

But my religion teaches that homosexuality is wrong.

For many parents, this can be the most difficult issue to reconcile. For others it is not an issue at all. Though some religions still condemn homosexuality, there are respected leaders within nearly every religious group who believe that it is wrong to pass judgment on gay people, and others who not only include, but also celebrate the gay people in their communities. PFLAG NYC can refer you to information specific to your own religion, including local gay-friendly congregations. We also offer two brochures: *Is Homosexuality a Sin?* and *Faith in Our Families*.

Now what? How can I support my child?

The fact that you are reading this shows that you are a concerned parent who is willing to show some support for your child. As with many other issues you may encounter within your family, you should be willing to talk, listen, and learn together with your child. In some cases, it may help for you to be able to talk about your feelings, and PFLAG NYC is here to help you with your needs as the parent of a gay child.

One way you can support your child is to educate yourself as much as possible about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender orientation and then help reduce some of the homophobia that exists in our society. After all, it is silence that allows prejudice and discrimination to survive.

For more information, ask for our special brochure for parents—*Our Daughters and Sons*.

Additional brochures available from PFLAG National at www.pflag.org:

- *Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality* (American Psychological Association)
- *Be Yourself!* (for gay youth)
- *Faith in Our Families*
- *Is Homosexuality a Sin?*
- *Our Daughters and Sons*
- *Our Trans Children* (for parents of transgendered children)
- *Read This Before Coming Out To Your Parents* (for parents and children)
- *Opening the Straight Spouse's Closet*
- *Recommended Reading List*



Our main monthly meeting is on the second Sunday of every month from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at St. Bartholomew's Community House 109 E. 50th St. (between Park & Lex) New York, NY

For other meeting locations throughout the city, see our website.

All are welcome, including parents, friends, family members and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, with or without their families.

PFLAG NYC

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Answers to Parents' Questions about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender People

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What do you do when you first find out that your child is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender?

This brochure is designed to answer some common questions you may have and address some of the emotions you may be feeling in the wake of this discovery. It will take some time to absorb and process all of this new information. Just remember that you are not alone. According to some widely accepted statistics, roughly one in four families has an immediate family member who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Remember that you love your child, and to preserve—perhaps even strengthen—your relationship with him/her, you must try to move towards understanding and, eventually, acceptance.

Note: From this point on, we will use the word “gay” to refer to people who are not heterosexual, both male and female.

How can s/he be sure? Maybe s/he's just rebelling or experimenting.

It is natural to try to think of this new information as “just a phase.” However, because our culture is still predominantly anti-gay, there is very little chance that someone who is heterosexual would choose to live as gay. Keep in mind that you would probably never ask “Are you sure you're straight?”

Some parents feel that they would be better off not knowing that they have a gay child. Please remember that someone who has “come out” to you has usually gone through a long and hard process of acknowledging his/her own sexual orientation. The fact that your child told you shows his/her love for you and desire to have an honest relationship with you. It may also be a sign of a need for support. According to one study, up to 80% of gay youth report feeling severe social and emotional isolation.

Why did my child wait so long to tell me?

It can be difficult to realize that you don't know your child as well as you may have thought. It takes many gay people a long time to figure out what they're feeling. Many report growing up feeling “different,” but not really understanding why. In addition, our predominant culture teaches gay people that who they are is not “okay,” causing many to internalize self-hate or insecurity. The fact that s/he told you means that s/he is inviting you to share in a more open and honest relationship.

Isn't being gay considered deviant behavior?

Being gay is not a behavior. It is an inherent trait, just as being heterosexual is. It is not something a person chooses about him/herself. Though some societies may still consider gay people “deviants,” that definition is not supported by prominent organizations like the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Medical Association, and other mental health professionals, who all agree that homosexuality is not an illness, a mental disorder, or an emotional problem, but simply a fact of life for some people.

Why is my child gay? Should I take him/her to therapy?

Although it is not known specifically what causes people to be gay, most scientists agree that it is likely the result of a complex interaction between biological and environmental factors. The American Psychological Association states “...Homosexuality is not an illness. It does not require treatment and is not changeable.”

Many gay people or their family members do seek help to work through their feelings about coming out.

PFLAG NYC holds monthly meetings in which families help one another through what can be a difficult process.

I have gay friends, so why am I so uncomfortable now that it's my child?

Homophobia is too prominent in our society to put out of our minds completely. Realize that it will take time to adjust to this new information and don't chastise yourself for not feeling the way you “should” about it.

I can accept that my child is gay, but why does s/he have to flaunt it?

Gay people are often accused of “flaunting” their homosexuality (or bisexuality, or transgender identity) when they come out. In our world, we tend to make assumptions that everyone we see is heterosexual. As a result, we tend to not be surprised or uncomfortable when people express their attraction to the opposite sex or talk matter-of-factly about their straight partners, lovers, families, and friends. Yet gay people are made to feel they must hide these aspects of themselves. For them, coming out is a positive way to challenge our assumptions and to help affirm their self-esteem.

Will my child be discriminated against? Is s/he in danger?

Unfortunately, both of these things are possible. On the brighter side, attitudes about differences in sexual orientation have begun to change as society becomes better informed. There are many places where your child will be accepted for who s/he is and will be able to live in relative safety. However, until homophobia no longer exists in our society, your child may encounter some significant obstacles. It is even more unfortunate when this discrimination exists within a child's own family.