

WHAT DO I DO IF MY CHILD IS LGBTQ OR I THINK THEY MIGHT BE?

HOW CAN I APPROACH MY CHILD OR LOVED ONE ABOUT THEIR SEXUALITY?

If you suspect that your child or loved one is same sex attracted it is helpful to show your support towards them and their sexuality.

Directly asking your child or loved one if they are same sex attracted may not be the best way of encouraging your child to talk to you about their sexuality. They may still be confused about how they feel and who they are. Remember, it is important for your child or loved one to come out to you when they are ready and feel comfortable doing so.

There is no universal way of approaching your child or loved one about their sexuality as each person is unique and responds to situations differently. Talking to organizations such as PFLAG, Twenty10, GLCS or another counselling service may help advise you on the best approach to take for your situation.

WHY DID THEY HAVE TO TELL ME?

It is important to accept and understand your child's sexuality. Some families believe they may have been happier not knowing. They start to recall the time before they knew as 'problem free', remembering an ideal rather than the reality.

Sometimes we can try to deny what is happening by rejecting what we're hearing ("It's just a phase, you'll get over it"), or by not registering the impact of what we're being told ("That's nice dear, and what do you want for dinner?")

For someone to tell their family or friends that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual often means taking a great risk – the biggest risk is that of rejection. Few people would take that risk lightly or prematurely. This is a crucial risk when GLBQ people are 'coming out' for the first time. How you react and support them can make it a positive experience.

WHY DIDN'T THEY TELL US BEFORE?

Your child or loved one has probably been thinking this through for months, even years. It is important to note that the time prior to your loved one coming out has no reflection on your relationship with them. It does not mean a lack of trust or love was present. What you should focus on is that your child or loved one has told you now, and you can prove to them that the trust they have given you is not misplaced.

Your child or loved one probably could not have told you any sooner than they have. It is likely that no matter how soon they told you, you would still be feeling confused and sad. Even more importantly discussing the situation now is an invitation to a more open and honest relationship. You have the opportunity to make a positive difference in the way your child or loved one feels about themselves and about their sexuality.

Be aware of how your child may feel about themselves:

The prevalence of homophobia in our society means it can take time for lesbians, gays and bisexuals to acknowledge their own sexuality. Queer people may internalise self-hate or insecurity about their sexual identity. They may feel uncomfortable within themselves, due to judgments and negative behaviour experienced toward them by others. For many reasons it may take time for someone to think through and work up the courage to tell a parent.

WHAT DID WE DO WRONG?

Parents and family members can sometimes experience feelings of guilt when they first learn of their child or loved one's attraction to people of the same gender.

Some parents react with shock, denial and anger to the news that their child is lesbian, gay or bisexual. One response is to wonder "How could he/she do this to me?" This is not a rational reaction - but it is a human response to pain.

This reaction is like a grieving process: here you are grieving over losing an image of your child or loved one and their future. While their future may not be what you envisaged, that does not mean your child or loved one will not have a happy and fulfilling life.

Some parents feel that they did something "wrong" to raise a child who is lesbian, gay or bisexual. There is no evidence that different parenting styles or family situations have a bearing on sexual orientation.

As you work through your feelings, you can take courage from the fact that the one thing your child has 'done' to you is to trust that your relationship will grow as a result of you knowing the truth.

SUMMARY

Telling parents and family about their sexuality is often difficult and confronting for LGBTQ people.

Try and be supportive. It is normal to go through something similar to shock or a grieving process.

Talk to your child, be supportive, and do some reading or talk to a professional if you're really struggling.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD?

Reading this resource is the first step to supporting your child – you have shown that you are open to new information and hopefully you are now better informed. Supporting your child now should be a natural extension of your general support.

Every child needs different things from their parents. It is up to you to learn how to communicate with him or her about their needs and issues surrounding sexuality.

You can support your child by educating yourself as thoroughly as possible about homosexuality and by helping to break down homophobia in our society.

And you can ensure your child you love them, just as they are.

SOME RESOURCES

PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)

pflagaustralia.org.au / pflag.org

Do's and Don'ts for families and friends:
community.pflag.org/page.aspx?pid=541

'For the Bible tells me so' – an excellent DVD
forthebibletellsmeso.org

'My Child is Gay', by Bryce McDougall

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