

**LIVING LOTUS'
GUIDE TO
SUPPORTING
YOUR LGBTQ+
CHILD**





Created by:
Maggie Chen, MSW

**Registered Associate Clinical Social Worker (#133198)
Supervised by Dr. Panicha McGuire, LMFT, RPT™, PsyD (#111378)**



© 2026 Living Lotus Family Therapy, Inc. dba Living Lotus Therapy®. All rights reserved.

**This was created for personal reflection, community wellness, and education.
You are welcome to share it for non-commercial use with credit.
Not for resale or redistribution without permission.**

**This workbook is not a substitute for professional mental health treatment. If you are
experiencing distress or crisis, please seek support from a mental health provider.**



SO, YOUR CHILD JUST CAME OUT, NOW WHAT?

Or maybe you have a feeling that your child is LGBTQ+ but they haven't told you yet. We know that reactions may vary and that this time can be stressful as you figure out how to best support your child. We've compiled this starter guide to provide you with some of our best tips and resources to not only help your child, but also to take care of yourself as you navigate your own emotions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Importance of Family Acceptance.....	4
Top 10 Tips.....	5
Believe that your child can have a happy, fulfilling future	6
Be affirming as they explore their gender/sexual identity	7
Be curious about their LGBTQ+ journey and identities	8
Do your research and learn the language.....	9–12
Connect them with LGBTQ+ community and resources	13
Be welcoming towards LGBTQ+ friends and partners.....	14
Advocate and stand up for them if they are being mistreated....	15–17
Normalize LGBTQ+ topics in the home.....	18
Pay attention to signs of emotional distress	19–22
Validate your own feelings and take care of yourself.....	23–24
LGBTQ+ Glossary.....	25–28
The Basics of LGBTQ+ Sex Education.....	29–34
Navigating LGBTQ+ Identities and Religion.....	35
Policies To Be Aware Of	36–37
Additional Resources.....	38



THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY ACCEPTANCE

Families and caregivers have a significant impact on the well-being of LGBTQ+ children. Research has found the following:

- **LGBTQ+ youth with supportive families report higher self-esteem, better mental health, and stronger overall well-being.**
- **Acceptance from parents and caregivers is associated with about 33–36% lower odds of suicide attempts among LGBTQ+ youth.**
- **Family rejection is associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicide risk among LGBTQ+ youth.**
- **Supportive family environments are a key protective factor that buffers against minority stress and mental health distress in LGBTQ+ adolescents.**

DeFerro, J., Whelihan, J., Min, J., Powell, M., DiFiore, G., Gzesh, A., Jelinek, S., Schwartz, K. T. G., Davis, M., Jones, J. D., Fiks, A. G., Jensen, B. P., & Wood, S. (2024). The Role of Family Support in Moderating Mental Health Outcomes for LGBTQ+ Youth in Primary Care. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 178(9). <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.1956>

Nath, R., Hobaica, S., & DeChants, J. P. (2025). The Relationship Between Parental and Caregiver Support and Suicide Among LGBTQ+ Youth of Color. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2024.11.242>

Wittlin, N. M., Kuper, L. E., & Olson, K. R. (2023). Mental Health of Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-072220-020326>

TOP 10 TIPS

- 1. Believe that your child can have a happy, fulfilling future as an LGBTQ+ adult**
- 2. Be affirming and supportive as they explore their gender and sexual identity**
- 3. Be curious and open to discussions about their LGBTQ+ journey and identities**
- 4. Do your research and learn the language**
- 5. Connect them with LGBTQ+ community and resources**
- 6. Be welcoming towards LGBTQ+ friends and partners**
- 7. Advocate and stand up for them if they are being mistreated or disrespected**
- 8. Normalize LGBTQ+ topics in the home**
- 9. Pay attention to signs of emotional distress and offer support and therapy**
- 10. Validate your own feelings and take care of yourself**

BELIEVE THAT YOUR CHILD CAN HAVE A HAPPY, FULFILLING FUTURE AS AN LGBTQ+ ADULT

We know that families always want the best for their children. But, finding out that your child is LGBTQ+ can be scary. You may be afraid that other people will try to hurt your child. You may have heard some frightening mental health statistics for the LGBTQ+ population. Know that this is a valid, normal reaction. Sometimes this is what drives families to feel like they need to change their child's gender identity or sexual orientation.

