

Asexual: Someone who doesn't experience sexual attraction

ABOUT

Asexual

Relationships

Partners

Family

Friends

www.asexuality.org

Asexual Visibility and Education Network

Partners, friends and family

Asexual relationships? Wait, what?

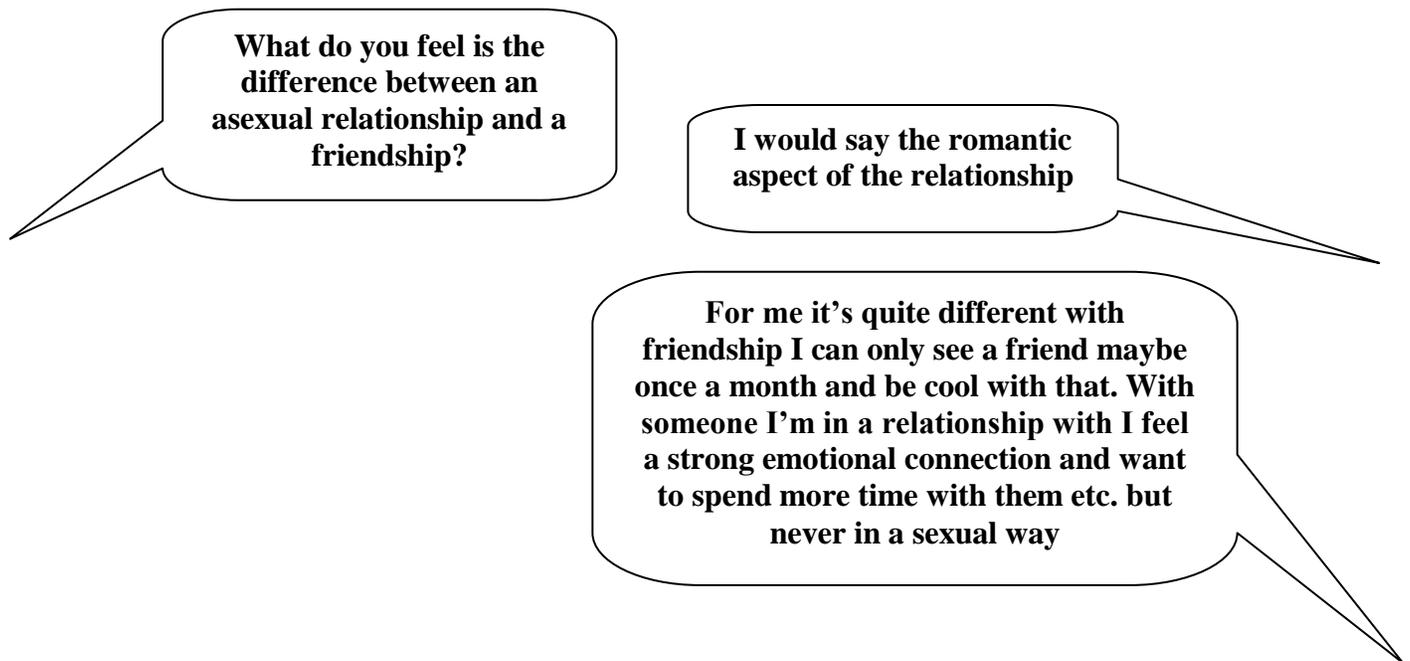
Many people don't realise it, but our orientations are made up of more than just sexual attraction. Since asexuals lack this, they are better able to recognise what is and isn't still present.

Romantic attraction (the urge to have a relationship with someone) is connected to, but separate from, sexual attraction (the urge to engage in sexual intimacy with someone). For many people in society these two types are directed towards the same people so the different nature of them is not obvious.

Some people may find that their romantic orientation differs from their sexual orientation; for example, bisexuals may be sexually attracted to both sexes but only be interested in a relationship with one sex or a person may experience sexual attraction without wanting any commitment (such as when one night stands occur). It has even been heard of, rarely, for someone to have sexual attraction to one sex but romantic attraction to the other.

For asexuals, it is entirely possible to not experience sexual attraction at all, but to desire a relationship.

As with orientations, romantic states are labelled as heteroromantic, homoromantic, biromantic, panromantic, aromantic etc.



One thing that confuses many non-asexuals is how someone can love someone in a romantic way if there is no sexual impulse involved. We get asked a lot how this would be different from just a friendship.

The answer is that it is a different emotional feeling from friendship. There are different forms of love, such as towards family or towards friends, where sexual components are absent. For an asexual, another person may make them experience feelings that they do not feel under other circumstances, such as butterflies, a special connection, automatically smiling at the thought of them or a strong sense of shared values or likes.

