

Our Daughters & Sons

Questions & Answers for Parents of
Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual People



PFLAG

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PFLAG



Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is the nation's foremost family-based organization committed to the civil rights of gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender persons. Founded in 1973 by mothers and fathers, PFLAG has 200,000 members and supporters in more than 500 chapters throughout the United States. This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced and serviced by the PFLAG national office (located in Washington, D.C.), the national Board of Directors and our Regional Directors. PFLAG is a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization that is not affiliated with any political or religious institution.

For more information, please visit www.pflag.org.

Our Vision

We, the parents, families and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, celebrate diversity and envision a society that embraces everyone, including those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Only with respect, dignity and equality for all will we reach our full potential as human beings, individually and collectively. PFLAG welcomes the participation and support of all who share in, and hope to realize this vision.

Our Mission

PFLAG promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

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About this booklet:

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Definitions used in this booklet:

Heterosexual (or straight):

Refers to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are primarily for the opposite gender.

Homosexual (or gay):

Refers to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are primarily for the same gender.

Homophobia:

Refers to society's misunderstanding, ignorance or fear of gay, lesbian or bisexual people.

Lesbian:

Refers to women who are homosexual.

Bisexual (or bi):

Refers to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are for both genders.

Coming out:

Refers to the process of identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual. It also refers to the process that parents go through when telling others about a gay loved one.

Gay:

In this booklet, the word gay is used to include homosexuals and bisexuals, male and female.

Transgender:

Someone whose gender identity or expression differs from conventional expectations for their physical sex. They can be straight, gay, or bisexual. For information for parents of transgender children, please see the **PFLAG Transgender Network** publication, *Our Trans Children* (ordering information is on page 20).

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

Most parents aren't prepared for the words, "Mom, Dad. I'm gay." If you're like many parents, your first reaction is "How will I ever handle this?"

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is here for you. We hope this booklet will help you understand your child's sexuality and its meaning to you and your continued relationship with your son or daughter. Our members consist of parents, families and friends of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people and GLBT people themselves. We most likely have been through much of what you are now feeling. We understand.

We can tell you with absolute certainty that you're not alone. According to some statistics, one in every ten people in this country and around the world is gay. Approximately one in four families has an immediate family member who is gay, lesbian or bisexual, and most families have *at least* one gay, lesbian or bisexual member in their extended family circle.

That means that there are plenty of people out there you can talk to. We can tell you from experience that talking about it really helps. There are books to read, telephone helplines to call, websites to visit, and people to meet who, by sharing their own experiences, can help you move forward. And PFLAG can connect you with the information and support services you need.

The second thing we can tell you is that – if you choose to – you will emerge from this period with a stronger, closer relationship with your child than you have ever had before. That's been the case for all of us. But the path to that point is often not easy.

Some parents were able to take the news in stride. But many of us went through something similar to a grieving process with all the accompanying shock, denial, anger, guilt and sense of loss. So if those are the feelings with which you're dealing, they're understandable given our society's attitudes towards gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

Don't condemn yourself for the emotions you feel. But, since you love your child, you owe it to him or her – and to yourself – to move toward acceptance, understanding and support.

While it may feel as if you have lost your child, you haven't. Your child is the same person he or she was yesterday. The only thing you have lost is your own image of that child and the understanding you thought you had. That feeling of loss can be difficult, but that image *can* be replaced with a new and clearer understanding of your child.

If your child is young, coming to an understanding with him or her may be crucial. Gay, lesbian and bisexual youth who are shut out by their parents have

a comparatively high incidence of suicide and drug and alcohol abuse. Some teens protect themselves by putting as much distance between themselves and their parents as possible.

If your son or daughter "came out" to you voluntarily, you're probably more than halfway there already. Your child's decision to be open and honest with you about something many in our society discourage took a tremendous amount of courage. And it shows an equally tremendous amount of love, trust and commitment to their relationship with you.

Now it's up to you to match your child's courage, commitment, trust and love with your own.

Is my child different now?

