

Improving family-based communication key to enhancing sexual health outcomes of gay, bisexual, and queer adolescents

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Studies have shown that talking with teens about sex-related topics is a positive parenting practice that facilitates important sexual health outcomes with heterosexual adolescents. But for LGBTQ youth, the topic of sexuality and sexual health is often ineffectively addressed at home.

A research team led by the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Penn Nursing) investigated and found that sex communication with [parents](#) throughout adolescence that excludes GBQ males' same-sex concerns is a missed opportunity for targeted sexual risk reduction. This is particularly important considering male-to-male HIV sexual transmission accounts for 92 percent of new HIV infections among all adolescent males between ages 13 and 24, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The study further advances understanding about the larger roles parents and [health](#) care providers can play in facilitating positive, family-based [sexual health](#) discussions for GBQ youth that are specific to their emerging attractions, current and future behavior, and identities. The findings are set for publication in an upcoming issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Research*, but are available online first here.

"The growing information on how sex communication occurs between parents and LGBTQ children can ultimately help families and health

care providers address this population's health outcomes through inclusive sex communication," says the study's senior author Dalmacio Flores, PhD, ACRN, Postdoctoral Fellow in Penn Nursing's Department of Family and Community Health. "Supporting parents' capacity to address the needs of their LGBTQ children through inclusive sex communication has the potential to minimize risk behaviors before these youths leave the confines of the home."

The team used a qualitative interpretive approach to explore perceptions of sex communication with adolescent males who self-identify as gay, bisexual, or queer. Semi-structured interviews with GBQ males between 15 and 20 years of age were conducted to understand their experiences with sex communication, identify their thoughts on parents' approaches to these conversations and their efficacy as sex educators, and determine the inclusivity of these talks. The study determined that for this demographic, sex [communication](#) with parents occurs rarely, is heteronormative in content prior to adolescent males' disclosure as GBQ, and after disclosure is reactionary and based on stereotypes that associate this population with negative health outcomes.

"This study also identified parents as GBQ [adolescent](#) males' preferred source of sexuality information despite the infrequent and heteronormative nature of these talks. With [health care providers'](#) help, parents can be better sex educators and conduits of pertinent sexual health information for their GBQ adolescents," says Flores.

More information: Dalmacio Flores et al, "It's Almost Like Gay Sex Doesn't Exist": Parent-Child Sex Communication According to Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Male Adolescents, *Journal of Adolescent Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0743558418757464](https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558418757464)

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