

H. SPECIFIC ISSUES IN HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT: **PASTORAL RESPONSE GUIDELINES**

H.4 SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

PRAYER | PRAYER OF SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

*Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know You, a heart to seek You,
Wisdom to find You, conduct pleasing to You,
Faithful perseverance in waiting for You,
And hope of finally embracing You.*

Amen.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Note: A review of section G.1, G.2, and G.3 helps support appropriate communication.

When dealing with students regarding SSA (same sex attraction), the Catholic educator should:

1. Remember that all people have inherent dignity and worth, regardless of race, creed, ethnicity, gender or sexual inclination.
2. Remember at all times that each person is made in the image and likeness of God and is therefore GOOD.
3. Read and understand the CCCB letter “*Pastoral Ministry to Young people with Same-Sex Attraction.*” See Appendix D.
4. Read and understand the CISVA document “*Persons with Same-Sex Attraction: Pastoral and Educational Considerations.*” See Appendix F.
5. Understand the emotional, physical, social and sexual development of adolescents.
6. Have knowledge of the curriculum and family life components relevant to this issue.
7. Recognize the Church’s teaching on SSA is based on its understanding of human sexuality, marriage, and the purpose of life.
8. Review Policy 407 *Student Code of Conduct*, Policy 408 *Anti-Bullying*, and Policy 410 *Student Groups and Organizations*.

9. Appreciate that to openly speculate about another person's sexual inclination is gossip and damages relationships.
10. Understand that transient same-sex attraction is not uncommon and may affect up to a quarter of adolescents.
11. Recognize in students with SSA that:
 - They may bargain with God, becoming hyper-religious (e.g., extra involvement in campus ministry).
 - They may become convinced they were "born that way" and conclude, mistakenly, that God must have intended them to take up same-sex ideology and practice.
 - They may try to pass as straight by mocking people with SSA, dating the opposite sex, and/or engaging in risky sexual behaviour. (Counter intuitively, students questioning their sexuality are at increased risk of teen pregnancy).

IMPORTANT FOR STUDENT TO CONSIDER IF DISCLOSING*

- Is there an understanding that people are not defined by their sexuality but rather by their relationship with God?
- Do you have support? Would you consider spiritual direction from a priest, sister or recommended Catholic counselor?
- Is the student knowledgeable about the Church's teaching on homosexuality?
- What is the emotional climate at home?
- How long have you been aware of these feelings and why are you wanting to bring this up now (are there external pressures)?
- Do you have relevant Catholic resources available on the subject?
- What is your general relationship with your parents?
- Is it safe for you to do this now?

* "Understanding the Typical Stages of Students Who Disclose SSA." Calgary Catholic: "Towards an Inclusive Community." Used with permission.

POSSIBLE PARENTAL OR FAMILY REACTIONS TO DISCLOSURE OF SSA

Parents may react to disclosure of SSA in a variety of ways. *Ideally they will reassure their son or daughter that their love is unconditional*; however, such support may be mixed with other reactions such as shock, denial, guilt, or grief. It is now uncommon for young people with SSA to be rejected outright by their families. More usual, instead, is for parents to over-identify with their child's claimed sexual identity and to assume that loving their child implies they must approve of all of his or her choices. Many relatives of people with SSA feel torn between the moral expectations of their faith and their loyalty to their family member. However, there need be no contradiction if only they trust that a loving God has shown us a path for the benefit of everyone *including* persons with SSA. EnCourage, the Catholic apostolate to loved ones of people with SSA, can support such family members through discussion, prayer and fellowship.

CHURCH TEACHING

1. Homosexual inclinations are not sinful.
2. The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition (CCC 2358).
3. Catholic moral teaching is the same for heterosexuals and homosexual persons: genital sexual activity outside marriage between a man and a woman is forbidden.
4. Our sexuality is only one aspect of what makes us who we are. Our inclination should not obscure the deeper and core aspect of who we are, "made in God's image," and therefore spiritual creatures searching for a fullness that only comes in a relationship with God.
5. Our sexuality is an essential dimension of who we are and therefore a key determinant in our happiness.

"The Church believes that, in the order of creation, man and woman are designed to need each other's complementary traits and to enter into a mutual relationship so as to give life to children. That is why homosexual practices cannot be approved by the Church. Christians owe all persons respect and love, however, regardless of their sexual orientation, because all people are respected and loved by God."