We think we know and understand our children from the day they are born. We're convinced that we know what's going on inside their heads.

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, 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. You also have lost the illusion that you can read your child's mind.

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. In our society, though, we're better prepared to deal with those circumstances than with our child's "minority" sexual orientation.

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, your vision that may have to change if you are to really know and understand your gay loved one.

Why did he or she have to tell us?

Some parents feel they would have been happier not knowing about their child's sexuality. They look back to before they knew and recall this time as problem-free overlooking the distance they often felt from their child during that time.

Sometimes we try to deny what is happening – by rejecting what we’re hearing (“It’s just a phase; you’ll get over it”); by shutting down (“If you choose that lifestyle, I don’t want to hear about it”); or by not registering the impact of what we’re being told (“That’s nice, dear, and what do you want for dinner?”). These are all natural reactions.

However, if you did not know the truth about your child’s sexuality, you would never really know your child. A large part of his or her life would be kept secret from you, and you would never really know the whole person.

It is important to accept and understand your child’s sexuality because homosexuality and bisexuality are not a phase.

While people may experiment for some time with their sexuality, someone who has reached the point of telling a parent that he or she is gay is not usually going through a phase. Generally, he or she has given long and hard thought to understanding and acknowledging his or her sexual orientation.

So if you’re wondering, “Is she sure?” the answer will almost always be “yes.” Telling a parent that you think you’re gay involves overcoming too many negative stereotypes and taking far too much risk for anyone to take that step lightly or prematurely.

The fact that your son or daughter told you is a sign of his or her love and need for your support and understanding. It took a lot of courage. And it shows a very strong desire for an open, honest relationship with you – a relationship in which you can love your child for who he or she is, rather than for who you want him or her to be.

Why didn’t our child tell us before?

One difficult realization for you may be the recognition that your child has probably been thinking this through for months or even years, and is only now telling you. It’s easy to misinterpret this as a lack of trust, lack of love, or a reflection on your parenting. And it’s painful to realize that you don’t know your child as well as you thought you did, and that you have been excluded from a part of his or her life.

To some extent, this is true in all parenting relationships whether the child is gay or straight. There’s a necessary separation between parent and child as the child moves toward adulthood. Your child may reach conclusions you would not have reached, and will do it without consulting you.

But, in this case, it is particularly hard because the conclusion your child has reached is so important and, in many cases, so unexpected. You may have been shut out of your child’s thinking for a long period of time.

Gay people may hold back from their parents as long as possible because it has taken them a long time to figure out what they’re feeling themselves. In other words, gay, lesbian and bisexual youth often recognize at an early age that they feel “different,” but it may take years before they can put a name to these feelings.

Because we still live in a society that misunderstands or is fearful of gay people, it takes time for them to acknowledge their sexuality to themselves. Gay people have often internalized self-hate or insecurity about their sexual identity. It may take time for someone to think through and work up the courage to tell a parent. Even if you feel your child should have known they could tell you anything, remember that our culture’s treatment of homosexuality says “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

So, even as you may grieve for not having been able to help your child through that period – or even if you believe that the outcome would have been different if you had been involved earlier – understand that your child probably could not have told you any sooner. Most importantly, doing so now is an invitation to a more open and honest relationship.

Why is my child gay?

Parents often ask this question for a number of reasons: they may be grieving over losing an image of their child; they feel they did something wrong; they feel that someone “led” their child into homosexuality; or they wonder if there is a biological cause of homosexuality.

Some parents react with shock, denial and anger to the news that their child is gay. One response is to wonder, “How could she do this to me?” This is not a rational reaction, but it is a human response to pain. We liken this reaction to a grieving process – here, you are grieving over losing an *image* of your child. As you work through your feelings, you may discover that the only thing your child has “done” to you is to trust that your relationship could grow as a result of you knowing the truth about him or her.

You may feel that your child has been led into homosexuality by someone else. It is a popular misconception that homosexuals “recruit.” No one “made” your child gay. He or she has most likely known that he or she was “different” for a very long time – no person or group of people “converted” your child.

