

Health Board Tackles Gay Issues in FAQs

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Facts, advice in programme to teach youth about sexual health matters

A LIST of some two dozen questions focusing on homosexuality and bisexuality has been generating buzz, not least because of its source - the Health Promotion Board (HPB).

First posted in November last year, the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Sexuality and their corresponding answers were put together by HPB, with the help of professional counsellors.

Part of HPB's programme to educate youth on sexually transmitted diseases, it is meant as "a one-stop resource to provide factual information on sexuality and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) / HIV prevention from a public health perspective", said the board in response to queries from The Straits Times.

"We would like to reiterate that the family remains the basic building block of our society. This means encouraging heterosexual married couples to have healthy relationships and to build stable nuclear and extended family units," it added.

From defining gender identity and sexual orientation, to comparing homosexual and heterosexual relationships, the FAQs provide facts and even advice on dealing with discrimination and homophobia. Nearly half of the 28 Q&As were for parents who may be struggling to deal with children who have displayed homosexual or bisexual tendencies, or are at risk of sexually transmitted diseases and Aids.

The general acceptance of homosexuality may currently be low - an Institute of Policy Studies survey released last week showed that almost 80 per cent of respondents were against homosexual relations - but that is changing, said sociologist Tan Ern Ser.

"People in Singapore society, understood as a post-materialist society, will increasingly come to see homosexuality as different, rather than deviant," he said. This resonates with HPB "presenting homosexuality as a normal sexual orientation, different from heterosexuality but normal".

The FAQs also address STIs, HIV and Aids, including where to get tested and how to prevent transmissions, in a manner that is "quite clinical, without moralising", said Dr Tan.

HPB advises youth who need support in sexual health matters to seek assistance and guidance from their parents, trusted adults or professional counsellors.

Dr Benjamin Detenber, who led a team that studied perceptions of homosexuality here last year, lauded HPB for taking steps to address sexual health "in a thoughtful manner".

Said the communications professor at Nanyang Technological University: "I think it's good for HPB to provide information on a wide range of health-related topics for all kinds of people. In fact, it's essential to their mission."

For openly gay IT consultant Adrianna Tan, 29, the FAQs are, overall, a welcome addition to any public conversation about homosexuality.

"I was surprised in a positive way when I read it because I felt like it was the first scientifically accurate and non-ideological version of sexual education going back to my school days in Singapore," said Ms Tan.

"One of the things that always comes up is 'I feel unaccepted and I feel like I don't belong'. Just giving the facts is a mature step that will move us towards learning a little bit more."

For the FAQs, go to www.hpb.gov.sg/HOPPortal/health-article/HPB056342

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