If a relationship without sex is a friendship, then by the same equation a friendship with sex is a relationship. A person can have casual sex with a friend that they care about but not feel the same kind of emotions that they would with a partner. This emotional difference is what asexuals can still experience.

For people of other orientations, the lack of sex in a relationship can compromise or eradicate the romantic attraction that they hold for a person. Although asexuals can appreciate the significance of sex to someone of another orientation or even experience the feeling of closeness through participating in the act themselves, without sexual attraction there is no high priority for sexual expression of love, preferring other methods of conveying their feelings and being satisfied with the situation.

Unfortunately, since around 99% of the population is not asexual, the chances are that anyone an asexual falls in love with will not be of the same orientation, leading to difficulties.

How did you feel when you told your partner you were asexual / your partner came out to you as asexual?

I didn't as we were already friends previously and I had come out, it dodged that bullet, but there was the worry whether my asexuality would have an impact, them being a friend previously made it even harder to try and talk about it.

Mixed... On the one hand, we had gone through a lot of stress and arguments about his lack of interest and I'm happy that he's found out about himself and I know I'm not unattractive or to blame... but on the other hand, I guess I'd hoped it was something that could be fixed. But at least now we know and we can work forward with this.

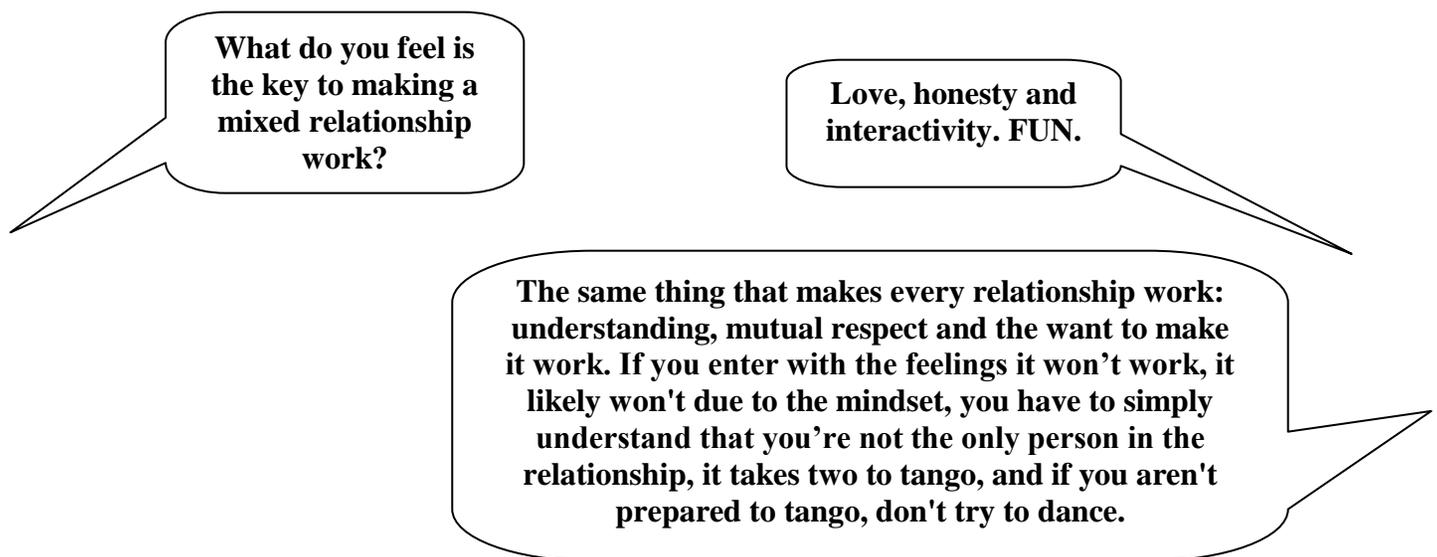
I was dreading it... I just wanted to be like everyone else and have a relationship with a guy I was really interested in but I knew sex would come up eventually. The last one I told swore at me for leading him on even though we'd only been on a few dates and I never saw him again. Thankfully my boyfriend understood and we've been together over a year.

Since asexuality is not well known, many asexuals do not know they are asexual when they go into a relationship. Often they assume that they are just not ready for sex yet, that they are just inexperienced, that they need to find the right person to make sex interesting, that they have a low libido, that they just have an innate moral value to wait until marriage, etc. Mixed relationships under these circumstances can lead to an asexual participating in activities that they find unappealing or even distressing because

it is expected of them (and therefore they expect it of themselves) or an asexual may conclude, once advances become regular or their partner becomes frustrated by the lack of intimacy, that their partner only wants them for one thing and break off the relationship. While some asexuals can enjoy hugging, kissing and physical touch, this too can become infrequent due to the expectations of the other that it will lead somewhere more sexual and so sometimes all intimacy can disappear.