Other parents believe feel that their parenting is the cause of their child’s sexual identity. For years, psychology and psychiatry have bandied around theories that homosexuality is caused by parental personality types – the dominant female, the weak male – or by the absence of same-gender role models. Those theories are no longer accepted within psychiatry and psychology, and part of PFLAG’s work focuses on erasing these myths and misconceptions from our popular culture.

Gay people come from all types of families. Some have dominant mothers, while others may have dominant fathers. Gay men, lesbians and bisexuals are only children and they're youngest, middle and oldest children. They come from families with siblings who are gay and families with siblings who are not gay. Many come from what society would consider "model" families.

Many parents wonder if there is a genetic or biological basis to homosexuality. While there are some studies on homosexuality and genetics, there are no conclusive studies to date on the "cause" of homosexuality *or* heterosexuality. In the absence of this data, we would encourage you to ask yourself why it is important for you to know why.

Does support or love for your child rely on your ability to point to a cause? Do we ask heterosexual people to justify their sexuality that way? Remember that gay, lesbian and bisexual people exist in every walk of life, religion, nationality and racial background. Therefore, all gay people, like straight people, are very different and have come into their sexual identity in very different ways. Although we may be curious, it is really not that important to know why your child is gay in order to support and love him or her.

Why am I uncomfortable with his or her sexuality?

The apprehension you may feel is a product of our culture. Homophobia is too pervasive in our society to be banished easily from our consciousness. As long as homophobia exists, any gay person and any parent of a gay, lesbian or bisexual youth has some very real and legitimate fears and concerns.

For parents who see themselves as "liberal" and believe they have put sexual prejudice behind them (even those who have gay friends) sometimes have additional guilt with feeling uncomfortable. They are sometimes stunned to recognize that they are uncomfortable when it is *their* child (whatever his or her age) who is gay. These parents not only have to grapple with deep-rooted fears of homosexuality, but also have the added burden of thinking they shouldn't feel the way they do.

It helps to concentrate on the real concern of what your child needs most from you now. Try not to focus on the guilt. It is baseless, and it accomplishes nothing for yourself or for your child.

Should we consult a psychiatrist or psychologist?

Consulting a therapist in the hopes of changing your child's sexual orientation is pointless. Homosexuality is not a disease to be "cured" – it is a natural way of being.

But there are situations where it can be helpful to consult people experienced with family issues and sexual orientation. You may want to talk to someone

about your own feelings and how to work through them. You may feel that you and your child need help communicating clearly through this period. Or you may recognize that your child is unhappy and needs help with self-acceptance.

Once again, gay people often have trouble accepting themselves and their sexual identity. In this circumstance, self-rejection could be a dangerous emotional state.

In all of these cases, you have a number of options and resources. PFLAG members, either individually or in support groups, can provide you with the information, space and resources you may need to build a stronger relationship with your gay child.

A therapist can also provide the confidentiality and, to a degree, the anonymity that you may feel you need at first. PFLAG members may be able to suggest a therapist that has helped their families.

There are a variety of resources for help, information and advice. We encourage you to explore your options and to use those best suited for you and your family. Please refer to the resource section in the back of this booklet for suggestions.

What about "ex-gay" ministries and "reparative therapy" – can it help?

Because homosexuality is not "chosen," you cannot "change your child's mind" if he or she is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, in spite of what so-called "reparative therapists" and "ex-gay ministries" claim. In fact, these practices have been rejected by every major medical and professional association and have been proven to cause serious damage and even lead to suicide.

Here are a few points to know:

- In 1990, the American Psychological Association stated that scientific evidence shows that reparative therapy does not work and that it can do more harm than good.
- In 1997, the American Psychological Association again publicly cautioned against so-called "reparative therapy," also known as conversion therapy.
- In 1998, the American Psychiatric Association stated it was opposed to reparative therapy, stating "psychiatric literature strongly demonstrates that treatment attempts to change sexual orientation are ineffective. However, the potential risks are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive [suicidal] behavior..."
- The American Medical Association, states in its policy number H-160.991, that it "opposes, the use of 'reparative' or 'conversion' therapy that is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the a priori assumption that the patient should change his/her homosexual orientation."

