



Journeys

When your lesbian, gay,
bisexual or transgender
child uses drugs
and/or alcohol

FOR PARENTS



Adfam

Families, drugs and alcohol

Fact and fiction

Challenging some of the myths relating to LGBT people can help you open an honest dialogue with your child in relation to their sexual and gender identity and also their drug and/or alcohol use

COPING WITH DISCRIMINATION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people may face significant discrimination during their lives. There is research that suggests this discrimination leads to low self-esteem and has a significant impact on the likelihood of LGBT people using drugs and alcohol as a means of coping. Often the realisation they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender may be extremely difficult for your child to come to terms with. They may be upset, confused or scared. They may be angry or resentful and you may bear the brunt of some of this anger. They might want to talk about it or they might prefer to withdraw and stay quiet. The main thing is that you should make yourself available and ready to talk if they wish. It is important to ask questions, not to be judgmental and be ready to listen and be open. Remember you can seek support from relevant agencies – see middle section pages iii and iv.

At school

Your child might find it hard to be fully themselves at school. Or it might be that they are the butt of jokes or even subjected to violence and bullying from other children. This could well impact on their ability to perform at school, to form friendships and build relationships with friends and peers. At the same time, young people are exposed to drugs and alcohol in all sorts of environments and school is certainly one of them. This doesn't always mean they are directly exposed to it at school (although some are) but certainly conversations about drugs, attitudes towards and pressure to take

drugs and alcohol are all part of the school environment. It is important that you are able to explore these issues with your child and liaise with the school; particularly if there are any incidents of bullying going on. Perhaps you can contact the school and find out about their bullying policy and whether this covers sexual orientation. For information and help, contact Schools Out at www.schools-out.org.uk

As an adult

Sometimes, your son/daughter might try and deny their feelings and follow what they see as a 'normal' heterosexual lifestyle. He or she may engage in heterosexual relationships and even get married and/or have children in an attempt to deny or stifle any feelings they may have towards the same sex. Often, drugs or alcohol will provide an avenue of escape and a way to cope with anxiety. They may help your son/daughter to relax or forget about their problems, escape from their internal conflicts and to help them deal with internalised homophobia and oppression. This may be especially true if they have nowhere else to turn for help or support. There are a number of agencies that help and support LGBT people either face to face or via the telephone. For a directory of services contact www.query.org.uk

LIFESTYLE ISSUES

While, in some instances, someone's drug/alcohol use may be directly or indirectly related to their sexuality (e.g. to help them deal with homophobia), this is not always the case. In many

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FOR LGBT PEOPLE

When your partner or family member uses drugs and/or alcohol



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Families, drugs and alcohol

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'I do love my brother very much... but the drugs have caused huge family splits over the years'



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'After trying out different counsellors we are now well on the road to recovery and are much happier'



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Welcome

Trying to deal with the substance use of your partner, or someone you care about, can be a challenge. If you are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender you might also find yourself struggling with prejudice and discrimination – real or perceived – and this can be a particularly difficult time for you and your family.

It is not really clear whether drug and alcohol use is a bigger issue for LGBT people. Certainly stress factors associated with homophobia, the 'coming out' process, isolation and secrecy might lead to people using drugs or alcohol to help them cope or reduce tension. Mainstream support services often operate with an unconscious assumption that everyone is heterosexual. In addition, we know that family support services often apply a narrow definition of family and this means that you might feel excluded from accessing services.

Being caught up in someone else's addiction to drugs and/or alcohol might mean that you feel incredibly lonely and don't know where to turn for help. We hope that this booklet, based on real stories from LGBT people affected by someone else's drug and/or alcohol use, will be a helpful resource for you; both in terms of highlighting what other families are going through and also listing useful services for you to access.