obviously crapping himself and worried about how everyone would react."

"I guess I'd never had any other friends that had come out. It was just a different experience – not in a bad way or anything. Definitely a surprise, but I was more worried about him being upset, or stressed about it. I'd say that was the hardest part, it was just the thought that he's struggled with it for so long."

"Yeah when Bushie told me, we were sitting in the pub in Amsterdam," Josh remembers, "and I said 'what's going on mate?' and he was like 'I'm gay'. I saw his face, and he was stunned, waiting for my reaction. Inside me, my gut dropped, and every stupid or homophobic comment I'd said in the past flashed through my head – 'fairy boy', 'You're gay' – I thought to myself 'I'm such an idiot!'"

"I don't know if I shed a tear, but I was almost about to cry, 'cause I was so happy for him, but at the same time I was like 'Struth man, you've gone through all of this, and it's all built up, and no one's known about it,' like 'man, why couldn't you tell me earlier?'"

"For me, I've got a religious background, and it's always been like 'nah, you shouldn't be gay' – but I don't even care about that – what it's about is my mate and how he felt. I was really happy for him, I gave him a hug. I'm sure he felt relief."

"Yeah...I totally did," Bushie adds.

"I thought 'Gee, that must have been so hard for him to tell me', especially 'cause I'm the type of guy who likes to joke around about things inappropriately, so I can see how he could have thought I was homophobic."

Both Josh and Shane are quick to add what's different now that Chris is out. "After Bushie came out, I can really say I've never seen this guy so happy. So much more relaxed. I guess before he was probably wound up a bit tight. What was the tipping point?"

Bushie sits up in his chair, "I got to a point where I had to come out. Not being able to tell my closest friends who I was...it made me so unhappy. I could only do it for a couple of years until it got too much.
Every day growing up, I considered coming out, but thought the reaction would be terrible. With some of the stuff you see in the media, or at school, you end up believing your friends wouldn't be your mates if they knew this aspect of your life. It's messed up, yeah? Look at how cool these guys actually are."

Josh laughs, "Chris is a pretty intimidating guy though, so out of all our peers and who we know, I don't think there's one person who has an issue with him being gay."

"I guess there's this stereotype that sporty guys are homophobic – but there are a lot of sporty guys who are gay. I think that stereotype has changed a lot in the past four or five years. I mean I speak to guys who are older than us, and they admit they would have had an issue with it. But I also see some of the younger guys I coach who wouldn't even bat an eyelid."

"One of the guys younger than us said he was bi, and it was a complete non-issue, and I just think that's so impressive. These guys are all footballers, rowers, sporty jocks. I don't think it's fair to have that stereotype."

"There might be some people who have an issue showering with a gay guy - I think they just need to grow up man. People like that just need to have their eyes opened. I definitely think that seeing us not caring at all and not being bothered helps heaps. "

"By far the biggest thing is how much more relaxed and happier Chris is. If he's alright, so are we."

how can you tell?

alice chesworth

We form our ideas of what sexuality and gender are from our experiences – so if the only lesbian person we know is from watching Glee, you might be forgiven for having a warped perspective. But here's a handy tip: don't always believe what you see on TV. Not every gay guy aspires to be a fashion designer, and not every lesbian is into sports.

Just like there's no 'right way' to be straight, there's really no 'right way' to be gay either.

Being same sex attracted is just one aspect of who a person is. It affects who they are about as much as being straight would. We all know people who break the 'girly girl' and 'manly man' stereotypes, and we all know there are many shades of grey in between the two. How you dress or act is just an expression of your personality, and the same goes for people who are same sex attracted. It's pretty damn hard to 'dress straight' - you're just dressing as you! In that vein, someone can't 'dress gay', they're just being themselves. What you do, how you sound, your body language etc. is just you being you, no matter who you're attracted to!

The assumptions people can make based on stereotypes can be pretty wild:

- Not every gay guy wants to be your 'gay BFF' and give you fashion advice.
- Not everyone has a crappy time coming out. (Ask them!)
- Not everyone who is gender diverse wants to have a sex change.
- Not every bisexual still has to 'make up their mind'. (They have, they're bisexual!)
- Just because someone's same sex attracted doesn't mean they secretly want to get with you.
- Just because someone's same sex attracted or gender diverse doesn't mean they have to answer questions about their personal lives.
- Just because someone's gender diverse, doesn't necessarily mean they're gay.