- In 2001, The US Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior asserted that homosexuality is not "a reversible lifestyle choice."

Many PFLAG parents have seen firsthand how damaging this so-called "reparative therapy" has been to their children. PFLAG members believe that it is important that we recognize and educate society based on scientific facts and reputable professional opinions, not on the ideological and pseudo-scientific beliefs expressed by ex-gay ministries and advocates of reparative therapy.

Knowing who these groups are and the various names under which they work is critical. See page 17 for a list of groups to avoid.

Will my child be ostracized, have trouble finding or keeping a job, or even be physically attacked?

All of these things are possible. It depends on where your son or daughter lives and what kind of job he or she takes – but attitudes toward homosexuality have begun to change, and are now changing relatively quickly. There are many places where your child can live and work relatively free of discrimination.

Unfortunately, societal change is often slow – just look at how long it took for women to gain the right to vote in this country. Progress is often also accompanied by backlash. Until more individuals and more organizations become advocates for gay rights, until homophobia is eradicated in our society, your child does face some significant challenges.

How do I reconcile this with my religion?

It is true that some religions continue to condemn homosexuality. But even within these religions, there are respected leaders who believe that their church's position of condemnation is unconscionable.

In 1997, the U.S. Catholic bishops issued a pastoral statement urging parents to love and support their gay children. In a 1994 pastoral letter, the U.S. Episcopal bishops wrote, "As it can be for heterosexual persons, the experience of steadfast love can be for homosexual persons an experience of God."

Many mainstream American religions have now taken official stands in support of gay rights. Some have gone further. The Methodist Church, for example, has developed a network of reconciling congregations welcoming gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Since 1991, the United Church of Christ has had a denominational policy stating that sexual orientation should not be a barrier to ordination. In the Episcopal Church, the denomination's legislative body has declared that gay people have a full and equal claim with all other people upon the church and have ordained openly gay clergy.

You will still hear people quote the Bible in defense of their prejudice against gay people. But many Biblical scholars dispute any anti-gay interpretations of Biblical texts.

The resource list at the back of this booklet cites references that can help you learn more about changing religious attitudes toward homosexuality. PFLAG can help refer you to information and listings specific to your own religion.

What about HIV/AIDS?

While AIDS initially spread fastest among gay and bisexual men, and drug users who shared needles, all people and communities now face the threat of AIDS.

Therefore, every parent needs to be concerned about HIV/AIDS – whether your child is gay or straight. You should make sure your child understands how AIDS is transmitted and how to protect him or herself.

With teenagers becoming sexually active at younger ages, and with AIDS still spreading, no parent can afford to ignore the danger or assume a child is safe.

If your child is presently HIV-positive or has AIDS, he or she now needs your support more than ever. You should know that you are not alone. There are numerous local and national organizations that can help you with medical, psychological and physical care.

PFLAG can refer you to other parents and families in similar situations, and resources specific to your needs. Call the PFLAG national office or visit the PFLAG website to find a contact near you. At this point, your relationship with your child can become even closer but your family will have to learn to adjust to the physical and emotional circumstances of your child's changing health.

Are there special legal concerns for my child?

The 2003 *Lawrence v. Texas* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court dictated that it is unconstitutional to criminalize sodomy (the legal term used for homosexual behaviors). Additionally, many cities, towns and states have worked on a local level both to decriminalize homosexual behavior. Some of these jurisdictions have taken their own measures to ensure non-discrimination with local ordinances and laws.

However, some states still have laws on the books that are sometimes used against gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. Although enforcement of these laws is rare, and there are a number of groups and organizations who can help in these cases. (See the Resources section in the back of this booklet for more information and suggestions of who to contact if you have questions.)

We have accepted the situation, but why must they flaunt it?

Gays, lesbians and bisexuals are often accused of “flaunting” their sexuality when they “come out” as gay, when they are publicly affectionate with a same-sex partner, or when they wear gay symbols and t-shirts or participate in gay pride parades.

