



a guide to queer**attitude**.com for
schools, parents and guardians

What is this document?

You will most likely have been shown this document by a young person in your care who would like you to allow them the opportunity to visit QueerAttitude.com (or "QA"), an international online community designed for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people and their straight friends. The staff of QA have prepared this document for our members' parents and teachers to help you understand why we believe it is safe and appropriate to offer access to our website at home, school, and elsewhere.

What is queerattitude.com?

Our website is a socially responsible online community. Whilst our community transcends borders, it does not cross-over from cyberspace to the real world; we operate solely on the World Wide Web.

We have a user base referred to as our *members*. Our members have registered an account at our site by choosing a unique username and password. Using these details, they can log-in and use our features.

The main feature of QA is our discussion board, or *message* board. Split into a number of areas, called *forums*, members open a discussion by starting a topic, or *thread*, on a specific subject. Members then contribute to that thread by adding their own responses, or *posts*. Essentially, it's like a group of people sitting around a table, chatting about anything and everything.

We tend to attract members who are interested in communicating their intellectual and artistic pursuits, and as such host a number of members' personal *blogs* and image *exhibitions*. Blogs are like online diaries and exhibitions are like photo albums.

The community is supported by a number of other features, including the ability to send other members private messages (that only they can read) and a feature allowing members to keep in touch with the friends they have made at QA.

Many of these features are standard for online communities. QA stands out however because our website is fully *moderated*. This is a system of checks and balances to ensure, primarily, that our members remain good-willed and well-tempered and that the content (a post or a photo, for example) submitted to the website is acceptable for all audiences.

Importantly, QA is **entirely not-for-profit**. There is no commercial agenda other than to break-even, and the website staff are volunteers. These are some of the reasons that QA remains a friendly and welcoming community for LGBT youth worldwide.

Who can register?

The United States' Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) effectively prevents us from storing information about anyone under 13 years old, so this is our lower age limit. We have no official upper age limit although, in practice, any users older than 25 years old require permission to register as members of our site. We have a Safe Space Policy to protect all of our members; especially those of the younger ages.

What is our Safe Space Policy?

We are **not** a dating website, and any activity by members that suggests they are using QA to meet other young people for dating or sexual purposes is strongly discouraged. We also keep an eye out for bullying. We do not allow members to exchange any information regarding their surnames, addresses, phone numbers, locations, school, or any other "real world" information specific to them. We do allow the exchange of Instant Messenger and e-mail information, but only in private messages (i.e. our members can only reveal these things to specific members they already know and trust). We have stringent limitations on the amount of advertising we let our forums be used for, and we do not tolerate spam. The Safe Space Policy is actively enforced by the site staff.

Is there sexual content on QA?

We do not believe that stopping young people thinking and talking about sex will stop them being interested in it, nor is that a viable or appropriate goal. We also believe that it is inevitable for sexual matters to come up in a web community that bases itself on the sexual orientation of its members, whatever their ages. We take a non-judgmental view, because that is exactly what makes the young people who visit QA feel the most comfortable, and the most accepted.

The sexual content on QA is located within one specific, members-only forum so that we can easily review this content. We require the contributions in this area to be of a constructive, mature nature. Content that is deemed graphic, unconstructive, or otherwise in bad taste, is removed. This forum has a nominal minimum age of 16, however we do not discourage our younger members from accessing and contributing to this content. If our members talk about engaging in activity for which we believe they are too young (regardless of their local age of consent), we keep in accordance with a non-judgmental approach, but certainly do not encourage such activity.

The most significant portion of this forum deals with concerns and questions that our members have about their (present or future) sex lives. These questions have often been dealt with for their straight counterparts in Sex Education, but can be matters of some mystery for gay people growing up. We ensure that the information our members provide to each other in answering these questions has a good degree of accuracy and that issues of safe sex are addressed.

None of the content in this forum can be accessed without a QA username and password. If you would like to further investigate this content before reaching your decision about allowing access to our website, you can contact us to request further information.

Is accessing this website from school appropriate?

For a school considering the question of blocking or allowing access to QA from your computer network, we would ask you to be honest with yourselves about the reasons you may have for blocking access. We are often contacted by members who say that their school firewall blocks websites based on the presence of "homosexual" content. It stands to reason that since you have agreed to read this document, you do not represent a school with a homophobic agenda, and so banning a website simply because it is run for gay people is not your intention. We would say from the outset that allowing your firewall software to block all "gay" websites and content sends the message that your school considers homosexuality taboo or worse, not tolerated. This will make your gay students feel unsupported and marginalised.

QueerAttitude.com is a social site. If your school blocks access to **all** social sites (such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo et cetera), then extending that block to QA may be appropriate. However we ask that you consider that QA may be exempt from such a stance. For a young gay person living in isolation from other gay people or perceiving a lack of acceptance from their family, friends or teachers, access to QA and other websites like us can be of extraordinary value. Indeed, for many of our members, QA is a lifeline rather than simply a distraction. Moreover, whilst QA is a social community, and unlike the aforementioned networking sites, our members are encouraged to maintain a level of anonymity.

My child or student is not gay, just confused!
This website will lead him/her in the wrong direction!

It is not uncommon to believe that for young gay people, their homosexuality is a "phase" that will pass if treated correctly, allowing them to grow up and into a heterosexual adult. This is a misconception that over-simplifies a complex issue.

If your son, daughter or student believes he or she might be gay, allowing access to QA is a positive action regardless of their eventual sexual orientation. Through interactions with people who are also undergoing, or have undergone, the process of questioning their sexuality, the learning process is helped and aided. Moreover, such interactions are made within a safe and secure environment on QA. This is desirable for your child or student and for you as their guardian.

For the young person who decides, in the end, that they are straight, their time with QA has only broadened their horizons and allowed them an insight in to what life is like for people with experiences different to their own.

If, as parents, you have genuine suspicions (or wishes) that your child's belief is a "phase," this should not prevent you from allowing them to participate in our community. QA supports all of our members, irrespective of their sexuality, and as such, we do not promote one sexual preference over another. Allowing him or her to come to their own conclusion, in their own time, is crucial.

It is the experience of many of our members that, once they have been a member of our community for an extended length of time, they have been able to become more comfortable with themselves, and are generally happier as a result. Consequently, you may enjoy a more honest, relaxed and rewarding relationship with your child or student.

Who runs QA?

QA was established and continues to be run and developed by Graham G. Hughes, under the non-legal entity of Graham Design (www.grahamdesign.co.uk). The website is operated with the assistance of approximately ten staff members; job roles are specific and relate to developing site software, maintaining the site, moderating its content, and paying for its upkeep. The staff run between the ages of 16 and 25.

The staff are happy to be contacted by parents, schools and guardians who want more information about QA. Contact us using the form on our website:

<http://www.queerattitude.com/contact/>

We hope that we have alleviated some concerns and that you have concluded that QA is a resource to which access should not be prohibited. Finally, we thank you for your time and wish you all the best during what may be a complex and stressful period.

Kind regards,
The QA Staff.