However, rejecting your child's identity is not protecting them. For queer youth, rejection of their LGBTQ+ identity often feels like a rejection of their entire being. Believing that your child can have a happy, fulfilling future as an LGBTQ+ adult is a first step to acceptance and support of their identity. It also makes it more likely for your child to believe in their future too. While social media and the news tends to depict only negative stories of LGBTQ+ people, consciously change that narrative for yourself and your family. Look for positive, uplifting stories. Maybe even share them with your child. Here's a few ideas to get you started:

- Research the origins of queer advocacy to see the strengths of the community**
- Research policy victories that have increased rights for LGBTQ+ people globally**
- Find LGBTQ+ people in the public eye to look up to**

BE AFFIRMING AND SUPPORTIVE AS THEY EXPLORE THEIR GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Understand that gender and sexuality is fluid. This means that a person's gender identity and sexual orientation may change over time. Similarly, as LGBTQ+ youth come to terms with their own identities, they may explore different labels. This is normal. It does not mean they are looking for attention or that it's a "phase." Some children know their sexual orientation and gender identity from a very young age while others may have a longer process of self-discovery. Be vocal about your support and respect the labels, pronouns, and name(s) they are using. Support the different ways they may be exploring their gender expression. Offer to take them clothes and make-up shopping or to redecorate their room. Tell and show them that you love them for who they are.

If you are disappointed with your initial reaction when your child came out to you, you are not alone. These conversations often take parents by surprise and it can be difficult to know exactly what to say. However, don't be afraid to apologize or revisit the conversation when you've collected your thoughts or done more research. It is also possible to be supportive while wrestling with your own feelings towards the LGBTQ+ community. Children can usually tell how parents really feel, so be honest with them. For example, you can say something like, "This is hard for me, but what you are telling me is important. I hope you will keep talking to me about this because I am willing to do hard things for you as your parent. Know that this doesn't change my love for you."



BE CURIOUS AND OPEN TO DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THEIR LGBTQ+ JOURNEY AND IDENTITIES

Coming out is a lifelong process. Your child likely wrestled with speaking to you about their LGBTQ+ identity for days, weeks, months, or even years before building up the courage to actually do so. Honor that process by truly listening.

Some parents feel that minimizing their child's queer identity is the ultimate form of support. The thought process is along the lines of "It doesn't matter to us that you're gay, bisexual, lesbian, etc. so why do we need to talk about it all the time?" While this may work for some individuals, most queer youth who have just come out for the first time are experiencing a newfound sense of freedom and joy as they finally express their true selves. Be there for them in these moments. Ask questions. Ask what makes them feel good but also ask what has been hard for them at home, in school, and any other communities they are part of. Ask about their self-discovery process, their hopes and dreams for their future, and any LGBTQ+ celebrities they may look up to. Let them explain things to you about queer culture.

At the same time, it's okay if your child doesn't want to share these things with you. Respect their need for space. The goal is to show that you're okay talking about LGBTQ+ topics even if they make you uncomfortable and that you understand it is an important part of who they are. Showing that you are committed to staying informed and that you truly want to listen to them will make it easier to discuss difficult experiences surrounding their LGBTQ+ identity in the future.

DO YOUR RESEARCH AND LEARN THE LANGUAGE

This guide should act only as a starter resource for your family. We highly encourage you to conduct further research more specific to your child's identities and needs. A few key definitions will be provided on pages 23–26, but LGBTQ+ terms can fill dozens of pages. Additional recommended resources will be linked at the end of this guide.