Youcat #65

6. God has a special plan for each of us. God desires our whole heart and is eager to assist us in our personal struggles.
7. Homosexual persons, like all others, are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection (CCC 2359).
8. Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, Tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved (CCC 2357).
9. In general, homosexual feelings and attractions are not freely chosen and are not sinful. What is sinful is any genital sexual expression outside the bond of marriage between a man and a woman.

CASE STUDIES

Note: The following Case Studies and Personal Story could be discussed during a staff in-service.

SITUATION #1

The mother of a grade 9 student asked for a meeting with the principal. Once in front of the principal, Mrs. Smith explained that she was concerned about an upcoming sports trip and how students would be roomed together. One of her daughter's friends on the team had come out as a lesbian. Her daughter was uncomfortable rooming with this girl after finding this out and didn't know how to talk to her coach or the girl about it. This was information that her daughter had learned through other students.

SITUATION #2

A group of grade 9 boys were caught writing the word "gay" on a classmate's locker. The student whose locker it was is an honour roll student and always involved in the school drama program. Some might say that he was a bit effeminate. It was not the first time that his classmates were teasing him in this way.

SITUATION #3

John always stays late to finish up his art projects and chats with the art teacher. One day after school, he asks the teacher what she thinks about homosexuality because they are talking about it in Religion class. She replies that it's a difficult question, why is he asking. He quietly replies that he thinks he might be gay and isn't sure what to do about it.

SITUATION #4

A grade 12 student wants to bring a same-sex date to grad.

PERSONAL STORY

NO ONE BY MY SIDE | By a Member of Courage, Toronto, ON

It was very difficult being a student with same-sex attractions, both in elementary and secondary schools.

Let me start by stating that from a very early age (either 12 or 13) I was attracted to other boys. Not once did I ever experience sexual attraction toward a girl.

My first experience of homosexual discrimination occurred, I believe, in the eighth grade. There was a very attractive boy in my classroom that I had a crush on and admired secretly for quite some time. He and I were never friends, but I do remember, on one occasion, play-fighting with him during break. I was so thrilled to be playing with him that I wasn't aware of the sparkle in my eyes and the excessive broad smile on my face.

He noticed it, however, and immediately he stopped playing with me. "Fag!" he said. "Don't look at me like that! You're a fag." He then turned around and left me, and that was the end of that. This experience was very painful for me. His words made me feel like I didn't belong with other boys, especially in the playground during breaks. I began to feel different from others and felt very unaccepted.

From this point onward, I realized I had to be extra careful. I always had to make sure others weren't looking at me whenever I gazed at attractive boys, male teenagers, and older males. Although this also applied to family members and friends, the school setting was my major concern. The reason being was that there was a plethora of attractive male students which made it difficult for me to keep my eyes from admiring their good looks. School, of course, was also the place where I spent most of the day. Thereby, the chance of students discovering my secret was quite high.

I felt most conscious and paranoid about being discovered during gym, especially in the changing room, for obvious reasons. Once in a while I'd hear the words "fag" and "gay" used in a discriminatory and mean way. Because of this, I frequently kept my gaze on the floor while changing. I felt like I was living in prison, always hiding, always monitoring my eyes so no one would see me looking at other males.

Then came high school, grade 11, the time when I experienced the greatest emotional pain and rejection. I overheard my best friend telling a couple of students that I was "gay." Because I loved him and had been sexually attracted to him for at least one year, the betrayal destroyed my trust in all people. This included other friends and even my own family. I asked myself, "If I cannot trust my very best friend, whom then can I trust?" Three or so weeks later, I experienced further turmoil. I noticed many students in my grade ignoring me and some giving me dirty looks. Luckily, it didn't go beyond that.

This happened in the mid 1980's when HIV and AIDS news was all over the media. I believe it was because of this that I experienced such great discrimination and rejection. Only one friend stayed with me after I ended my friendship with my best friend. I was terribly alone for the remainder of the school year.

By the time I learned of Courage (age 23), I had already finished high school. Why didn't a Courage or similar group exist in the school? Why wasn't there Catholic support for me when I needed it most; when I was young, when I had virtually no friends? This I don't know.

In high school, I wanted to also have friends of the same orientation. Friends I could relate to. However, I didn't want so-called "friends" who would take me to spiritually unhealthy places, such as gay bars, clubs, etc. I had decided at the age of 14 that I wanted to live a chaste life, after learning of God's teaching on same-sex sexual behavior.