It can be frustrating to hear phrases like "could you please dress like a girl for once", or questions like "are you the man or the woman in the relationship?" (They're both the same sex, that's kind of the point!)

Of course, some same sex attracted people are 'girly' and some are 'manly', but really, so are some straight people.

Unless you're flirting with someone it's pretty hard to say who you're attracted to, so why would you make assumptions about someone else? You never know, that kid you thought was straight might not be, and that kid you thought was gay might just really like musical theatre. So when you tell someone they don't "seem gay", you sound like an idiot, and who knows, maybe you don't "seem straight." Same sex attracted people are just as diverse as any other group of people: Mac users, people with red hair or people who hate Nicolas Cage's acting.

In that case 'gaydar', which is what some people call trying to detect someone's sexuality, is a pretty silly concept then. As I've said, it can be pretty impossible to tell. The best course of action is not to assume anyone is same sex attracted or straight. Let them be themselves and if they tell you, they tell you, and if you see them flirting with someone, then that's usually a good clue ;)

If they do fit a stereotype, that's OK too because that's just who they are. It makes sense that if someone comes out, it's best not to assume they'll change how they act or dress, but if they do, that's cool too.

So how DO you tell if someone likes guys, girls, or both? How about telling them you'd be cool if they were queer and just waiting for them to tell you?

crushes.

ella svensson

It's a pretty sure thing that at some point we'll have a crush on someone who doesn't like us back. Sometimes it's because they're in a relationship, and sometimes they're just not interested. In high school, Grace found out that her friend Ella had a crush on her. Grace wasn't really interested, mostly since she's straight.

Grace and Ella talk about what it was like for both of them, and dealing with the awkwardness of liking someone who doesn't like you back.

Ella: So how exactly did you figure out I had a crush on you?

Grace: Umm, because, you told everyone, EXCEPT me. Word gets around. You didn't officially tell me until afterwards, you said, "by the way, I used to have a crush on you."

E: Haha. According to Google I should have been doing things like 'telling you how much better women are'.

G: *giggles* Umm, I don't think you did that, but I'm oblivious to everything, so I didn't figure it out until later on.

E: What was it like when you realised I had a crush on you?

G: Umm, I don't know. You were pretty much my closest friend at the time. And so when I kinda figured it out I just thought 'nah she can't have a crush on me, it's just because we're really close.' And I convinced myself that you didn't really have a crush on me.

I didn't really want you to have a crush on me because I couldn't really...

E: Reciprocate?

G: Yeah, reciprocate! I didn't feel awkward at all, even when we were having sleepovers because I knew that you weren't going to jump me or anything.

E: Did you take it as a compliment?

G: I dunno, I guess, a little? I generally approve of your standards, so yes; it was a compliment. You have good taste. *laughs*

E: Was it awkward at all?

G: Yeah I guess so. It's always awkward when someone likes you and you don't like them back. When I had figured out that you liked me and when you really liked me I generally did tend to avoid it because I felt bad. But when you got over me, and I knew that you didn't like me anymore I was okay with it.

When you find out someone has a crush on you, there are two ways to react. Depending on whether you like them, or whether you don't like them. And so I reacted when I found out that you did have a crush on me the same way I would act when I found out anyone who I liked had a crush on me. So I'd be like 'oh that's nice, I'm flattered, I like spending time with them', I may not be interested but I'm not weirded out by it.

E: So would you react differently than you would if a male friend who you weren't interested in told you he liked you?

G: I was probably more comfortable really, maybe just because I had an excuse. Like 'aww, I really like you... But I'm straight.' As opposed to when a guy likes me and you have to convince them why you don't like them.

E: Yeah, some girls do the whole "OMG you're gay? You must be interested in me" thing, which you didn't do.

It's good because you never took the stance that because I'm a girl and not a guy and interested in you that I was instantly going to try and jump you.

G: Yeah. No but you weren't and plus you were scared with me a little bit.