There are a few key considerations to mention before you read through our glossary of terms. First, language is important and constantly evolving. Words allow us to make meaning of ourselves and our world. Given this constant evolutionary process, words may have different meanings to different people. It is therefore important to ask your child how they define the words they are using and to use the same language that they do.

Our provided definitions are the most widely used interpretations, but they may not align with your child's definitions. Doing additional research on the terms your child commonly uses is a great way of showing your support. But, we acknowledge that queer vocabulary can be confusing, so when in doubt, ask your child. Asking for clarification is a sign of respect and can demonstrate your commitment to understanding their identities.

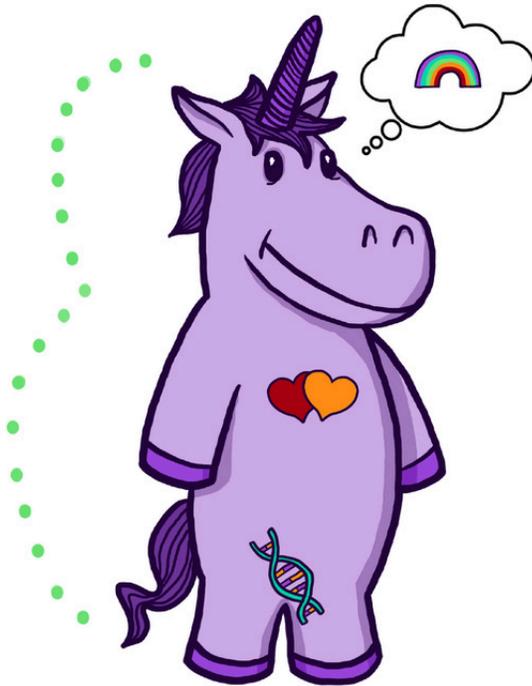
DO YOUR RESEARCH AND LEARN THE LANGUAGE CONT.

As an example of how terms are constantly evolving, there are a number of words that the LGBTQ+ community has reclaimed. Chief among these is the term queer. Once used as an anti-gay slur, it was reclaimed in the 1990s by HIV/AIDS activists and is now commonly used as a more inclusive term describing anyone who is not straight or cisgender. However, some individuals may still be offended by this term, so it is always better to ask than to assume. Other common terms that have been reclaimed include homo, dyke, and queen.

Second, it is important to understand the differences between sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Sexual orientation describes a person's emotional, physical, and/or romantic attraction to others while gender identity is a person's internal concept of self as male, female, or another gender. Gender identity can align with one's biological sex or differ from it. Gender expression is how an individual chooses to express their gender and can include behaviors, clothing, physical characteristics, voice, body language, and chosen name and pronouns. These terms often get confused when in reality, they are three separate subjects. Identity does not equate to expression and you should never use a person's presentation to assume their gender identity. Furthermore, gender identity and gender expression are fluid and can change over time. While sexual orientation is understood to generally be more stable, it may also be fluid for some people.

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



Gender Identity



Gender Expression



Sex Assigned at Birth



Physically Attracted to



Emotionally Attracted to



To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

**TRANS STUDENT EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES, 2015. "THE GENDER UNICORN."
[HTTP://WWW.TRANSSTUDENT.ORG/GENDER.](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)**

Created by Trans Student Educational Resources, the Gender Unicorn is a great visual to help understand the differences between gender identity, gender expression, physical attraction, emotional attraction, and one's sex assigned at birth. As shown in the worksheet, all but one's sex assigned at birth exist on spectrums and may fluctuate with time.

CONNECT THEM WITH LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY AND RESOURCES

Helping your child find queer community can have a profound impact on their emotional and physical well-being. Queer youth often experience intense feelings of social isolation due to stigma and bullying. Finding other queer youth to connect with as well as older queer individuals who can act as mentors or role models can help decrease these feelings of isolation. Having queer friends can help your child feel like they are not alone and that others have gone through the same struggles of self-exploration, feeling different, being discriminated against, etc. It can also help them learn more about different identities they may resonate with and about different aspects of queer culture they may want to be part of.

