



Be Yourself

Questions & Answers for lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, & questioning youth.

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are complex issues, and figuring it out can be difficult and confusing for anyone. As a young person, coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) can be especially complicated—and fraught with questions.

You are at a time in your life when you are becoming an adult, yet you might not yet have adult rights. Your relationship with your parents, guardians, or family is changing. You're becoming more independent, and they are having to accept that you're not their little child any more. That's not easy for either of you. And all of a sudden, something you didn't think about a few years ago—sex—might feel like the most important thing in the world.

If you are, or think you might be, an LGBTQ teen, sex, attraction and relationships might be even more confusing. Growing up, your friends and family may have talked about dating, falling in love and getting married. But they probably never talked about if you grow up and fall in love with a person of a different gender, or what it would be like to feel that your physical sex doesn't match up with how you feel inside. In your family, school faith community, or elsewhere you may have heard words like "queer," "fag," or "tranny" used as an insult... or witnessed—or experienced—harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.

Popular culture is still dominated by heterosexual and cisgender images: Television, films, magazines and social media mostly show straight, cisgender couples together; most music talks about straight couples falling in love. If you're a guy, your friends are probably talking about girls, and if you're a girl, they're talking about guys. And, while most people your age seem to fit neatly into expected gender roles, you may feel you don't – or don't want to. All of that makes things hard if you're LGBT – or think you might be – because you don't have much that relates to you.

We are here to let you know three things above all else:

One: It is okay to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning—or any other sexual orientation or gender identity that works for you.

Being LGBTQ is as much a human variation as being left handed. Your sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are just a part of who you are.

Two: It takes time to know who you are.

It's OK to be confused; it's OK to be unsure if you're LGBTQ, and it's OK to take your time finding out. There's no need to rush.

Three: You're not alone.

Right now, there are tens of thousands of other youth, all thinking they're LGBT or wondering if they are, all wondering if they're the only one, all trying to find someone to talk to about it. Hundreds of thousands more, however, have already traveled that road. One of them or another helpful person will be on the other end of the line if you call any Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) support line or email any PFLAG chapter.

To learn more about common questions and answers for LGBTQ youth and young adults check out the full-length publication *Be Yourself*, which can be found on the PFLAG National website at pflag.org



Our Children

Questions & Answers for families of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender-expressive, & queer youth.

“My mother’s last words to me were that of acceptance and love at a time I was filled with fear and hate of the world. My mother will always have the best place in my heart for giving me that gift.” — Christopher M., 29, Washington, D.C.

As parents and family members, we work to ensure that our kids are safe, happy, and successful. When they are young, we dream about their future. We encourage them to finish school, find love, get married, and have our grandchildren. When we have a child who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender-expansive, or queer (LGBTQ+) it’s common to feel that those dreams might not be possible. Some are taught that being LGBTQ+ is different, wrong or, in the case of families of faith, sinful.

What’s the first thing you can do when you learn that your child is LGBTQ+ or questioning if they might be? Seek support from others. Families all across the country and in your community have LGBTQ+ people in their immediate or extended families. **You are not alone.** Talking about it to someone can really help—and that’s where PFLAG comes in. PFLAG, as the first and largest organization for parents, families, and allies of LGBTQ+ people, has been doing this work for nearly 50 years, and its 400+ chapters across the country have provided peer-to-peer support and crucial education opportunities to all kinds of families. Find a chapter near you at pflag.org/find.

Coming out can be a difficult process. Regardless of how nurturing you are with your kids, they might feel a real risk of losing love and support by coming out. Every day, young people are kicked out of their home for disclosing their sexuality or gender. By the time a child has built up the courage to come out, they have likely begun a process of self acceptance. Telling you is a sign of love, and desire for an open and honest relationship—your support can strongly reinforce their own process of self acceptance.

Is my child different now? We think we know and understand our children from the day they are born. So when a child reveals their authentic selves, and we hadn’t a clue—or we were pretty sure we knew but possibly denied it to ourselves—the reaction can range from surprise to worry, or possibly joy and support almost immediately; in some cases it’s a variety of responses simultaneously. **All of these emotions—and others—are normal and ok.**

The reality is that our world comes from a place of assumption that everyone we encounter and interact with is straight (also known as heteronormativity) and cisgender (not transgender), also known as cisheteronormativity. Your dreams for your loved ones are likely this way, too. Despite the fact that a significant portion of the population is LGBTQ+, society still assumes everyone is straight or cisgender as a baseline... when the truth is actually quite different. Of course, when you stop to think about it, whether our kids are straight, bi, or gay, or cisgender, transgender, or gender expansive, they’re always surprising us. They don’t marry who we might pick for them; they don’t take the job we would have chosen; they don’t live where we’d like them to live.

Keep reminding yourself that your child hasn’t changed. Your child is the same person that they were before you learned about their sexuality or gender. It is your dream, your expectations, and your vision that may have to change if you are to really know and understand your LGBTQ+ loved one. For an in-depth exploration of these issues, be sure to order the full publication **OUR CHILDREN**, or download a copy for free, both from pflag.org/our-children. And if you have questions, please contact us at info@pflag.org.

