



## Your child is gay— and you have questions.

If you've recently learned that your child is gay, you probably have a thousand questions running through your mind.

You may also be experiencing a wide range of intense emotions, including anger, confusion, worry, sorrow and guilt. Many parents of gay children experience some or all of these emotions. This is natural. After all, you're probably thinking the life you envisioned for your child has just been turned upside down.

Most parents experience these emotions because they don't have the answers to the questions that are now raining down on them. This happens because many people don't have a good understanding of homosexuality. Unfortunately, homosexuality is a subject that is still not discussed openly in many parts of our society. As a result, misconceptions are strewn about everywhere.

You may find yourself in an emotional jungle at the moment. We, as fellow parents of gay and lesbian children, have found that the path out of the jungle is one of understanding. The journey on that path may take weeks or it may take years. The single most important thing we have learned is this: Although your life has undeniably changed, the further you venture toward understanding and acceptance of your gay child, the more you will realize that what now appears as dark and depressing, can turn out to be a uniquely positive experience that has the potential to bring you much closer to your child. This path is very much brighter than it seems.

### Some common questions

*Why is my child gay?*

Science has not yet reached a complete understanding of what determines sexual orientation. However, there is a general consensus that sexual orientation is likely determined before birth, or at a very young age.

*Could I have done something different as a parent to avoid this?*

No. There are numerous instances in which parents raise multiple children, some of whom are gay and some are heterosexual, even though they were raised in the same way.

*Why is my child doing this?*

Our sexual orientation is an instinctive part of each of us. It's a fundamental part of our identity. If your child has come out to you, it is because of an essential need to be the person he or she truly is, and to be accepted as such.

*Could psychotherapy help my child?*

Therapy could potentially help both you and your child in dealing with the coming out process and the prejudice that gay people experience. However, it is important to know that numerous studies have shown that so-called "reparative" or "conversion" therapy is ineffective and generally does more harm than good. Imagine what it would be like if you were subjected to therapy that attempted to change your sexual orientation. Both the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from their official list of mental and emotional disorders.

*Is this just a phase?*

There is still a widespread belief in our society that a person has to be heterosexual to be

"normal". Because of this pressure, your child has most likely thought carefully about this question for a long time before deciding to come out to you. He or she probably understands that their sexual orientation is not just a phase.

*Is my child in danger?*

If your child is being harassed in school, Washington State's Safe Schools Bullying Bill provides protection for all students, including sexual minorities, from harassment.

### Suggestions

- Read as much as you can about homosexuality and sexual orientation. This may be challenging, but is enlightening and an essential part of understanding your child. See the Suggested Reading section (other side).
- Consider attending a PFLAG support meeting (see below). This is an excellent way to find answers to your questions and to talk to other parents that are in similar situations.
- Once you have explored some of the issues surrounding homosexuality, and hopefully have answered at least a few of your questions, talk to your child. Try to gain an appreciation for the emotions that he or she has been dealing with and explain your feelings and concerns.

---

---

### About PFLAG

PFLAG is an international organization that promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) individuals, their families and friends. The Tacoma chapter of PFLAG started in 1981. Our monthly meetings provide a friendly and confidential environment in which you can talk to other parents of GLBT children. Visit

[www.pflagtacoma.org](http://www.pflagtacoma.org)

for more information about our organization and our meetings, or call 253-383-2318.

---

---

# Your child is gay – and you want to tell others.



After learning you have a gay child, a typical reaction is to go into the closet yourself. You may be reluctant to discuss it with your friends or family. You might feel ashamed, thinking you did not do a proper job of parenting. You may fear for your child's safety if anyone else finds out.

You should not resist your time in the closet. Embrace it. It is a time for reflection, for formulating and, hopefully, answering your questions. While you're in there, try to learn as much as you can about sexual orientation, even if this means pushing yourself out of your normal comfort zone.

At some point, you need to come out of the closet, just as your child did. It's hard to live a life dodging the perennial questions that relatives ask about your child's love life, or sitting quietly after a friend or relative makes a crude comment about gay people.

Equally important, once you have come to understand homosexuality better, you'll be more sensitive to the prejudices and inequities that gay people experience every day in our society. And you'll want to change it. This is part of becoming an advocate for gays and lesbians. Being an advocate means talking to people about homosexuality and gay rights. And, naturally, some of the first people you will tell are your family and friends.

## Suggestions

### *Answer your own questions first*

It is essential that you are comfortable with your child's sexual orientation before you talk to your family. They will have many of the same questions you did. Their acceptance will be much quicker if you are confident in your understanding of homosexuality and can answer their questions, or at least broaden their thinking. They will probably ask many of the same questions that you did.

### *Start with the easy ones*

Some of your family members will be more open than others. If possible, start with the ones you believe will be the most accepting. This will give you a chance to try out your delivery and possibly learn something about the more "difficult" people at the same time.

### *Be prepared for rejection*

Some family members and friends may have a very closed mind when it comes to homosexuality. If so, try to understand the source of their homophobia. This may show you a way to help them come to a better understanding. Consider inviting them to attend a PFLAG meeting with you.

### *Be prepared for surprises*

Keep in mind that while you may lose some friends, you may become much closer to others. Don't underestimate your family's willingness and ability to be supportive.

### *Be patient*

Don't expect a family member or friend to be accepting right away. Keep in mind how long it took you to become accustomed to it. If someone is not accepting at first, don't give up!

### *Remain calm*

Because homosexuality can be an emotional issue, you may hear some offensive comments about gay people, which will put you in a defensive position. Be prepared for this. Your arguments will be much more persuasive if they are calm and reasoned, rather than emotional and distraught.

### *Allow enough time to talk*

Your friend or family member may have a lot of questions. Try to find an opportunity when you will have enough time to talk and you will be free of distractions.

### *Become an advocate*

One of the best ways to make the world better for your gay child is to simply talk about it. This may be difficult at first – so start slowly. Put a gay-friendly bumper sticker on your car. Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper. Write or call your elected officials to show your support of legislation that gives equal rights to gay people. Wear a PFLAG shirt!

## Some Useful References

- *Scared Straight: Why It's So Hard to Accept Gay People and Why It's So Hard to Be Human*, by Dr. Robert Minor.
- *The Preacher's Son*, by Marc Adams
- *Is It a Choice? Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions About Gay & Lesbian People*, by Eric Marcus.
- *Growing Up Gay/Growing Up Lesbian: A Literary Anthology*, by Bennett Singer.
- *Coming Out As Parents: You and Your Homosexual Child*, by David Switzer