There are a number of ways to seek out queer community:

- **Queer clubs at school like Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) or Gay Straight Alliance (GSA)**
- **Safe online spaces like TrevorSpace and The Queer Cafe (Discord)**
- **San Diego County Library Queer Youth Hangouts**
- **Rainbow Spaces**
- **Pride month events**

BE WELCOMING TOWARDS LGBTQ+ FRIENDS AND PARTNERS

Closely related to the previous tip, embracing your child's LGBTQ+ friends and partners is a great way of showing your support. Asking for their names and pronouns from the get go helps demonstrate that you're an ally. Get to know your child's friends and ask what they like to do together. Be supportive of their shared hobbies and interests by asking questions and offering to purchase materials they need or take them to events. Welcome them into your home and ensure they know you are a safe, accepting adult to be their true self around, especially if you know they have an unsupportive family.

While it is daunting for any parent when their child begins to date, parents of queer teens sometimes report greater anxieties and may also need to wrestle with their own feelings of discomfort. However, remember that this is a normal phase of development and treat your LGBTQ+ child as you would any other straight, cisgender child. The following are some general guidelines:

- **Do what you can to model healthy relationships for your child and stay involved. Have discussions about trust, consent, and what healthy relationships can look like. Make sure they know you are a safe person to ask for help.**
- **Encourage them to date in an age-appropriate manner and build up their confidence. This sends the message that queer relationships are nothing to be ashamed of.**
- **Don't assume anyone's gender identity or sexual orientation. Ask for names and pronouns when meeting them or when your child talks about a new partner.**
- **Be genuinely curious about their partner's life and highlight their positive qualities.**
- **Advocate for queer sex education to be included in their school's curriculum. If it isn't, help educate them and provide them with resources.**
- **Don't be afraid to set boundaries around dating like a curfew or rules about sleepovers.**
- **Do NOT refer to your child's significant other as just a friend.**

ADVOCATE AND STAND UP FOR THEM IF THEY ARE BEING MISTREATED OR DISRESPECTED

Discrimination, harassment, and bullying is unfortunately a common experience for most, if not all, LGBTQ+ individuals. Pay attention to how your child is being treated in all of the communities they are part of, including, but not limited to, family, extended family, religious groups, and school. Let them know you will stand up for them, even if it makes you uncomfortable and/or damages relationships with other family or community members. Talk to them about how they would like you to support them in these scenarios and then follow through. For example, some kids might prefer support in the aftermath of a situation while others want more active advocacy from their parents. Listen to their wants, but also use your best judgment for more serious cases that might need adult involvement.

Unfortunately, most school environments are not welcoming to LGBTQ+ youth and many schools fail to protect students from bullying. If you notice common warning signs that your child is being bullied due to their LGBTQ+ identity, report it to school administrators and demand immediate action. Make sure to follow-up with administrators at a later date to ensure the problem has been appropriately resolved. Common warning signs include mood changes, avoiding school, disappearing possessions, declining grades, trouble sleeping, aggression, and declining self-esteem. Be on the lookout for signs of physical violence as well like cuts, bruises, and any unexplainable injuries. Help your child identify safe spaces and people at their school, such as a Gay Straight Alliance club, counselor, or specific teacher they feel comfortable with. Remind them that bullies don't get to define their worth or value.

ADVOCATE AND STAND UP FOR THEM IF THEY ARE BEING MISTREATED OR DISRESPECTED CONT.

In the home and with extended family, make it known that stereotypes, slurs, and jokes at the expense of LGBTQ+ community members are not tolerated. Express your disapproval when you encounter this form of messaging in the community or news media. Sibling bullying is common after a child comes out as queer. Ensure that this too is not tolerated and provide LGBTQ+ education for all members of the family.

If extended family members are homophobic and/or transphobic, do not force your child to attend family events or gatherings that may invalidate their identity and make them uncomfortable, whether or not they are out to these family members. Tell them that their mental well-being is more important to you than their attendance at the family event and offer alternatives if possible. Have a conversation with your child if they want to go low or no contact with these relatives and respect their decision. Ask if they expect you to also go low/no contact and be honest about what level of contact will be realistic for you. Also keep in mind that being unsupportive now doesn't always mean being unsupportive forever. Let your child know that they can choose when and if they would like to rebuild relationships with family members in the future.