E: *laughs*

G: You were! Whenever we had sleepovers I remember you would get changed in the other room!

E: That's because I was so afraid of making you feel uncomfortable...

G: That was probably nice but I'm rarely uncomfortable anyway. And at people's houses we'd end up sleeping next to each other and you would always be really shy. It was cute.

E: Were you ever afraid that I ever might try and act on it?

G: If you were ever going to try and act on it, you wouldn't just try to rip my clothes off! Who does that? You would have talked to me about it.

Mate, you're one of my closest friends, and it's pretty awesome that things just didn't get awkward between us.

culture and faith.

chrystal moore

Kas is a 20 year old Muslim girl from the Maldives who found out her best friend was gay. Even through religious and cultural barriers their friendship stayed strong. So I sat down with Kas and asked her to tell me a bit about herself, her new life in Australia and what it's like to have a best friend who's gay.

How long have you been in Melbourne for?
This is my third year in Melbourne and I have loved every bit of my stay here. Although weather back home is perfect and I miss that, I find that Melbourne has provided me with many learning experiences and made me look at things from a very different perspective.

What's life like in Melbourne?
My life here in Melbourne has been pretty exciting as this has been the first time that I have been away from my family. I had to do everything by myself and had to learn a whole new way of living, as it is quite different from that of my home country.

I had to learn how to be independent. But it has also provided me to look at this world from a very different perspective as I was exposed to a lot of things all at the same time. I believe that I adjusted quite well after the initial culture shock and it is quite exciting. I have built relationships with people that I would keep for life and have a really good life here. It has become my second home now.

What was the main culture shock for you then?
My family is Muslim and I have been raised as Muslim all my life. I am not quite sure of where I am in my religion right now. Life here is really different, and makes you consider a lot of things...

The mindsets of people here are very different to that of what it is back at home. There are more opportunities here for people to explore and to choose their own paths. People are less educated in my home country and the living standards are lower in Maldives than that of Australia. Even the way people interact with each other is very different. People are quite religious back at home, however, it is also a very moderate country.

What about friends here?
My best friend Nidal and I met on the first day of university and started sitting together in lectures and tutes. It was nice making new friends and he had a good sense of humour (which I liked a lot). We hung out a lot and experienced uni together. We both had just moved here from different countries and were excited about the new uni experience. After a lot of lunch breaks and assignments together we became close friends.

After about 8 months of being very close friends, he told me one night that he was gay. I thought he was joking at first because he jokes around a lot. So for about a week I did not believe him. I honestly thought he was tricking me, even though every time I asked him if he was joking he would look at me and say "No I'm not joking!". So over a coffee about a week later I asked him again:

"C'mon tell me are you really gay?", he said "yes!" and then I realised... He might actually be serious!

Wow - how did that impact your friendship?
When I (finally) accepted that Nidal was gay, I became very overwhelmed and angry with myself. It was his first time coming out to a friend and I felt that I had let him down by not believing him. I remember then feeling angry at this world, because I felt it was not fair that some people had to struggle to explain who they are, while others don't have to. As to our friendship, I believe that it grew more as we were able to be very honest with each other and because of that I felt that I have had the best relationship with a friend that I couldn't have imagined having before. However, when I think about him I do not think of him as a gay or straight person, he is just my best friend and it does not matter what his sexuality is, because it does not change who he is for me.

How did your cultural background and faith impact on Nidal coming out to you?
It didn't really. However, it made me question my own religion's and other religions' point of view about being gay and same sex attraction. Also I began to think about living life, the concept of being happy and being fair to all. I am a strong believer of equality amongst everyone regardless of sex or colour or sexuality. By the time my friend came out to me I had already been doing my own research about same sex attraction and felt more educated about it than when I had left the Maldives.

I found that I became very defensive of the topic of sexual orientation as it was no longer a thing which was far away from me. I cannot tolerate discrimination of any form, and having a friend who's gay makes it personal.

How are things with Nidal now?
His friendship means the world to me and I would not give it up for anything. We have gone through a lot together in the past two years. He has supported me in my times of need and we have shared a lot. I am actually dreading the day that I have to go back to the Maldives, just because we would be so far away from each other. He will always be my best friend.

why i do what i do.

rose flanagan

As a straight, middle class, young female, going into my first year of high school should have been a breeze, right? Wrong. No one's high school is a breeze. There's something different about everyone and when you're young, being different is often directly proportionate to being picked on.