In a world that still assumes all people are heterosexual, “coming out” is the only way gay, lesbian and bisexual people can make their sexual orientation known. “Coming out” is often considered a positive way to avoid societal invisibility that can lead to internalized self-hate or lack of self-esteem.

You may be uncomfortable with your child’s public displays of affection with his or her same-gender partner. Bear in mind that all couples – straight and gay – often show affection publicly because they feel love and appreciation for their partner.

But think: Are you as uneasy about heterosexuals showing affection in public?

In these two instances, “flaunting it” may only be behaving in a relaxed, natural fashion in public. In other circumstances, it may be a political decision to assert one’s sexuality by wearing a t-shirt or participating in a public event. In cultures that either ignore homosexuality or deride it, stressing one’s sexuality publicly can be an important act of self-affirmation.

If you worry about possible negative reactions to any behavior that identifies your child as gay, keep in mind that some gays, lesbians and bisexuals will, of course, censor their own behavior because they share those fears. But it is up to your child to make those decisions for him or herself.

Will my child have a family of his or her own?

Throughout the world same-sex couples form and build long lasting family units. Many same-sex couples hold ceremonies to celebrate their commitment to each other and to share their relationship with family and friends. As of 2006, same-sex marriage is legally recognized in the state of Massachusetts while Vermont and Connecticut have legalized civil unions, a form of relationship recognition that provides benefits similar to marriage under state law. Marriage for same-sex couples is now legal in Spain, Norway, the Netherlands, South Africa and Canada with many countries providing benefits and/or civil unions to same-sex couples as well. More and more companies, such as IBM and American Express, now treat same-sex partners like any other married couple, and provide health care coverage for their gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees’ partners.

Many same-sex couples are also raising children together. Some couples and individuals have used artificial insemination in order to conceive a child. Other gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are raising children from previous heterosexual relationships on their own or with their new partners. As society’s attitudes

continue to change, adoption of children by gay couples has also become more common.

How do we tell family and friends?

Just as “coming out” is difficult for gay people, the coming-out process is equally difficult for parents. Many, upon learning their child is gay, go right into the closet. As they struggle with accepting their child’s sexual orientation, they often worry about other people finding out. There is the challenge of fielding such questions as, “Has he got a girlfriend?” and “So when is she going to get married?”

Many of us found that our fears were far worse than reality. Some of us held off for years in telling our own parents – our children’s grandparents – only to have them respond, “We knew that quite a while ago.”

Our advice to you is the same advice we give to gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals. Learn more about the changing attitudes within medical, psychiatric, religious, professional and political circles. There are plenty of “authorities” you can quote as allies in defense of equal rights for gay people.

On page 14 there is a list of just a few famous gays, lesbians and bisexuals who have made lasting contributions to our world. Remember, with many gay people keeping their sexual orientation hidden, this is just a fraction of the names you could cite. It also means that you probably already know many gay people.

Practice what you would say just like you might practice for a public speaking engagement, for a job interview, for boosting your assertiveness, or for anything new to you that makes you afraid or nervous.

One parent says, “I used to go in the bathroom and close the door and practice saying to the mirror, ‘I have a lesbian daughter’ and saying it with pride. And it helped. But you really do have to practice.”

Talk to people who understand your concerns. PFLAG members may be helpful to you in discussing their own experiences. Contact the national office or a local PFLAG leader to learn more about PFLAG’s extensive network of more than 500 chapters in the U.S. and abroad. You’ll find contact information at the back of this booklet.

You may get some negative or, at the least, insensitive comments from relatives, friends or co-workers. But you’ll probably find that those comments are fewer than you now fear.

Remember that your child has been down this road already. He or she may even be able to help.

And remember also that who you tell about your child’s sexuality should be a decision that both of you discuss and reach together.

What will the neighbors say?

This could be a very real concern, especially for families who consider themselves part of a close community or in areas where fundamentalist religions are strong.

