Our Sons and Daughters
Questions & Answers for Parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Youth

“I think the turning point for me was when I read more about it, and read that most kids who can accept their sexuality say they feel calmer, happier and more confident. And of course, that’s what I wanted for my child and I sure didn’t want to be what was standing in the way of that.” — Father of a gay son

As parents, every day we work to ensure that our children 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, or transgender (LGBT) it’s common to feel that those dreams are ruined. Some are taught that being gay is different, wrong, or sinful.

What is the first thing you can do when you learn that your child is gay? Seek support from others. Families all across the country and in your community have lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people in their immediate or extended families. You are not alone. Talking about it to someone can really help. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) chapters have provided support and education opportunities for families just like yours for over 35 years. Find a chapter near you at www.pflag.org.

It’s important for you to understand that coming out can be a difficult process. Regardless of how nurturing you are with your children, your son or daughter felt a real risk of losing your love and support by coming out to you. Every day, young people are kicked out of their home for disclosing their sexuality. In a study conducted by The Gay and Lesbian Task Force, nearly 40% of all homeless youth identify as LGBT and cited “experiencing negative reactions by their parents when they came out.” By the time your child has built up the courage to come out to you, he or she has gone through the process of self-acceptance. Telling you is a sign of love, and desire for an open and honest relationship.

Is my child different now? We think we know and understand our children from the day they are born. So when a child announces “I’m gay,” and we hadn’t a clue – or we knew all along but denied it to ourselves – the reactions are often shock and disorientation.

You have a dream, a vision of what your child will be, should be, can be. It’s a dream that is born of your own history, of what you wanted for yourself growing up, and especially of the culture around you. Despite the fact that a significant portion of the population is gay, American society still prepares us only with heterosexual dreams for our children. The shock and disorientation you may feel is a natural part of a type of grieving process. You have lost something – your dream for your child. Of course, when you stop to think about it, this is true for all children, straight or gay. 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 he or she was before you learned about his or her sexuality. It is your dream, your expectations, and your vision that may have to change if you are to really know and understand your gay loved one.

“I have to tell you, there are so many pluses now. You begin to recognize what an incredible child you have to share this with you and to want you to be part of their lives… [Look at] the trust that has been placed in your hands and how much guts it took to do that.” — Father of lesbian daughter

To learn more about common questions and answers that parents and family members of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender people often have check out the full length Our Daughters and Sons resource at www.pflag.org or find a chapter in your area.