ADVOCATE AND STAND UP FOR THEM IF THEY ARE BEING MISTREATED OR DISRESPECTED CONT.

In the event that contact with these family members can't be avoided, prepare in advance. The following are some general guidelines:

- **Ask your child how they would like to be supported. Do not out them to family members without their consent. Allow your child to come out to family members on their own timeline.**
- **Let the relatives know that they don't have to understand or like your child's sexual orientation/gender identity, but they have to respect it.**
- **Identify allies that can help run interference and stand up for your child.**
- **Set boundaries around what topics can be discussed. Let your child know that it is okay to say things like "This is hurtful to me. I won't talk about this with you."**
- **Prepare responses for changing the subject.**
- **Set a time for when you will leave in advance, but also prepare a game plan for leaving suddenly if things get out of hand.**
- **Help your child think through some coping mechanisms like taking a bathroom break to escape the situation for a few moments or clenching a stress ball in their pocket.**
- **Check in with your child after leaving and encourage them to engage in self-care. Offer to support them in this and validate their identity, whether that means taking them out shopping for gender affirming clothing or inviting queer friends over later that week, for example.**

NORMALIZE LGBTQ+ TOPICS IN THE HOME

As with any minority identity, positive representation matters and can help combat negative stereotypes and discrimination while promoting acceptance. Incorporating LGBTQ+ representation in the home can help make your child feel more comfortable talking to you about their identity as it lets them know you support the queer community. Doing so can also help your child realize that being LGBTQ+ is not shameful nor a barrier to achieving great things. However, don't be over eager. The goal is to create a positive environment in the home where being LGBTQ+ is normal and valid. Bombarding them with too much queer content may backfire, so pay attention to your child's reactions and follow their lead. The following are some examples of what you can do:

- **Talk respectfully about LGBTQ+ celebrities, media personalities, politicians, or any other queer individuals related to their hobbies. Make sure to include LGBTQ+ representation across different races and ethnicities.**
- **Seek out books, TV shows, and movies that have positive queer characters and storylines to read/watch as a family, but be aware that historically, queer representation in media has centered around stereotypical caricatures depicting LGBTQ+ characters as jokes, villains, and/or victims. More positive, realistic, and nuanced queer characters have begun to dominate new media, so do your research.**
- **Talk about gender and sexuality issues showing up in politics. This shows that you're paying attention to policies that might directly impact your child now or in their future. Suggest or support them in advocacy efforts like going to protests.**
- **Share anything new you might be learning about LGBTQ+ topics. This lets them know you are actively seeking out information and trying to learn.**

PAY ATTENTION TO SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS AND OFFER SUPPORT AND THERAPY

Being LGBTQ+ is recognized as a risk factor for mental health challenges due to stressors like discrimination, harassment, and bullying. National polls have also shown that anti-LGBTQ+ politics have negatively impacted LGBTQ+ youth mental health in recent years. As a caregiver, you have a powerful role in combatting these statistics, and reading this guide to create a safe and supportive home is already a great first step. However, it is still important to pay attention to signs of emotional distress. Mental health challenges with an increased prevalence in the LGBTQ+ community include anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, substance misuse, and disordered eating. We encourage you to research LGBTQ+ youth mental health further, but some common warning signs of mental health challenges include:

- **Impulsive or risk-taking behaviors**
- **Increased irritability or a decrease in frustration tolerance**
- **Excessive worry/anxiety**
- **Mood changes or abnormal mood swings**
- **Self-isolation or withdrawal from family, friends, and/or activities they usually enjoy**
- **Changes in substance use**
- **Changes in eating patterns or sudden weight loss/gain**
- **Difficulty concentrating**
- **Difficulty sleeping**
- **General pessimism/negativity towards life**
- **Declining self-esteem**
- **Talking about loneliness, despair, hopelessness, or suicide**
- **Self-harm (unexplained injuries, wearing long sleeves and pants in hot weather)**

PAY ATTENTION TO SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS AND OFFER SUPPORT AND THERAPY CONT.

