



Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) Youth: Supporting Your Child

Adolescence is a time of exploration of one's sexual identity and orientation. If your child has expressed questions about his/her sexual identity you may experience a range of emotions, which may include shock, confusion, grief, and even concerns about future grandchildren. These emotions are *normal*! How you express these emotions can inform a significant part of your relationship with your child.

The disclosure of one's sexual identity ("coming out"), especially to one's parents, can be a major psychological decision. Your child will likely fear negative consequences that may occur after the disclosure. Even if you do not react negatively, your child may still experience stress. A child may feel like they no longer have a safe haven to go to for support. In order to support your child there are several things you can do:

1. Family acceptance acts as a protective factor for your child. Research has shown that youth who face negative parental reactions to their disclosure have higher levels of psychological distress. This in turn can increase one's risk of depression and suicide. However, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) youth who experience positive reactions from parents have higher self-esteem and self-acceptance (Morrow & Messinger, 2006).
2. Disclosure is an ongoing process for both your child and you. This includes whom you disclose to, what you disclose, and when you disclose. Follow your child's lead and ask them if they are disclosing their sexual identity to their school, friends, or extended family. If he/she prefers not to disclose, respect their wishes.
3. Become aware of the resources in your community for both your child and yourself. This can be a difficult time for families—parent support can help. (see references below).
4. Learn about Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual youth. You can visit reputable websites (see references below) and resources, and/or join a support group.
5. Most importantly, let your child know that you love them!

Did you know?

In 1995 there was an estimated 7 to 20 million Americans that consider themselves gay or lesbian. Further, at least 50 million Americans identify as gay or lesbian or has a gay or lesbian family member (Patterson, 1995).

Want more information? Here are some great resources for you and you family.

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG) has *support groups for families* throughout the country. Check out their website at:

<http://community.pflag.org/Page.aspx?pid=194>

Washington Chapters: http://www.seattle-pflag.org/re_wachapters.shtml

Find out your child's *rights* at: <http://www.aclu.org/lgbt/index.html>

A nationwide *24-hour, 7-days a week toll-free crisis* and suicide prevention helpline for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth 866-4-U- TREVOR: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/home1.aspx>

A list of Gay Friendly Churches located throughout WA state:
http://www.gaychurch.org/Find_a_Church/united_states/us_washington.htm

Seattle

Counseling services for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and transgendered communities in Seattle: <http://www.seattlecounseling.org/>

The Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer *Community of Seattle*: <http://seattlelgbt.org/>

Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender and Questioning Adolescent Group (B-Glad), support group for kids ages 12 – 19 who identify themselves as Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender. http://www.youtheastsideservices.org/services/06_01_bglad.php

References and Resources:

Morrow, D. & Messinger, L. (Eds.). (2006). *Sexual Orientation & Gender Expressions in Social Work Practice: Working with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, & Transgender People*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Patterson, C. (1995) Sexual Orientation and Human Development: An Overview. *American Psychological Association, Inc.*, 31 (1), 3-11.