But gay, lesbian and bisexual people come from families from all corners of the earth, from every culture, religion, ethnic group and occupation.

One parent says, “I thought I was the only mother in Tulsa, Oklahoma who had a lesbian daughter. And then, as I started speaking out on the issue, other parents started coming forward. And now, every time someone says to me, ‘I need to talk with you,’ I know exactly what’s coming up.”

Again, you may very well encounter reactions that are difficult to take. But often, PFLAG members encounter reactions like, “I thought I was the only one.”

How can I support my child?

As a parent, you have to take care of yourself and your child. PFLAG is here to help you with your individual needs so that you can be an even better parent.

Reading this booklet is the first step to supporting your child – you have shown that you are open to new information and hopefully you are now better informed.

Supporting your child now should be a natural extension of your general support as a parent: we need to talk, listen and learn together.

Every child needs different things from his or her parents. It is up to you to learn how to communicate with him or her about their needs and issues surrounding sexuality.

Some parents find that they are better able to understand and support their child by recognizing the similarities and differences in their own life experiences. In some cases it may help to talk about how you have dealt with hurtful incidents.

But in other cases you must recognize that discrimination based on sexual orientation is hurtful in a unique way.

Here, you can support your child by educating yourself as thoroughly as possible about homosexuality and by helping to bring it out of hiding in our society. It’s the hiding that allows the prejudice and discrimination to survive.

Will I ever learn to deal with this new knowledge?

A psychiatrist answered the question this way: “Once most people adjust to the reality of their child’s sexual orientation, they feel like they’ve had a whole new world opened to them.

First, they become acquainted with a side of their child they never knew. They now are included in their child’s life. Usually, they get closer. And the parents begin to meet the gay community and understand that these are people just like any other community.

Another way to answer this question is to let some parents speak for themselves:

“It’s really important to talk about it, to know that you’re not alone, that there are other people who have had this experience and are dealing with it in a positive way. And the benefit is that you establish a good relationship with your child. Parents want to parent. They don’t, generally speaking, want to be isolated from their kid.”

— *Mother of a lesbian daughter*

“I hit a point where I was feeling sad and thinking what would I say when people asked, ‘How is Gary?’ And then it occurred to me: Gary’s fine. I’m the one who’s not. And once I reached that point, it was easier...as we met Gary’s friends, we found them to be wonderful people and realized that he’s really part of a pretty terrific community. So what’s the problem? It’s society’s problem. That’s when we figured we were over the hump.”

— *Mother of a gay son*

“I was teary-eyed for three months off and on. But we’ve always had a very good relationship. It has never changed from that. We never had an instant’s question of our love for him, and we both assured him immediately that we loved him. And since then, our relationship with our son is strengthened, because we have a bond simply because we know what he is up against in our society.”

— *Mother of a gay son*

“I’d say that reading and learning more about sexual orientation is what helped me most...laying to rest some of the myths I had heard.... So the more I learned, the angrier I got, and the more I wanted to change society instead of my son.”

— *Mother of a gay son*

“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*

“For me, it was my son’s saying to me, ‘Dad, I’m the same person I was before.’ Now it’s been six months, and I realize even more that really, nothing has changed in his life. It was our perception of him, I guess.”

— *Father of a gay son*

“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 a 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 a lesbian daughter*

In good company...

Here are just a few of the thousands of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals who have made tremendous lasting contributions to the world, so if your son or daughter is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, he or she is in good company:

