

# Bishop

(or other Ecclesiastical Leader)



## Roles in a Gender Affirmative Mentoring Relationship

There are many books and pamphlets that have been published, both by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and by the Church itself discussing how to counsel those who experience same-sex attraction. The information in this packet is not meant to be a one-stop resource for such counseling, but instead provides specific instruction on setting up and monitoring a Gender-Affirmative Mentoring relationship.

### **What is Gender Affirmative Mentoring?**

A gender affirmative mentoring relationship consists of a man or young man who experiences same-sex attraction, another man or young man who has strong gender identity (feels secure in his masculinity and is a good example of Christ-like masculinity), and you and/or a therapist as an overseer or counselor.

### **Which men should participate in a mentee role?**

A mentoring relationship best serves those males that are in the youth and young adult age range. The language of this booklet is written with the expectation that the brother you are counseling is still in the youth or young adult program of the Church but the principles can be applied to others. It is possible to have an effective mentoring relationship with those that are older.

Some of the young men that come to you and seek counseling regarding same-sex attraction experience what is called “weak gender identification.” These are the ones best served by a mentoring relationship. This means that they do not fully identify themselves with masculinity or the gender characteristics of men. They long for a connection with men, but need to learn how to connect, and how to do so appropriately. These young men do not always appear or act feminine. Weak gender identity is common in, but not limited to, young men that do not have a close connection with male role models. Many professionals believe that this lack of connection and weak gender identity contributes to the development of same-sex attraction. A young man experiencing weak gender identification, meaning he does not feel like a man, may defensively distance himself from other guys. Over time he often becomes curious about

the masculine lifestyle. During puberty and the adolescent years, there is a greater chance of this curiosity taking on a sexual nature, which can develop from same-gender attraction into same-sex attraction. A mentoring relationship is meant to change the course of this development so that the young man, rather than developing same-sex attraction, develops an internal sense of masculinity.

### **Which men should participate in the mentor role?**

A Gender Affirmative Mentor is not a counselor and is not necessarily an official part of any therapy in regards to same-sex attraction. The sole role of the mentor is to be a masculine role model so that the young man can learn about masculinity from experience.

The mentor is typically near the same age as the mentee. It seems that those closer in age are in a better circumstance to help the mentee enter the social world of men. Those closer in age are able to invite the mentee into social settings with male peers. If the mentee feels accepted among his peers, he will have greater confidence in his masculinity. Those closer in age are also able to help the mentee learn about male-typical activities, such as sports, and provide opportunities for the mentee to develop confidence in these areas. One common exception to this age guideline is when a father fills the role of the mentor and the mentee is still in the youth program. Even if a mentor is selected from the young man's own age range, it may be beneficial for him to be open with his father.

When choosing a potential mentor, you may consider praying with the young man experiencing same-sex attraction over a list of potential names that you feel exhibit the characteristics listed on the page, "What to look for in a Good Mentor" (also found in the Mentor section under the title, "How to be a Good Mentor".) You may be tempted to select the mentor yourself. Try to have the mentee select his mentor.

A mentor should be someone that will be around for the long haul. Someone that will only be around for a few months would be a poor choice. A man does not develop his gender identity over night. More information on how to select a mentor is provided on the following pages, "Selecting a Mentor."

**What is the difference between therapy and mentoring?**

Gender Affirmative Therapy, or Reparative Therapy, is therapy led by a professional where the focus is on helping the individual to identify himself as masculine. This often involves many months of working through past experiences and damaging relationships. Bringing a young man to the point that he can identify himself as masculine is difficult unless the young man has a masculine role model in his every day life from whom he is able to learn and with whom he can connect.

Gender Affirmative Mentoring provides young men with male role models who are secure in their masculinity. It can be compared to a Big Brother program, where the big brother is there to teach the younger brother how to be a man. The only difference is that these young men did not receive such mentoring as boys and need to receive it now if they want to become a part of the world of men and identify themselves as masculine, and in time throw off the programmed responses they have developed through same-gender attraction. The young men involved in mentoring are trying to live a heterosexual lifestyle and, rather than simply focusing on their behaviors, are attempting to strike at the root of the problem.

Many Bishops feel that the needs of the young man experiencing same-gender attraction are best met with professional counseling and ecclesiastical counseling. LDS Social Services offers great counseling at affordable rate. Or you may consider various books published by Deseret or other LDS book publishers.