There was the kid with the big nose, the big ears, the glasses, the fat kids, the scrawny kids, the skanks, the dumb-asses, the smart-asses, and (where I seemed to fit in) the "try-hards". Amongst all these labels though, there was one thrown around that I didn't fully understand; "gay".

"Gay" basically became synonymous with "loser" and "awful". If you couldn't come out on the weekend, you were gay; if you had an assignment to do, that was gay. I came to realise this negative association with the word was ingrained in the way everyone spoke, and it never seemed right. It's not that it was openly acceptable to make fun of gay people at our school and of course if there was a complaint or a serious conflict there would be standard high school consequences. The problem was, although it wasn't acceptable, it was swept under the rug. It was shied away from. It was hoped that no one would step forward and call someone out on being homophobic because it meant delving into the controversial unknown. That's something I wanted to change.

I never really knew many gay or gender diverse people growing up. Before high school the only person I can recall is my mum's best friend for as long as I can think. He was a successful, hardworking and gorgeous man. I remember my mum telling me he was gay, and I remember not caring at all. Maybe that's why when I went to high school and had friends come out to me, it really didn't make a difference.

I was at school, it was lunchtime, and I was hanging out with one of my guy mates, eating a Cyclone and whinging about homework. That night I was on MSN when that same friend popped up and said he needed to tell me something, "I'm gay." And then the next day we went to school, sat around at lunchtime eating Cyclones and whinging about homework. It didn't change a thing. All that happened was it gave him a sense of confidence and happiness that he hadn't felt before.But it did seem to be a big issue to other people. I started to notice that my friends were being treated differently, and mocked and bullied by people whom their sexuality had no impact on. For a long time I didn't want to get involved. I didn't want to rock the boat with my peers, I mean, hey, our school had a strict bullying policy and eventually it will be dealt with, right? But one day, my close friend told me a story of how he was in the bathroom and a few boys came in, taunted him, threw water on him and left laughing, while he sat crying in a cubicle alone. That's when I realised standing on the sidelines with my eyes closed and my ears blocked and hoping it would stop was not enough. So I joined Minus18.

At first I went along to a couple of Minus18 events, thinking to myself "Oh god, these people are going to smell the "straight" on me and kick me out!" But, of course everyone involved were so incredibly lovely and helpful. It made me realise that everything I thought I knew about sexuality and gender from TV was pretty wrong. At the end of the day, I couldn't tell who was gay, or who was trans just by looking at them, in the exact same way that they couldn't tell I was straight by looking at me.

Recently one of my family members came out to me. He's a young boy growing up in the country and it was great that there was more I could do than say "I support you, I love you." Through Minus18, I have been able to give him materials, resources and information that can actually be effective in helping him understand himself. That is why I found Minus18 so important.

Yes, high school's tough but being attracted to someone of the same sex is no reason for it to get tougher. If you're straight, I know what it's like – the apprehension, the politics, the fear of being ridiculed yourself. But think about how much you might make someone's day by simply not treating them any differently. And then maybe someone else will start to think like that too. It's already begun and you have a unique opportunity to get on board and know that you made a small change to make a big difference when it really counted.

Being straight doesn't make you a good person. But accepting others and treating them with respect regardless of their sexuality, that is an admirable quality no one can take away from you. And, being a volunteer at Minus18, I am keen beyond words to get as many peoples' heads around that as possible.

HERE'S SOME
OTHER STUFF
YOU MIGHT
FIND USEFUL

to my year 7 self.

Dear My Year 7 Self,

Hey Sarah! Now year 7's not the best year of your life. lots of people don't get along with you that well at your school. You have a few problems and you're a little bit unhappy. You're a bit of a nerd, and people pick on you for it. Growing up in rural Australia can seem tough now, but it's definitely something that'll shape who you are.

When it comes to boys, or relationships, you have NO idea, and you can't even imagine what it's like kissing someone. This will change, let me tell you!