Fortunately for me, I now have such good friends. Thanks to Courage. Thanks to our good Lord and Mother Mary who led me there. I am now quite happy with my life as a person who has same-sex attractions.

Note: Courage, an apostolate of the Roman Catholic Church, ministers to adults with same-sex attractions and their loved ones. It has been endorsed by the Pontifical Council for the Family. Now with more than 95 chapters worldwide, Courage has become a mainstream Catholic apostolate helping thousands of men and women find peace through fellowship, prayer and the Sacraments. Individual chapters, such as those in Vancouver, are self-supporting and exist with the permission of their diocesan bishop.

Fr. Paul Check, executive director of Courage International, explains, "As a matter of pastoral charity and pastoral practice, Courage would not encourage the formation of any group that would validate the self-identification of an adolescent as gay, homosexual, or lesbian." Courage therefore does not offer a group approach for adolescents, instead recommending that confidential assistance be provided to individuals and families. The Courage chaplain and Courage members who are approved by

him as speakers are resources to schools, parishes, and families. It is good for vulnerable individuals and for entire grades to see role models with same-sex attraction who are living dynamic lives of faith in accordance with Church teaching.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS - RESPONDING IN FAITH

Note: Refer to G.2 and G.3 Communication Strategies

- Students dealing with SSA (same sex attraction) want what all students want: be listened to and accepted for who they are. Remind them that they are not alone and that our faith does provide support.
- Students with SSA are as called by God and are as capable of holiness as anyone. SSA does not affect whether a person is 'good' or a 'good Catholic' Homosexual inclinations are not sinful.
- Understand that an individual's awareness of same-sex attraction is not a singular event but a process.
- The student may feel anger and frustration for having this inclination. While they may have had no choice in their sexual inclination, they do have a choice in how they express it. We are responsible for how we behave and how we use/misuse our bodies. God always blesses those He calls. He desires our total dependence on Him.
- Listen calmly. Frame your responses in non- judgmental language. (e.g., What are some of things that most concern you about this?) Be sure to distinguish the action from the person; "Love the person not the sin."
- Assess whether there is bullying or an imminent threat.
- Assure the student of confidentiality except where you are required by law to disclose (where it involves students doing possible harm to themselves or others or breaking of the law or against school policies).
- Understand your own bias and feelings toward this issue and have access to accurate information imbued with a Catholic worldview.
- Be aware that the student trusts you or they would not be talking to you. Do not overreact or act surprised.
- Look for, and be sensitive to, typical emotional responses such as grief, anger, denial or negativity toward themselves or society.

- Use the vocabulary that they are using suitable to the discussion. If they use “homosexual” or “gay,” follow their lead. Use “same-sex attraction” if the student seems ill at ease with the other language.
- Students may appear confused about their orientation. Assure them that gender confusion can be a normal part of sexual development. Assure them it will become clearer to them over time.
- Stereotypes are not helpful. It is helpful for the student to discern who they uniquely are as created by God. Recognize creativity, talent, and generosity in different forms: spiritual, academic, athletic, artistic, technical, leadership, stewardship, and service.
- Be sensitive to your comfort levels and acknowledge limitations. Your role is to act as a listener and to direct them to an appropriate, trained professional (spiritual director, priest, or counsellor).
- If a student is in distress, seek the support of a qualified therapist.
- Discuss with the student:
 - Do you have friends that you can speak to about this?
 - Do the student’s parents know or suspect?
 - If the parents are not supportive, what other adults does the student have to talk to?
 - Ask the student if he would allow you to refer him talk to a counselor or other professional. It is important to their self-esteem that they give permission for this. *If they are reluctant, offer to assist them in making this next step.*
 - It is essential that the support that students (and parents) receive is founded on Catholic teaching. The Church proclaims the fullness of truth regarding the human person. Receiving support from our faith will assist in the discernment process.
- Conclude by:
 - Compliment the student on his courage. Affirm that he is loved by God and encourage him to strengthen himself through the sacraments, scripture and prayer.

RESOURCES

Catholic Schools of Vancouver Archdiocese. "Same-sex Attraction: Pastoral and Educational Considerations." 2008.

Episcopal Commission for Doctrine, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction." Updated March 2011.