In order to best serve those that come to you for help, you should read the sections written for the mentor and the mentee as well. Some additional information is provided regarding same-gender attraction at the end of this booklet. This will help you better understand the young man you are counseling.



## Selecting a Mentor

It is important that the mentee is involved in the process of selecting potential mentors. You may create for him a list of those in the ward, or those that he knows, that you feel would be suitable mentors, and closely identify with the characteristics described in “What to look for in a Good Mentor.” The selection of a mentor should not be taken lightly. It should be a matter of prayer and even fasting, especially on the part of the mentee. The mentee will be sharing personal things that he may never have shared with a peer. This is meant to be a long-term relationship. The mentor should be someone that can be there for the mentee over a long period of time.

It is important to remember that the role of the mentor is not to force the mentee into male-typical settings, but to help the mentee into areas of masculinity where he wishes to go but lacks the confidence to do so. The ultimate purpose of mentoring is help the mentee receive an internal sense of masculinity regardless of behavior.

In the following paragraphs you will hear about a Gender Affirmative Mentoring Relationship that was implemented in a BYU Ward. The Bishop, mentee (Jon) and mentor all gave their viewpoints in a question and answer format. The viewpoints expressed are not those of the Church itself, rather individuals serving within the Church. The names have been changed.

Below **the Bishop** is answering questions provided.

*Q: How did you come up with the idea to partner Jon, who deals with same-gender attraction, with someone else in the ward?*

*A: This method is used with helping anyone with a challenge to overcome or deal with. Everyone can benefit from a support system, and we had an Elders' Quorum President that was an outstanding example of Christ-like behavior.*

*Q: Did you already have a potential mentor in mind that you felt Jon would benefit from?*

A: In a round about way, yes.

Q: *How did you and Jon decide who he should tell about his same-gender attraction?*

A: He mentioned that he felt comfortable around the person selected.

Q: *After the mentor was chosen, how did you or Jon approach him? Did you speak with him first?*

A: I believe I did, and then the three of us met if I remember correctly.

Q: *Did you expect Jon and this other young man to maintain a friendship or just talk it out once?*

A: This was not an assignment as much as one human being speaking and helping another human being. True friendship and concern was the motivation behind this relationship.

Q: *Did you keep track of their relationship?*

A: I have not after each person went their own way.

Q: *Did you monitor Jon's progress with goals?*

A: I did not. Out of 132 students at that time, I believe I was counseling 30 plus and did not document each and every one the way I would have liked to have done.

Q: *Did you ever meet with the two of them again together?*

A: I believe I may have only once, if I remember correctly. I did, however, speak to them separately concerning progress made.

Q: *Do you feel that Jon's issues improved as a result of this?*

A: In meeting with him in subsequent interviews, I felt that a heavy burden was lifted a little because he felt as though he had someone else to share it with.

Q: *How long did this scenario last?*

A: I believe it was just for that one semester that he was with us and then he moved on.

Q: *What would you have done differently?*

A: I was somewhat new at the time and very uneducated about his challenge. I believe I would research and become more knowledgeable about the topic.

Q: *Any advice to Bishops currently facing this situation?*

A: Be very supportive of anyone going through this challenge. Everyone is a Child of God, and everyone has their own tests to deal with. Treat each one with respect. Do as the Savior would do and follow the Spirit.

Below the **Mentee** is answering questions provided. He is the one dealing with same-gender attraction.

Q: *How did you and your Bishop go about deciding who should be your mentor?*

A: My bishop prayed about it and came up with a couple of names that he thought could possibly be my mentor. He then had me choose one that I felt the most comfortable with, which basically for me was the one I knew the best. He happened to be the Elders' Quorum President.

Q: *What did you say to the mentor?*

A: I told him about my attractions and anything that I felt comfortable sharing. I ended up telling him a lot of my past history, and my current struggles because of my past history.

Q: *What was the mentor's response?*

A: He was very supportive and understanding. He told me that he understood that everybody had their own struggles, some more than others, and that he didn't judge me due to my past and my current situations.

Q: *Was this your Bishop's idea or yours?*

A: It was my bishop's, because we had talked a lot about how I felt not welcome in the Church, and how I really didn't have friends in the ward.

Q: *Do you know if he's done this with others as well?*

A: I was the first, because this was the first time he dealt with someone who has same sex attractions.

Q: *Did you first speak with your mentor in the Bishop's office or somewhere else?*

A: I spoke with him in the Bishop's office.