Where partners remain together, issues often arise from the asexual's aversion, lack of interest, lack of initiating sexual encounters or from the lack of enjoyment from the acts. Commonly the result is to go to a doctor or to therapy and since asexuality is not widely heard of or believed by the professional community at present, it is generally not presented as an option and therefore disorders are diagnosed. Forced to take medicines that do not work or being blamed for non-existent childhood abuse or such things can be upsetting for an asexual to endure, lending more issues within a relationship. The asexual's partner may feel unloved, not desirable, unattractive, rejected or assume they are bad in bed.

If the person finds out about asexuality and recognises it as how they feel, their partner can react in a variety of ways, from being glad that the cause has been found (and subsequent relief that a lot of their assumptions about themselves are not true) to being angry that the issue cannot be changed or that their partner has been apparently faking it all along. **The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN)** has a section for Sexual Partners, Friends and Allies where people of other orientations are able to discuss their issues with people in similar situations and some find that their relationships can survive through both partners sharing **understanding, communication and compromise.**



Armed with the knowledge of their different orientations, the partners can appreciate each other's needs and learn how to best manage the situation rather than fretting and worrying about the cause.

Different asexuals have different views on sex in a personal context. Just because a person does not experience sexual attraction does not mean they are not willing to participate in sexual acts (or even enjoy them). Some can react positively to physical stimuli and perceive or understand the emotional aspect of lovemaking. Many are indifferent and may have sex for their partners, to conceive children, or any number of reasons other than sexual need. Others are averse to the idea of doing it themselves, finding the idea unappealing, boring, not worth the end result or, where penetrative acts are involved, there may be an issue of discomfort or pain since lack of interest often results in lack of arousal. In these circumstances, rather than being a reinforcement of love, sexual intimacy damages it.

As an additional aside from personal feelings, Antisexuality is where a person, asexual or otherwise, is averse to the idea of sex in general. They may find it disgusting or immoral and perceive it only as an animal act without love, considering therefore that being celibate is the desired and superior state of purity. It should be noted that antisexuality is not exclusive to asexuality; this view can be caused by bad experiences (such as being cheated on), strict religious beliefs, etc from any orientation. They occasionally seek to 'become asexual' so as to avoid the urges that they despise, unfortunately this is not possible.

Did your relationship survive? If yes, why did you carry on? If no, why not?

I like them. They like me. I see the future heading the right way.

I wouldn't say failed more a mutual disengagement, the orientation side never clashed but the friend side did, so we called it quits, I don't think it would have ever clashed to the differing orientations.

I did think about leaving for a while... Sex has always been an important part of a relationship for me... but I realised we loved each other and that mattered most.

If you have never been in a mixed relationship, would you consider it? If you have, would you ever do it again?

I would consider it again, just because the orientation differs doesn't mean there is a problem, when I was younger the aspect of sex always loomed and made it a worry, now older, I would simply see what happened, if I had to make a sacrifice I would see if I would for the relationship, if you don't take chances you never get the rewards.

Since discovering asexuality and now that I understand myself better I would not look for a "mixed relationship". If anything I would actively avoid it. Yes, it takes 2 people to make things work, but for me the idea of sex is totally out of the question. I understand for some (many?) sexual people sex is a large part of their romantic relationships. I would feel bad for not being able to provide that connection for them. I don't think it's something that can be talked out or compromised on for someone like me who has no desire to engage in sex even if it's only for my partner's sake. Best to not get into a relationship where that could be an issue.

Friends and family

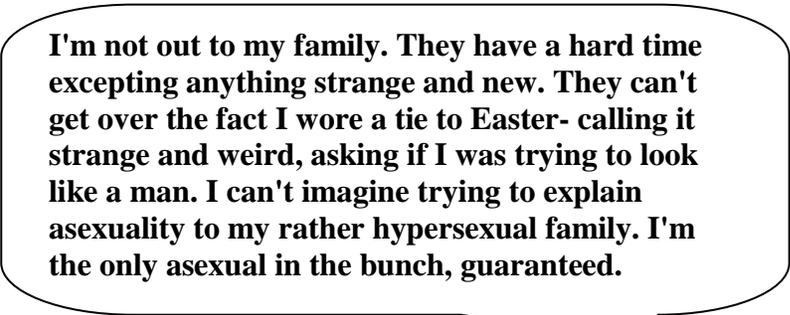
Coming out to friends and family can also be a difficult task. While in most cases stating ones asexuality does not result in extreme measures such as being cast from the family home or assaulted, asexuals find many negative responses that are hurtful especially from those we love.

Common responses can include anything from outright disbelief to advice on how to tackle the ‘problem’.