At the moment, you're not going to know much about sex, sexuality, or even be thinking about it. This is going to change a lot in the next few years of your life; not only are you going to be thinking about your own sexuality and experiences, but youre also going to be dealing with a lot of different things to do with other people's sexuality.

In the next few years your brother Ben, who is the most important person in your life, is going to tell you that he's gay. Honestly, you're going to freak out a little bit. Not only are you trying to work out your own stuff, but you'll have to work out how on earth you're going to support him.

The thing is though, in about Year 9 some of your closest friends, and even guys who you go out with, are going to start picking on your brother. They'll call him things like *gay*, *poof* and *fag*. It's such a struggle because you don't want to speak out against your friends, but you also want to do right by your brother.

You have no idea what to do, and the really crap thing is, you do nothing. I mean, you maybe occasional glance at them like you disapprove when they say "Hey Sarah, look! It's your little sister," but you don't tell them to stop.

It's hard looking back and realising you didn't do more for your brother, and you know you could have done more.

You *wish* you did more.

In a few years time you're going to get access to this awesome thing called 'the internet'; you're going to jump on MSN chat after school, make a MySpace profile and a whole new world is going to open up to you. Facebook won't start up for a few more years, but when that hits – woah, look out! Haha.

But this is going to bring a few problems, particularly for your little brother, Ben.

So Ben decides to make a recording of himself lipsyncing to a trashy pop song. He records it on his webcam and puts it on youtube, and in less than 24 hours hundreds of people at school have seen it.

The reaction he gets isn't great – well, infact it's homophobic and pretty awful. He had notes in his locker, saying the most awful stuff that makes me cringe when I think about it.

Sarah, It's not really something you want to get involved in though, and you don't know what to do.

If I could change something for the next few years, it's be that you have more confidence to say "Mate, that's not ok" and stand up for my LGBT friends. It doesn't just hurt my brother, it hurts me.

When you get older, there's a pretty good chance you're going to have friends in a whole spectrum of sexualities and gender identities, and you'll quickly learn that their identity doesn't define them. You need to support them, and if you find that you're a bit out of your depth, or you don't know what to say, that's OK. Just being there some usually be enough.

Don't give up, Sarah! There's so much information out there, online and all that. Check it out, and have a go at supporting your friends. It gets easier every time.

Love Sarah

What would you tell your Year 7 Self if you had the chance to send a message back in time?

WATCH THE VIDEO
year7self.org.au

more places to go.

australia wide.

SAFE SCHOOLS COALITION AUSTRALIA

Nationally convened by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), Safe Schools Coalition Australia is proud to create change in schools to build safer and more inclusive environments for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, teachers and families. FYA is a national independent non-profit organisation dedicated to all young people in Australia.

Safe Schools Coalition Australia partners are being established in every state and territory. Ask your school to get involved.

safeschoolscoaltion.org.au

MINUS18

Australia's national organisation for LGBT youth, Minus18 is young people leading change, building social inclusion and advocating for an Australia free of homophobia and transphobia.

Jump on to the website, get to know other same sex attracted and gender diverse young people, access resources and advice, and get info on upcoming events.

minus18.org.au

HEADSPACE

Headspace is the national youth mental health foundation and supports young people who need someone to talk to or who are going through a tough time. Check out their website to find your nearest headspace centre or for online mental health support.

headspace.org.au

QLIFE

QLife is a counselling and referral service for people of diverse sex, genders and sexualities. QLife provides nationwide, peer supported telephone and online chat support to LGBTI people of all ages.

1800 184 527 **qlife.org.au**

OII AND AISSG

Organisation Intersex International Australia and and Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group Australia (AISSG) provide support and education by and for intersex people.

oii.org.au **aissg.org.au**

act.

SEXUAL HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING ACT

SHFPACT is a health promotion charity supporting schools to deliver relevant and effective sexuality and relationships education for ALL students.

shfpact.org.au

BIT BENT

Bit Bent is a social support group held in Belconnen and Woden for young people who want to hang out with other LGBTIQ or questioning young people, in a safe and friendly space.

vic.