Jane Addams (humanitarian) • Alvin Ailey (choreographer) • Alexander the Great (King of Macedonia) • Horatio Alger, Jr. (writer) • Hans Christian Andersen (children’s story writer) • Susan B. Anthony (suffragist) • Josephine Baker (entertainer) • James Baldwin (novelist) • Leonard Bernstein (composer) • David Bowie (singer) • Glenn Burke (baseball player) • Margarethe Cammermeyer (former National Guard colonel) • Truman Capote (author) • Willa Cather (novelist) • Noel Coward (playwright) • Angela Davis (activist) • James Dean (actor) • Ellen DeGeneres (comedian) • Marlene Deitrich (actress) • Emily Dickinson (poet) • E.M. Forster (novelist) • Barney Frank (congressman) • Allen Ginsberg (poet) • Alexander Hamilton (Secretary of the U.S. Treasury) • Langston Hughes (writer) • Elton John (musician) • Frida Kahlo (artist) • John Maynard Keynes (economist) • Nathan Lane (actor) • T.E. Lawrence (author) • Audre Lorde (author) • Greg Louganis (Olympic diver) • Christopher Marlowe (dramatist) • Harvey Milk (politician) • Johnny Mathis (entertainer) • Herman Melville (novelist) • Michelangelo (artist) • Cherrie Moraga (author) • Martina Navratilova (tennis champion) • Lawrence Olivier (actor) • Cole Porter (composer) • Marcel Proust (novelist) • Eleanor Roosevelt (First Lady) • Bayard Rustin (civil rights activist) • Franz Schubert (composer) • Bessie Smith (singer) • Gertrude Stein (writer) • Esera Tuaolo (football player) • Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (composer) • Lily Tomlin (comedian) • Gianni Versace (fashion designer) • Leonardo da Vinci (artist) • Andy Warhol (artist) • Walt Whitman (poet) • Oscar Wilde (novelist) • B.D. Wong (Actor) • Tennessee Williams (playwright) • Virginia Woolf (novelist)

Resources

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

The best way for parents, family members, friends or gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people to get support, receive educational materials and learn about PFLAG’s advocacy efforts is to visit a chapter. PFLAG has more than 500 chapters located in all 50 states.

We suggest you call the local chapter whose name is stamped on the back of this booklet. If there is no chapter listed, you can visit PFLAG on the web, call PFLAG’s national office for a referral, or you can use directory assistance to find PFLAG in your local area.

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

1726 M Street, NW, Suite 400

Washington, DC 20036

Voice: (202) 467-8180

Web: www.pflag.org

Other Support and Advocacy Organizations

There are numerous other organizations that work on behalf of gay, lesbian and bisexual people. The following list includes just a few of the groups that may be able to provide you with information or services for you or your child:

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

www.glsen.org

(212) 727-0135

The National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC)

www.nyacyouth.org

(800) 541-6922

Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL)

www.smyal.org

(202) 546-5940

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

www.thetaskforce.org

(202) 393-5177

COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere)

www.colage.org

(415) 861-5437

Family Pride Coalition

www.familypride.org
 (202) 331-5015

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)

www.glaad.org
 (323) 933-2240

Human Rights Campaign

www.hrc.org
 (202) 628-4160

Bisexual Resource Center

www.biresource.org
 (617) 424-9595

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SEICUS)

www.SIECUS.org
 (212) 819-9770

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund

www.lambdalegal.org
 (212) 809-8585

National Center for Lesbian Rights

www.nclrights.org
 (415) 392-6257

Toll-Free Helplines:**The Trevor Project**

(866) 488-7386

The Gay & Lesbian National Hotline

(888) 843-4564

The GLBT National Youth Talkline (*youth serving youth through age 25*)

(800) 246-7743

For HIV/AIDS Information:**National AIDS Hotline**

(800) 342-AIDS

In Spanish: (800) 344-7432

TDD: (800) 243-7889

Publications, Periodicals, and Films:

There are literally hundreds of books, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, and films available that provide additional support and resources to parents and families of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals as well as for the individuals themselves. The web is a great place to look for information as are bookstores and libraries. For some of PFLAG's recommended reading lists, visit the PFLAG website at www.pflag.org.

Anti-Gay Organizations to Avoid:

There are a number of groups that have formed to oppose basic civil rights and equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals. Many are difficult to immediately identify since they frequently claim that they are committed to "traditional values," when in reality they advocate for harmful "reparative therapy" and anti-gay legislation.

Knowing who they are and the harms that they pose to your gay, lesbian, and bisexual children and loved ones is critical. Below are the names of just a few of these groups. You can learn more about such groups online – People for the American Way (www.pfaw.org) has a resource center that lists these groups, descriptions of their work, and archives of what they've advocated in their own words. You can also get news on these organizations from PFLAG.