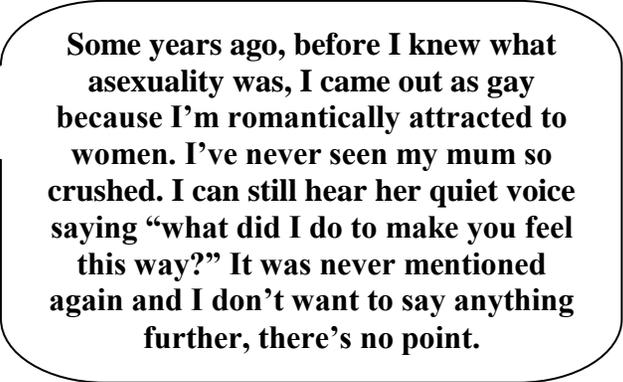
Not all responses are meant to upset; we understand that people to whom sexual desire is as natural as breathing find it incredible to believe that other people do not have such desires and therefore feel the need to reassure us that things will be better or that they can be fixed. To an asexual, especially if they have come out in a “this is how I am” situation rather than “I’m concerned about myself” conversation, anything other than acceptance, even with the best intentions behind it, can feel like rejection.

Parents often expect their children to grow up heterosexual and produce grandchildren for them. When asking asexuals about parental responses, it is frequently assumed that most parents would be happy that they don’t have to worry about their child’s sexual activity, underage pregnancy, STDs, etc, however in reality it seems that many parents are upset at the prospect of their children potentially never having sex or doing things that are considered “normal”.

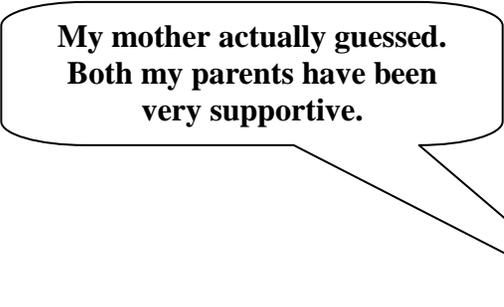
The child can be told that things will change when they get older (according to some parents, you can still be a “late bloomer” up to 30 years old...) or that so-and-so was exactly the same way and then came right or that a doctor or therapist visit must be in order. If their asexuality is believed, this can inspire feelings of guilt or blame in the parents since they can then feel that maybe they did something wrong to make their child this way.



I'm not out to my family. They have a hard time excepting anything strange and new. They can't get over the fact I wore a tie to Easter- calling it strange and weird, asking if I was trying to look like a man. I can't imagine trying to explain asexuality to my rather hypersexual family. I'm the only asexual in the bunch, guaranteed.



Some years ago, before I knew what asexuality was, I came out as gay because I'm romantically attracted to women. I've never seen my mum so crushed. I can still hear her quiet voice saying "what did I do to make you feel this way?" It was never mentioned again and I don't want to say anything further, there's no point.



My mother actually guessed. Both my parents have been very supportive.

When an asexual is surrounded by friends talking about “the hot guy on that tv show” or about their latest conquests or what they got up to with their girlfriend last night, it can be very alienating, especially when the asexual has nothing to add to the conversation. Friends are also in a greater position to recognise that

someone isn't having relationships or aren't as interested in sexual conversations or behaviours and may put an asexual under pressure to be sexually successful or label them, given the lack of evidence with the opposite sex, as a closet homosexual.

My friend actually told me that he thought he might be as well. It would be really cool if he is!

Most of the people I've told seem to have humoured me at the time and then forgotten all about it since. Sometimes I wonder if they thought I was attention-seeking. I did have one offer to go to their house to be 'fixed'. I don't come out to make it a big deal, just to have it known about me.

I get asked a lot why I'm not in a relationship. Apparently, at nineteen, never having had a relationship, let alone never being upset about suck, is rather strange. They think I'm a lesbian, I'm pretty sure. They also think I'm lying to them (a person can't pierce their nipples for no other reason than they like the shiny?) about never having sex. It doesn't help that I take birth control and masturbate so I MUST be having sex, right? They can't imagine that I would be completely happy single. Then again, they know I have odd quirks already, so they may just chalk it up to that.

Not all responses are bad responses. It's very nice to have good ones!

So why would an asexual come out anyway? There are many reasons for an asexual to want other people to know:

- ~ To be honest in or before a relationship
- ~ To feel as though they are not hiding a part of themselves
- ~ For general visibility
- ~ To fend off unwanted interest
- ~ To try to stop pressure from others to have a relationship/sex
- ~ So people may understand them better
- ~ In response to accusations of homosexuality

It is hoped that with greater visibility about asexuality, more people will know what is meant by it when or if someone they know comes out as asexual and can respond differently to the situation than if they had no knowledge beforehand.