Q: *Did the Bishop tell him anything ahead of time?*

A: From what I understand, the Bishop did not tell him anything in advance except that I needed some help with some problems that I was having.

Q: *Did you and your mentor maintain a close relationship after that?*

A: We maintained a close relationship for awhile. He would check in on me a couple of times a week. I would also go out to some activities with him. He would come over when I needed to talk to him, and he would give me blessings. He would also make sure I was at church, and if I wasn't, he would come over and talk to me. Then after I moved, we sort of stopped talking and making contact.

Q: *Did he invite you places and socialize with you? How often did you spend time together?*

A: We spent time together off and on. There wasn't really a set schedule. As things came up, we would see less of each other and when we had time, we saw more

of each other. Like I said before, he would at least check on me a couple of times a week.

Q: *Did you have many conversations after that first one regarding your attractions?*

A: We didn't talk a lot about my attractions. At first, he was curious and asking a lot of questions, but that died out. After that, when they came up in problems I was having, we would talk about them. Other than that, we never really talked about them.

Q: *How long did you stay in contact with him?*

A: I stayed in good contact with him for about 6 months or so. Then we both moved and lost close contact. We chat every once in awhile, but not very often because he's married and has other things to do now.

Q: *How effective do you think this relationship was?*

A: I think that the relationship was an interesting one. I never became a close friend, yet at the same time I did not feel like a project that he had to do for his calling. It was effective because I felt that he did care for me, and wanted what was best for me.

Q: *What would you like to have seen different?*

A: The one thing that I would change is having become better friends with him. I think that it would have been more beneficial for me to get to know him better before he knew everything about me, so he became a friend before finding out everything. A lot of the time we talked or hung out, it was all about me, and I didn't get to know him very much. I tried to, but it was difficult because I couldn't share information about myself to him anymore when he would share information about himself--it wasn't a normal start to a friendship, to put it simply. It might be better to have the bishop tell the person beforehand that whoever needs help needs a friend, which would allow them to develop a semi-normal friendship before everything else is known.

Below the **Mentor** is answering questions provided.

Q: *What was your relationship with Jon before you were approached about this?*

A: I was only in the apartment complex for the summer, so I'd met Jon, and was familiar with him as an Elder's Quorum President, but only about 2 or 3 months worth. By nature of the calling and the smaller summer ward, I met everyone really fast (especially the brethren), but my relationship with Jon was mostly through seeing him at church.

Q: *How were you approached? What did the Bishop say? Did you meet with the Bishop first or with both he and Jon?*

A: If I remember right, the Bishop pulled me aside privately and explained to me that Jon was struggling with a few things, and I think he mentioned same-gender attraction then. He'd met with Jon a few times, and with Jon's permission, I was invited to the next meeting. The Bishop told me I didn't need to worry about giving counsel, just to listen and be there for him. We then both met with Jon, and he explained that he was struggling with same-gender attraction, and the accompanying effects it had on his esteem, including depression and social anxiety.

Q: *What was your initial reaction?*

A: It's hard to describe exactly what I felt. I didn't know he was struggling with same-gender attraction, but it didn't shock me to find out. Not that he acted strange or seemed homosexual or anything of that nature at all, I just instantly felt compassion and love for him, and knew that he was really struggling with this trial. I guess it's the nature of the calling of Elder's Quorum President, but I really felt like he was my brother, and I'd do anything to help him out. Even though the magnitude of the trial was huge, I felt peace, and that the Atonement of Christ was in action and there was hope for Jon. He was doing the right thing coming to the Bishop, and what I needed to do was support him and be there for him.

Q: *Were you given any instruction or just asked to be his friend?*

A: Just to listen to him and be there to support him. In our first meeting with the Bishop, we made sure Jon had my number so that when he was struggling he could call/text me anytime and I'd give him a blessing or talk to him and

encourage him, helping him to have the strength to focus on something else and fight those feelings. But I was also instructed to keep my role a support system and trusted priesthood leader, not so much a buddy.

*Q: How often did you speak with Jon? How personal were those conversations?*

A: In the beginning, it was about once a day, usually at night before he went to sleep. After a week or so it changed to every other day and then eventually longer between. That was for about a month, and then I moved out of the ward. Jon was very honest and open, both on the phone and when we were face to face in private, like when I'd give him a blessing. We mostly talked about same-gender attraction and what he was struggling with that day, and then the Gospel, the Savior and the Atonement, and the power of prayer, faith and the priesthood.

