Gay, but afraid to say it

Dear Alice,

I am gay, but I am afraid of saying it. Until now I haven't had sexual intercourse with other men but I am looking forward to it each time I masturbate. What can I do?

— Nonintercourse

Answer

Dear Nonintercourse,

It sounds like you’re in the process of coming out, which can be both exciting and scary. The good news is that you’ve already taken a big first step: you seem to have explored your identity and already come out to yourself. As you continue your coming out journey, it’s good to remember that you’re in control of how you’d like to express your identity and to whom you’d like to come out. To that end, taking some time to do a bit of reflection may be worthwhile as you determine what next steps are best for you. You might also prioritize “finding your people” — by identifying those who’ve got your back and who accept (and celebrate) you for you. What’s more, making connections with those who also identify as gay is likely to yield additional support and possibly foster a spark between you and someone special. Lastly, when thinking about what to do before “doing the do” when you do find that someone, it’s a good idea to consider how to protect yourself in anticipation of sexy times ahead.
When thinking about what your next step might be, you might really bring the focus back to you. You’ve realized more about yourself and what you’re interested in as far as a sexual partner and sexual activities — self-exploration [2] is a useful tool in that way! To make some further progress, you might take a step back and consider how comfortable you feel with sharing your identity with others. Who are your allies? Which folks in your life do you feel you can count on no matter what? These might be the people you might come out to next. Though the choice about when and with whom you share this information is absolutely yours to make, these people (perhaps some of your close friends or family members) can support you as you decide how and when to tell others. Additionally, speaking with a mental health professional can help you think through this process as well. You might also take a look at the Q&A Coming out to mom [3] to further explore the ins and outs of coming out.

Once you’re more confident with sharing your identity, having positive interactions with other people who identify in a similar way can help you feel more at ease with your sexuality, and may make coming out more comfortable as you move forward. Not only can these folks be a source of support, but joining groups or organizations where others identify similarly can be a great way to start new relationships (friendly ones or perhaps something more!). You might see which groups or organizations are on your campus or in your community — the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) (link is external) [4] may be one resource to check out for information about active groups near you. As you’re making those connections, snagging a partner is pretty much the same for everyone in the dating scene. Try putting yourself out there by finding someone who catches your eye, investing some time to see if they’re open to getting to know you better, and sharing how you feel with them. Will I ever find a gay partner? [5] has some food for thought and great tips on how to get started on that front when you’re ready.

Lastly, though you do mention that you haven’t had sexual intercourse with a man yet, it’s not clear from your question whether you’ve been sexual in any way with a partner (i.e., having sexual contact with another person, not just limited to penetrative sex). Moving forward, it’s wise to determine your preferred protection methods in either situation. Say, for instance, that you’ve decided to use latex condoms [6] to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs, including HIV [7]) during sex. If anal sex [8] is something you’re considering, using some lubricant [9] (silicone or water-based, if the condom you’re using is made of latex) may also be in order to make penetration more comfortable. With that in mind, it’s a good idea to know where you can get those safer sex materials (and have them on hand before you need them), how to use them correctly and consistently, and how to talk with your partner about using them together to protect each other and still plan for pleasurable play. To read up on protection when getting down, take a look at the Q&As in the Safer sex [10] category of the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health [11] archive.

Remember, no matter what you choose to do, you get to decide and be in control of how and when you share anything about yourself. As you continue on in your coming out process and find folks that make you feel supported and good about yourself, you’ll likely find much more than just sexual fulfillment.

Alice!
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Published date:
Feb 01, 1994
Last reviewed on:
May 06, 2016

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