FAMILY PLANNING NSW

Family Planning NSW provides reproductive and sexual health services as well as information and health promotion for doctors, nurses, teachers and other health, education and welfare professionals.

fpnsw.org.au

TWENTY10

Twenty10 is a community organisation working with and supporting people of diverse genders, sexes and sexualities, their families and communities in NSW of all ages. It incorporates the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service NSW, including specialised services for young people.

twenty10.org.au

nt.

NORTHERN TERRITORY AIDS AND HEPATITIS COUNCIL

NTAHC provides a range of programs supporting LGBT health, with a particular focus on preventing transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C, STIs and minimising the physical and social impact of HIV/AIDS and Hep C.

ntahc.org.au

tas.

WORKING IT OUT

Working it Out provides services designed to meet the needs of people negotiating their sexuality and/or gender identity and intersex status through individual counselling and support, support groups, student education, workplace training, and community education.

workingitout.org.au

qld.

FAMILY PLANNING QUEENSLAND

Family Planning Qld provides sexual and reproductive health clinical services across QLD. They also provide education and training to health professionals, teachers and community leaders.

fpq.com.au

OPEN DOORS YOUTH SERVICE

Open Doors provides counselling and support services to young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender. They also provide support to families.

opendoors.net.au

vic.

SAFE SCHOOLS COALITION VICTORIA

SSCV is a coalition of schools, staff and students dedicated to supporting gender and sexual diversity and challenging discrimination in all Victorian schools.

They are the VIC provider of Safe Schools Coalition and based out of GLHV.

sscv.org.au

MINUS18

In addition to its national activities, Minus18 in Victoria runs the annual Same Sex Formal, social and dance events, Stand Out workshops and an online social network for same sex attracted, and gender diverse young people.

minus18.org.au

sa.

SHINE SA

SHine SA (Sexual Health Information Networking and Education SA) works in partnership with government, health, education and community agencies, and communities, to improve the sexual health and wellbeing of South Australians.

They are the SA provider of Safe Schools Coalition Australia.

shinesa.org.au

wa.

FREEDOM CENTRE

Freedom Centre is an organisation and drop in centre for young people to support each other and their communities to be informed, happy and healthy about their sexuality, sex and gender.

freedom.org.au

standing out.

So you might be asking "what next?" If you're looking to take things another step, you might want to think about Standing Out against homophobia and transphobia.

Standing out against homophobia and transphobia, especially at school and uni won't just support your friends, but goes a pretty long way to making sure everybody feels like they belong.

There're a bunch of different ways to Stand Out. In fact, we've got a whole magazine on them.

Find out where your friends can get support

Your friends *might* be too shy to talk to others about being queer; it can sometimes be pretty intimidating. A lot of the time they might feel like they have to 'out' themselves, which they might not be ready to do. Finding out which teachers at school are supportive, or websites / places they can go to meet people is a pretty easy but awesome thing for you to do - especially since we've given you a head start at the back of this mag.

Don't let people get away with being jerks

Don't let people be jerks. It's pretty simple. Report people who bully, or harrass others, and when they make ignorant comments, call them out on it. Stopping words like *fag*, *poof* or *dyke* or phrases like *that's so gay* ist a good place to start.

Get people talking

Talking about sexuality and gender identity is a pretty decent way of getting other people to talk about it too. Think school assignments, putting posters up, guest speakers at school - that sort of thing. Get your student leaders / student council to run events that raise awareness for queer youth. Rainbow casual clothes days and recognising days like International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia - Just a few to get you started.