*Q: Did you share information about yourself? (Meaning was it a normal two-partner friendship or more of a counseling session for Jon)*

A: I don't remember sharing much information about myself; mostly I think I was a counselor. We chatted about the things we'd done during the day, but it was mostly to get Jon thinking about something else, and usually only lasted for a few minutes.

*Q: Did you hang out socially? What kinds of things did you do?*

A: No. When I saw him at ward activities or around the apartments, I'd talk with him and introduce him to other ward members and help them get to know him better, but we never did anything outside of those settings.

*Q: Do you think that this helped Jon? Was it effective?*

A: I think it helped Jon a lot to have a trusted priesthood leader his own age that he could confide in and knew was praying for him and supporting him. I hope it was effective. He had homosexual and straight friends, and I'm not sure how much time was spent with either group, or how that affected him. From what the Bishop told me, Jon was very appreciative and grateful to have my support, and thought of me as a counselor and friend, but not ever as a sexual interest. He really hated the same-gender attraction and wanted to be rid of it, but knew that he might struggle with it his entire life. He also recognized the power of the Atonement and supportive priesthood leaders.

*Q: What would you have done differently?*

A: I don't know what I would've done differently. This was the first and only time I've been involved in a situation like this, and I don't understand everything he was dealing with, or how hard it must be to struggle with same-gender attraction. Maybe more information about how much of a friend vs. counselor I should be would be helpful? Or what homosexual men think (are they attracted to every man or do they have guy friends that are just friends?) I'm not sure how it all works.

*Q: Have your views on those within the church experiencing same-gender attraction changed at all as a result of this?*

A: Yes, completely! I didn't know the level of suffering and pain that these people go through, especially when they have a desire to change and live a righteous, happy life with a spouse and children, active in the Church. Everyone has their own trials, but I think this would be one of the hardest to deal with, especially because of the societal norms and expectations of the Church vs. the world. But there is hope, and having gone through this experience with Jon, I understand even more now how much God loves all of His children, and wants to support them and have them return to live with Him.

## What to Look for in a Good Mentor

Adapted from "Characteristics of a Good Mentor"

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An effective mentor must have several characteristics. No one can be the perfect embodiment of these characteristics. A good mentor must demonstrate self-confidence and good moral character. That is, he must have achieved a sense of masculine competence of his own.

A good mentor must have strong gender identity. He must feel good about himself as a man. This does not mean being super-macho. Being super-macho is actually a sign of weak gender identification. Evidence of sound gender security includes the lack of defensiveness or the need to prove anything to anyone, as well as active participation in his masculine roles, such as father, husband, provider, ecclesiastical leader, male friend, and a participant in male-typical activities. In addition, males with good gender identification relate respectfully and well to women. He respects and likes women, and it shows. In essence, he should enjoy every aspect of being a man.

A good mentor will have good ego-strength. What this means is that he does not get his feelings hurt easily, and he has no problem saying 'no.'" Mentoring can be very trying, and requires tenacity for the long haul. Same-gender attraction does not form overnight, and even with motivated individuals it does not go away overnight. His self-esteem cannot depend on the success of his mentee. He must remain positive, loving, and encouraging, no matter how badly his mentee fails.

Men who struggle with same-gender attraction can be at the same time emotionally needy and defensively detached. This means they long for emotional contact with men but fear being hurt. At the first sign of abandonment they can become defensive and even reactive, which may be interpreted as condescension. The mentor can never take the defensiveness personally, and must be able to set limits on the emotional neediness.

A good mentor must be emotionally available. He must be comfortable with his own feelings and able to share these with the mentee. He must be comfortable with his own weaknesses, failures, embarrassments, and fears, and be able to share these with the mentee at times when this type of disclosure would be helpful. He must be able to hear the mentee talk about his fears, anger, feelings of inadequacy, and pain without becoming anxious or needing to minimize or fix them. Talking about failures and fears may seem feminine but not when the tone of the conversation mirrors the way it would occur between a father and son.

It is not a mentor's role to know what the mentee should do, or how to fix his fears. This is very important. His job as a mentor is to be present over the long haul, and emotionally supportive. He is neither the mentee's moral authority nor his therapist, and he does not need to take responsibility for or direct him in these ways. Men who struggle with same-sex attraction badly need both spiritual direction and therapeutic help, but this not the role of the mentor.