PFLAG is here for you!



Faith In Our Families

Parents, Families & Friends talk about religion & sexual orientation or gender identity.

“Our guidepost has always been unconditional love for our kids. We were observant Jews — conservative — not orthodox, not Reform. We were aware that there were lines in the Old Testament that prohibited gay relationships. Back when my daughter came out to us, the conservative seminaries held homosexuality as taboo. However, we didn’t have a problem reconciling these views because our kids always come first.”

Discovering that a family member or friend is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) can pose new questions about your faith and may prompt you to re-evaluate beliefs that you previously took for granted. While this can seem scary it can also be the beginning of a new period of learning and exploration. At Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) we encourage you to ask questions about sexual orientation and about your faith community.

A strong support system can be helpful during this time. Many people chose to turn to their traditional support system: clergy and other faith leaders. Depending on your faith community’s teaching and leadership however, they may or may not be in a position to help. Many religious denominations are studying their positions on sexual orientation. Other religions or denominations have historically been unsupportive. You may first want to explore the attitudes about LGBT people in your faith community.

Exploring your faith from a new perspective and fresh needs may be difficult at first as many people have been taught to not question their faith tradition. It is OK to ask questions both about your loved one’s sexual orientation as well as your faith community. PFLAG encourages you to explore different interpretations of scripture. Widely respected biblical scholars disagree about the interpretations of the scriptures. Passages about homosexuality are no exception.

Learning that a loved one is LGBT can be a challenge if you feel it is at odds with your faith tradition. However, being LGBT does not impact a person's ability to be moral and spiritual any more than being heterosexual does. Many LGBT people are religious and active in their own faith communities. It is up to you to explore, question and make choices in order to reconcile religion with sexual orientation and/or gender identity. For some this means working for change within their faith community, and for others it means leaving it.

You will find LGBT people or their loved ones in almost every faith group across the country. You are not alone. There are a number of faith organizations that do positive work for our LGBT loved ones. In addition to worship services a number of organizations offer resources specific to their faith work.

“I first spoke publicly about my gay son in a speech about our life to my congregation. My voice shook terribly. Half of the people applauded, half sat on their hands. Since that first experience my husband and I have continued to be involved — even on a national level. I have testified before the general assembly council and met with pastors across the country.”

To learn more about resources for many different faith communities check out the full length Faith and Our Families resource at www.pflag.org or find a chapter in your area.

PFLAG Advocacy Guidelines

SPOKANE, WA

These are rules you must follow while representing PFLAG, in person, including at chapter and coalition events, and online, including use of PFLAG email and social media accounts. Violating these rules may result in the denial or revocation of PFLAG's tax-exempt status. If you have questions contact PFLAG National's Director of Advocacy, Policy, and Partnerships, Diego Sanchez.

Do

Educate the public about issues relating to an upcoming election.

Attend candidate forums and town hall meetings.

Organize public forums where ALL candidates are invited and have equal speaking opportunity and coverage.

Ask ALL candidates about LGBT issues.

Wear clothing that supports specific issues, as long as it cannot be linked directly to a political party or candidate.

Issue public statements in favor/opposition of elected officials' positions on LGBTQ issues.

Don't

Endorse candidates in person, in writing, or online.

Participate in any political campaigns or conduct campaign outreach at meetings--no flyers, announcements about campaign events, etc.

Invite a candidate or their staff to a PFLAG meeting to recruit volunteers or give out membership lists.

Donate to any candidate on behalf of your PFLAG chapter.

Engage in partisan discussion at meetings.

Wear clothing/paraphernalia pertaining to or endorsing specific political parties or candidates.

Sell chapter member email lists to campaigns.

Elected officials vs. Candidates: Know the Difference

Understanding when an incumbent is acting as a candidate, versus in their role as an already-elected official, correlates with the activity in question, not the timing. For example, an incumbent holding a town hall is acting in their role as an elected official because they are not there to campaign, but to focus on legislative issues.



SPOKANE, WA

Into To Advocacy

Advocacy Options Include:

- **Via social media:** Spread your message to a wide audience, including Senators and Representatives, nearly all of whom are on social media, including Twitter and Facebook.
- **Via Traditional Media:** Write op-eds to express your opinions on important issues and put out press releases to share news about advocacy programming.

Lobbying Options Include:

- **In-person lobbying:** Bring your personal story to the forefront and have a conversation either with your elected official or someone on their staff who has direct contact with them.
- **Attending town halls:** Make your voice heard, ask questions of your elected officials, and increase visibility. Town hall meetings are open to all constituents, although some are promoted by direct invitation. Find a town hall by calling your elected official, checking their website, or going on townhallproject.com
- **By phone:** Advise your elected official with a brief message.
- **By email and mail:** Influence your lawmaker from home by writing your own letters on how an issue affects your family or by adding your personal story to scripted ones from PFLAG National.
- **Via social media:** Spread your message to a wide audience, including elected officials, nearly all of whom are on social media, including Twitter and Facebook.
- **Via Traditional Media:** Write op-eds and letters to the editor to express your opinions on important issues and send media advisories to share news about advocacy events.

