They don't believe that I'm gay! [1]

Alice,

Girls say that I am true "boyfriend material" to take home to their parents. The problem is that when I tell them that I am gay, they don't believe me. I've known some of these girls from three to eleven years. I've never "experienced" but have dated and kissed girls. They think that they can change me and make me become straight. How can I force the fact in their minds that I am gay without hurting them?

Answer

Dear Reader,

While your friends may not have bad intentions by dubbing you ?boyfriend material?, their words can still be hurtful, frustrating, and undermining to the strength of your friendships with them. Your difficulty in coming out to them may be due to your friends having internalized some myths or stereotypes about people who are gay and are struggling to see past those to acknowledge your identity. Unfortunately, just having a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer (LGBTQ+) friend doesn?t automatically erase a person?s implicit or explicit prejudices towards these groups, so it may take time and patience for you to successfully and safely come out to them. While it?s great that you want to educate your friends, as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, you don?t bear the burden of responsibility to educate them about it. You can share as much as little or as much as you?d like, but it?s ultimately their responsibility to learn. Luckily, there are some tips that you can consider when continuing your conversations with them (more on those in a bit!). The tips you find most suitable may be influenced by your reasons for coming out to them and your predictions about how they?ll respond in the future.

As you?re presently focused on coming out to your close friends, it may be helpful to contemplate potential reasons for not believing you. Maybe your friends simply don?t understand the nuances of sexuality, particularly what it means (and doesn?t mean) to identify as gay. It?s possible that they could be willing to educate themselves but perhaps aren?t aware of how and where to begin. If you suspect this is the case, a helpful resource you can send their way is Planned Parenthood?s information on sexuality [2]. Your friends may need some time to let the news soak in and could have different reactions [3] to it.

Before continuing to speak with your friends about your sexuality, it?s helpful for you to understand your own feelings on it. By doing so, you?ll be better equipped to better facilitate
these interactions. Some questions to ponder are:

- **Are you willing to educate your friends?** They may not know much about the nuances of sexuality and may ask you countless questions about the topic. Additionally, they may make mistakes (for example, accidentally making a homophobic comment), and part of the educational process may be correcting these misconceptions and mistakes. If you aren’t willing to educate them, that’s okay.

- **Do you have other sources you can turn to for support?** If your friends choose to not support you, do you have support elsewhere, be it from other friends, family, or other organizations?

- **If your friends choose to not accept your sexuality, how might this impact each friendship?** Do you feel like your friendships can remain the same? How would their inability to accept your sexuality make you feel about continuing the friendship?

Trying to “force” someone to acknowledge and accept any aspect of your identity is impossible. In order to increase the likelihood that your thoughts are heard and are treated with respect, here are some tips to consider:

- **Consider preparing an outline of issues you want to discuss.** This may seem formal and rehearsed, but sometimes it’s easy to get side-tracked or lose focus during significant conversations such as this one.

- **Use ?I? statements to prevent yourself from blaming your friends.** Sometimes “you made me feel” can come across as aggressive. By replacing it with “I feel?”, your friends are less likely to be defensive.

- **Ask your friends to explain why they struggle to accept your identity.** It may be tough, but try to be patient and listen. This part may seem unfair to have to justify your sexuality to them. It may be helpful to ask your friends to explain why they struggle to accept your identity. If their actions stem from a lack of understanding, versus stubbornness or entrenched homophobia, you can express how their actions make you feel.

- **Explain that the label ?boyfriend material? for girls may seem like a compliment to them but you?d prefer to define and adopt your own labels.** You might decide to retain your title of “boyfriend material”? for boys, not girls, you may decide to adopt other labels, or you may want to eschew them entirely.

- **Be honest and firm.** Being firm can indicate to your friends that you’re confident in your stance and that this is an issue that truly matters to you. This can increase the likelihood of them taking you seriously.

Though these tips focus on what you can do, if your friends refuse to extend themselves to understand where you’re coming from, there’s not much more that you can do to control the situation. In the same way that you can educate them, they can educate themselves with the countless resources online or in the Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, or Questioning [4] category in the Go Ask Alice! archives. You may want to consider whether these friendships still serve you if your friends don’t accept you as you are right now. Remember, the responsibility to educate your friends and get them to recognize your sexuality doesn’t have to fall on you.

Here’s to hoping that your friends finally hear you, loud (proud) and queer!

Alice!

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Published date:
Mar 07, 2003
Last reviewed on:
Sep 08, 2017

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