While he must be emotionally available, he should not lean on the mentee for emotional support. The mentor relationship mirrors the relationship of a healthy father-son dynamic. In this dynamic, the father provides for the son, but the son does not provide for the father. Fathers get their needs met in the adult world, while children seek their emotional support from their parents.

A good mentor must be physically affectionate. Many people believe that being physically affectionate with men who struggle with same-sex attraction will exacerbate or increase their symptoms. Nothing could be further from the truth. Men who struggle with same-sex attraction are afraid of male affection. It is precisely this fear that can make male affection so intensely sexually interesting. As long as the mentor has a strong gender identity, there is no chance of the encounter becoming sexual. This is exactly the kind of safety the mentee needs to experiment with; allowing himself to genuinely love and need non-sexual male affection, the kind a boy receives from his dad. The deepest longing of the man who struggles with same-sex attraction is not for sex. It is for love and affirmation.

Finally, a mentor must pursue the relationship with the mentee. The mentee at the core does not trust that the mentor could ever be genuinely interested in him and at the same time, need nothing from him. This is a continuation of the father-child injury. For this reason, the mentee will not be the initiator in the relationship. This will be re-enacted in the mentoring relationship. In addition, when there is any confusion or conflict, the mentee is very likely to assume he did something wrong, and withdraw or devalue the relationship. The mentor is very likely to assume he did something wrong and withdraw or devalue the relationship. The mentor must remember that the withdrawal from or devaluing of the relationship is a defense (usually unconscious) against the intense need and longing for the love and affirmation of an idealized male. He must not take anything personally, and must continue to gently but actively pursue the mentee.

Men who struggle with same-gender attraction long for a non-anxious connection with men. The mentor needs to take initiative in identifying activities that will be fun for both and yet not provoke too much anxiety for the mentee. He should explore common interests such as art, music, theater, cars, or sports. Both the mentor and the mentee can introduce each other to the things they individually enjoy. Over time, the relationship will develop into one that will allow more risks to be taken, without the fear of humiliation.

Some men who struggle with same-gender attraction have defensively detached from masculinity so extensively that almost any male-typical activity will trigger a fear/inadequacy response. In the beginning, even watching a basketball game may be too much. Defensive detachment seldom is expressed as fear. A mentee will probably never say, "I'm afraid of appearing stupid if I watch a game with you." He is much more likely to express disinterest such as, "I have never seen the point of football. It is nothing but egotistical male aggression." You must see through this defense and slowly encourage him to be a part of the world of men. This can only happen over time, and after trust is established. It is not necessary for all men who struggle with same-sex attraction to become NFL fans. They must, however, develop to the point that they can attend a Super Bowl party or a church softball game without feeling overwhelmed with anxiety and inadequacy.

Learning to play and be competitive at team sports is often a problem for men who struggle with same-gender attraction. They should be encouraged to do so; however, this should be approached with extreme caution. Even encouragement in this area can trigger significant fear, which leads to compulsions to act out. This is often an area of significant childhood injury, and many have trained themselves to completely avoid these activities. It is typical for these men to gravitate toward individual sports such as track, swimming, diving, and ice-skating, to avoid being a member of a team. They feel inadequate to perform in a situation where other men rely on them in competition. Even minor failures in a team sport can be experienced as devastating inadequacy and overwhelming humiliation. It may be wise to consult the mentee's therapist before approaching this issue.

It is important to include the mentee in family events. Many men who struggle with same-gender attraction come from families with poor dynamics, and so have a distorted view of family.

If the mentee is not active in the Church, the mentor should encourage Church-based activities, but he should go slowly. Church attendance can increase anxiety, which in turn can lead to increased sexual compulsion. The mentor should seek feedback from the mentee. The mentee knows what he needs. The mentor should be open to his suggestions and trust them. If at any point the mentor hurts or disappoints the mentee, he should sincerely apologize without making excuses. It may be the mentee's first experience of humility from an authority figure. This can be very healing.

The mentee's talents should be used. His talents should never be evaluated in terms of the masculinity of the activity. All men are created by God, completely masculine. His preferences, talents, and feelings are completely masculine. Everything about him is completely masculine. The thing men who struggle with same-sex attraction lack is an internalized sense (feeling) of masculine adequacy. There is no objective thing that he is lacking. The last thing he needs is to have a man he respects infer, even indirectly, that he is in some way less than completely male.