

When a loved one comes out as LGBTQ+

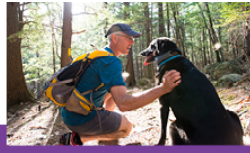
For many people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer, the coming out process can be a very difficult process. At the same time, it can be just as difficult for the families and friends who hear the news.

Rashida Bonds is an in-person and online coach at Liberation Life Coaching in Indianapolis, Indiana. And she specializes in supporting families and parents of LGBTQ+ youth. She offers the following tips to help you through the process:

- **Stay calm.** Bonds says, “Just centering yourself is a good place to start.” You may feel upset or anxious and that’s okay. If you stay calm, you give yourself a chance to think before reacting.
- **Ask your loved one, “What does this mean to you?”** There are a lot of identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. “All of these identities mean different things to the people who hold them,” reports Bonds. This question helps you understand your loved one and can make them feel supported.
- **Ask, “How can I support you?”** and really listen to the answer. Support looks different for everyone. Bonds reports, “It may just be, ‘I need you to love me’ and for most people that’s what it is.”
- **Don’t worry about “what-ifs.”** Bonds says it’s easy to worry about your loved one. She suggests you ask yourself, “Is everybody okay?” because “This gives you less time to wallow in the ‘what-ifs’ and helps you focus on what’s real.”
- **Recognize your feelings.** Everyone reacts differently to this kind of news. You might feel shock, denial, anger, disappointment, shame, resentment, guilt or a sense of loss. “Those feelings belong to you. And those feelings are fair. You get to feel your feelings.” When you accept your feelings, you can cope with them.
- **Deal with your feelings.** “Just do it away from your loved one,” says Bonds. “Don’t make the person who’s coming out responsible for these feelings. They have enough to deal with.” Provide space to grieve the dreams you may have had for your loved one.
- **Respect your loved one’s privacy.** You may be curious and that’s okay. “Just don’t ask your loved one anything you wouldn’t ask a stranger on the street,” advises Bonds.
- **Educate yourself.** Educate yourself about LGBT topics through books or internet resources. “But don’t make your loved one responsible for your education,” says Bonds. “They’re not a spokesperson.”
- **Do your best.** Bonds says that for people who are transitioning to a new gender or a gender non-conforming identity, “The fact that you’re trying means a lot. Doing your best can be a form of support.”

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- **Make mistakes and move on.** You may have to practice calling your loved one by a different pronoun. Bonds says it's common to make mistakes as you adjust. She recommends you, "Just say, 'Oops. I'm sorry.' And then move on with the correct pronouns. It's that simple."
- **Offer protection.** Even if you're accepting, coming out to others can be really hard. Depending on your relationship, you may want to offer protection. So, for example, Bonds says, if your child comes out to you but grandma isn't accepting, "you may need to protect them from that situation."
- **Stay curious.** Know that you come with your own set of beliefs. These might be challenged or need to change in order to support yourself and your loved one. "Explore your own biases, stereotypes and prejudices so you don't take them out on your loved one," recommends Bonds.
- **Keep learning.** Bonds explains it's important to stay open "because things are constantly evolving and changing and there are always new things to learn."
- **Know that you are not alone.**¹ One in four families has an immediate family member who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. And most people have at least one lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender member in their extended circle of friends and family.
- **Get support.** Talk to a friend, family member, mental health professional or religious leader if

you need support. And there are community-based organizations like PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).

- **Accept your loved one.** Know that your loved one does not need to be "fixed." Reparative therapy is not only ineffective but increases suicide risks. When LGBTQ youth aren't accepted by their families, they're six times more likely to be depressed and eight times more likely to attempt suicide.²

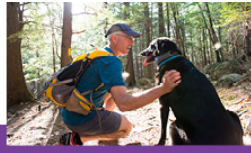
Coming out can be an uncomfortable process. And it can take time to adjust to the news. It's important to understand that your loved one is the same person that they were before you heard the news.

But it's okay to feel uncomfortable. In fact, this lack of comfort is a chance to build a closer relationship with your loved one.

Bonds says, "If there's a true desire to understand your LGBTQ+ loved one, you have to have these conversations with them. They might be hard conversations that you don't want to have. And it might be uncomfortable. You must get past that barrier. Because once you get past that, there's forward movement."

¹ [Questions parents ask about LGBT people](#). PFLAG New York City. Accessed September 2019.

² [About conversion therapy](#). The Trevor Project. Accessed September 2019.



Book resources

- [Always My Child: A Parent's Guide to Understanding Your Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered or Questioning Son or Daughter](#) by Kevin Jennings and Pat Shapiro
- [Is it a Choice?: Answers to 300 of the Most Frequently Asked Questions About Gay and Lesbian People](#) by Eric Marcus
- [Now That You Know: A Parents' Guide to Understanding Their Gay and Lesbian Children](#) by Betty Fairchild and Nancy Hayward
- [Love, Ellen: A Mother/Daughter Journey](#) by Betty Degeneres
- [Helping Your Transgender Teen: A Guide for Parents](#) by Irwin Krieger
- [Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is](#) by Abigail Garner
- [Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out](#) by Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu
- [This Is a Book for Parents of Gay Kids: A Question & Answer Guide to Everyday Life](#) by Dannielle Owens-Reid and Kristin Russo
- [Side by Side: On Having a Gay or Lesbian Sibling](#) by Andrew R. Gottlieb
- [Coming Out, Coming Home: Helping Families Adjust to a Lesbian or Gay Child](#) by Michael C. LaSala

Online resources

- **Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG)** – Find your local PFLAG chapter as well as helpful resources and information at pflag.org/
- **Straight Spouse Network (SSN)** – This organization supports current and former heterosexual spouses and partners of LGBTQ mates. straightspouse.org/
- **Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE)** - This is a national group of children of LGBTQ parents. colage.org/
- **The Trevor Project** – This organization provides crisis support and suicide intervention to LGBTQ people under the age of 25. thetrevorproject.org/
- **Trans Family** – This site offers information and resources for the transgendered community and their loved ones. transfamily.org/
- **Liberation Life Coaching**. Rashida Bonds offers individual coaching services to friends and family members of LGBTQ youth. libyourlifecoaching.com/
- **GLBT Near Me** – Find local support resources for the LGBT community at gltbnearme.org/

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