

HANDOUT 3.4: SCARLETEEN READING

Note: This reading is adapted, with permission, from a conversation that took place on a Scarleteen discussion board between a youth who was questioning their gender identity and Scarleteen volunteers. Full conversation:

http://www.scarleteen.com/forum/ultimatebb.php?ubb/get_topic/f/25/t/000537.html

NARRATOR: A young teen posted that they wanted to tell their parents—particularly their mother—that they were questioning their gender identity. They were worried. They wrote, “I think one of my biggest concerns is suddenly I’m a big deal, and a point of attention. Once they know, they know, and even if they don’t say anything they will think things. . . . I don’t know if I could live like that. And what if they disown me . . . or kick me out or something?”

The Scarleteen volunteers offered the teenager support, acknowledged their feelings, and encouraged them to consider both hardships and benefits that coming out as transgender might bring. What follows are pieces of the discussion board conversation.

YOUTH: So . . . um . . . I decided to email her.
Because I got too scared she might try and text me back.
And then I spent the rest of the day scared in my room.
She came home and acts like nothing happened.
But she kinda also acted like she wanted to talk to me.
I have no idea if she saw it or not . . . I guess I’ll know tomorrow.

YOUTH: SHE SAW!
“Don’t know if your phone is on but, I just wanted to say that what you sent me today was INCREDIBLY brave and to say that I love you! No MATTER WHAT!”
I’m freaking out
I guess it’s good but . . . oh god . . . deep breaths

SCARLETEEN VOLUNTEER: That’s a pretty positive response to get! I realize that sharing anything this huge and personal with someone, especially a parent, might feel really overwhelming right now, but I’m glad your mom was so supportive. =)
Thanks for the update. And keep breathing!

YOUTH: I . . . don’t really know what to do.
This is so weird.
I keep trying to avoid her, I don’t want to look at her.
I think she is getting mad.

I want to like . . . start making progress.
But . . . I feel weird talking about this.
I have been her “son” for so long . . . I don’t know :/

SCARLETEEN VOLUNTEER: What are you afraid will happen if you stop avoiding her and start talking to her?

YOUTH: I don’t know.
It’s just awkward

SCARLETEEN VOLUNTEER: I can understand how it would feel awkward.
I guess I’m just wondering if you expect something bad to happen.
You know, it isn’t going to get any less awkward the longer you avoid her, and will probably feel more awkward if anything. Know what I mean?

NARRATOR: The teenager and the volunteer continued talking, with the teenager unwilling to talk with their mother and the volunteer providing additional resources and support. The teenager eventually reached out to their mother again and posted their conversation to the discussion board.

YOUTH: . . . ok . . . we are texting now :/

MOTHER: how long have you felt this way

YOUTH: awhile

MOTHER: forever . . . weeks . . . months?

YOUTH: I don’t know

MOTHER: a long time, or recently?

YOUTH: both? . . . I don’t know

MOTHER: have you talked to anyone else?

YOUTH: kinda

MOTHER: kinda who?

YOUTH: internet people

MOTHER: what internet people . . . how did you find them?

YOUTH: like . . . professionals . . . health class

MOTHER: so tell me why you think you are

YOUTH: what?

MOTHER: what have you told the professionals

YOUTH: **silence**

MOTHER: hello?

YOUTH: **silence**

MOTHER: have you tried to hurt yourself?

YOUTH: what?

MOTHER: why do you keep saying what? . . . have you tried cutting yourself or considered suicide?

YOUTH: I haven't said anything since then

SCARLETEEN VOLUNTEER: How about you answer those last questions?

YOUTH: . . . (sigh)

I don't know what to say

I don't want to say anything

This whole thing is making me feel awkward and weird and uncomfortable

SCARLETEEN VOLUNTEER: I can understand that, but what I'm hearing is that you have a parent who cares about you, and wants to know what's going on. That's very lucky for you, and also sounds like what you really need right now. So, I'd advise to push through the discomfort you're feeling and take advantage of that caring parent. Not everyone has access to that kind of help, and it's great for you that you do when you obviously need it.

YOUTH: I don't know
I'm kinda just waiting for her to say something
But she keeps saying stuff I don't know how to respond to

NARRATOR: The teen and the volunteer continued to talk, trying to work through some of the internal strife that the teen was feeling. The volunteer said, "It might help to bear in mind that while you have probably known about your feelings for awhile, they're probably brand new to her, right? If so, she's not likely to understand them or feel at home in them any more quickly than you have. . . . Since they aren't her own feelings, it's bound to take her far longer." While the teen was able to acknowledge this, they still felt stuck and unable to reach out for help or accept it when offered. In the end, the teen was able to access mental health services but wasn't able to be honest with their provider about their feelings or concerns.