Help start, or join in a Stand Out group

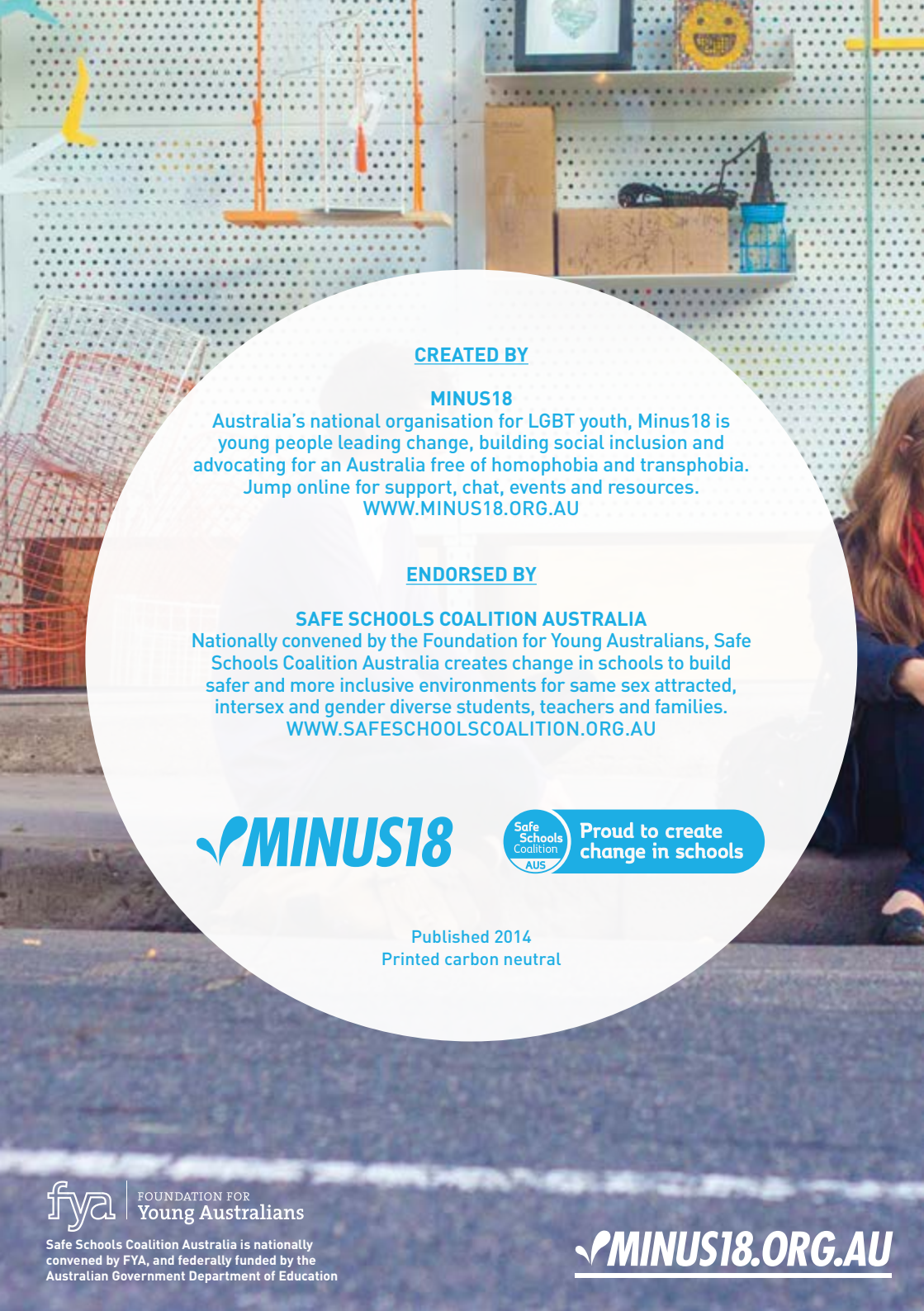
Some schools/unis have Stand Out or diversity groups - places for queer and straight students to hang out and chat about what's going through their mind, and to talk about what things they can do together to change things in the school. If your school doesn't have one, you could be the awesome person that starts it.

Be counted

Create change in your school and become a member of Safe Schools Coalition Australia. You'll need your principal to join - visit **safeschoolscoalition.org.au** to find out how.

DOWNLOAD STAND OUT!

minus18.org.au
safeschoolscoalition.org.au



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Australia's national organisation for LGBT youth, Minus18 is young people leading change, building social inclusion and advocating for an Australia free of homophobia and transphobia. Jump online for support, chat, events and resources.
WWW.MINUS18.ORG.AU

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Safe Schools Coalition AUS — Proud to create change in schools

Published 2014
Printed carbon neutral

fya | FOUNDATION FOR Young Australians

Safe Schools Coalition Australia is nationally convened by FYA, and federally funded by the Australian Government Department of Education

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OMG MY
FRIEND'S
QUEER