American Center for Law and Justice

American College of Pediatricians

American Family Association

Christian Communication Network

Christian Families with Faith for Lesbians and Gays (CFLAG)

Concerned Women for America

Courage/Encourage

Eagle Forum

Family Research Institute

Focus on the Family

Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality (JONAH)

Liberty Counsel

National Association for Research and Therapy for Homosexuality (NARTH)

Parents & Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays, (PFOX)

Positive Alternatives to Homosexuality (PATH)

Traditional Values Coalition

Support PFLAG

The Benefits of PFLAG membership:

- A subscription to our newsletter, the PFLAGpole
- The PFLAG Weekly Alert and Action Alerts via e-mail
- Discounts on PFLAG publications
- Invitations to local, regional and national events and conferences
- Voting privileges for national board members and regional directors
- Satisfaction that you are part of the nationwide network of PFLAG families and friends advocating for GLBT equality

To join as an at-large member, visit www.pflag.org or fill in the application below and mail the application to:

PFLAG

1726 M Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036

Member Information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____ e-mail: _____

Payment Information:

Check enclosed made payable to PFLAG.

Visa Mastercard Discover American Express

Please charge my card:

\$50 \$75 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000

Card Number: _____

Card Expiration: _____

Important:

The member name and address must match what appears on your credit card billing statement to be processed.

Other PFLAG Publications

Nuestras Hijas y Nuestros Hijos:

Preguntas y respuestas para padres de gays, lesbianas y bisexuales

A culturally appropriate Spanish translation of *Our Daughters and Sons*, this booklet is a valuable resource for Spanish-speaking families coming to terms with homosexuality and bisexuality. It answers commonly asked questions about having a gay or lesbian loved one, and includes Spanish language resources.

Be Yourself: Questions and Answers for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth

Today's youth face more social pressures than ever, especially since young people are coming out at increasingly younger ages. This publication offers a supportive approach to common questions asked by teens who may be questioning their sexual orientation. It also provides hotline numbers for teens and a list of resources.

Faith in Our Families:

Parents, Families and Friends Talk About Religion and Homosexuality

Discovering that a loved one is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender can pose new questions about your faith and may prompt you to re-evaluate beliefs that you previously took for granted. By using personal experiences, this publication provides examples for reconciling your faith with the knowledge that a loved one is gay. Includes an updated list of gay and lesbian religious and spiritual groups to watch out for.

Bisexuality Resource Packet

Bisexuality is a commonly misunderstood and misrepresented concept. This packet provides facts about bisexuality, commonly-asked questions, resource lists and a set of articles.

From Our House to the Schoolhouse: A Safe Schools Publication

Making schools safe for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth is an important part of PFLAG's work. Facts about anti-gay harassment in schools and important legal landmarks are detailed in this booklet for educators. Resources and a "safe schools checklist" are also included.

(continued)

Opening the Straight Spouses' Closet

Finding out a spouse is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender can be difficult. Questions about sexual orientation, fidelity, self-esteem and fear often go unanswered. This recently updated and expanded publication provides insight into issues facing spouses, including coping stages, identity crises, concerns about children and support avenues.

Our Trans Children

PFLAG'S Transgender Network (TNET) published this booklet as an introduction to transgender (TG) issues especially for parents of "children" of all ages. The booklet covers transgender-related terms, TG youth, transition processes, family journeys, commonly asked questions, commonalities and differences between sexual orientation and gender identity, legal concerns, a brief bibliography, a list of resources, and trans family websites. This is an excellent educational tool for families, friends, employers, and the larger community. (This publication is also available in Spanish.)

Coming Out Trans to Your Parents and Family

This single-page handout outlines things you need to consider when you plan to come out to your parents and family as transgender. It is a guide to making the coming out process as comfortable as possible.

All publications are available as a free download on www.pflag.org and also for purchase. Visit our website or call (202) 467-8180 for more information.