If you are noticing signs of distress in your child, talk to them. While we understand this can be scary or awkward, it shows them that you care enough to notice and want to help them feel better. Here are some sample conversation starters:

- I've noticed that you haven't been your normal self lately. Do you want to talk about it? I'm here to support you.**
- We haven't had a chance to really talk lately. I want to make sure you're doing ok. How are you?**
- I've been worried about you and want to know what's been going on so that I can help you. Do you want to go out for ice cream and chat for a bit?**
- I've noticed that you've been pretty down on yourself recently. I want to make sure you know that I have your back. Can we brainstorm some ways to help you start feeling better?**
- I can tell that you've been struggling lately. I'm sorry that it's been so hard, that really sucks. I'm here to help when you're ready.**

If you feel like your child is in immediate danger or in danger of hurting others, don't wait to act. Take your child to their pediatrician or to an ER immediately, not to a therapist. There are also a number of crisis hotlines that may be helpful via phone or text. Be aware that crisis responders may call the police.

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273-8255**
- National Suicide and Crisis Line: 988**
- The Trevor Project: (866) 488-7386**
- The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender National Hotline:(888) 843-4564**
- Trans Lifeline: (877) 565-8860**

PAY ATTENTION TO SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS AND OFFER SUPPORT AND THERAPY CONT.

A 2022 national survey conducted by The Trevor Project found that 82% of queer youth want mental health care, but only 40% actually receive it. Offering to help your child find a queer-affirming therapist can make a huge difference in their mental well-being and ability to cope with the minority stress of being LGBTQ+. Finding a queer-affirming therapist is critical. At the least, ensure that the therapist respects your child's name and pronouns and does not pathologize queer identities. The following are some questions you may want to consider:

Questions to ask your child:

- Would you prefer a therapist who is part of the LGBTQ+ community themselves?**
- Would you prefer a therapist who is male/female/other gender?**
- Would you prefer online therapy or in-person therapy?**
- What are you hoping to gain from going to therapy?**
- Is there anything hard or scary about starting therapy that you'd like to talk about? How can we make this easier for you?**

Questions to ask therapists:

- Discuss some of your experiences working with LGBTQ+ youth.**
- Do you have experience working with LGBTQ+ youth with intersecting marginalized identities (e.g., race, neurodivergence)?**
- Are you familiar with how mental illness and LGBTQ+ identities interact?**
- Do you have experience or do you specialize in working with LGBTQ+ youth with XYZ mental illness/challenge? (If your child has a specific challenge or disorder)**

PAY ATTENTION TO SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS AND OFFER SUPPORT AND THERAPY CONT.

While looking for a queer-affirming therapist, be aware of clinicians offering therapies that attempt to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. While the most common name for this is conversion therapy, it is also advertised as reparative therapy, ex-gay therapy, and sexual orientation change efforts. Conversion therapy has been widely researched to be ineffective as one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity are not choices and cannot be forcibly changed. Subjecting your child to conversion therapy is dangerous and leads to higher rates of depression, guilt, hopelessness, shame, social withdrawal, and suicide. Currently, conversion therapy is banned for minors in California through SB 1172, passed in 2013. However, underground practices still occur, especially by religious organizations advertising services under broad terms like "coaching" and "counseling".



VALIDATE YOUR OWN FEELINGS AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Remember that you can only support your child if you are also taking care of yourself. Finding out that your child is part of the LGBTQ+ community can come with positive, negative, and mixed emotions. For example, some parents may feel happy just knowing that their child felt comfortable opening up to them or proud of their child's self-discovery and confidence. Other parents may experience a sense of loss as they grieve gendered expectations they had for their child or fear for their child's safety and well-being in today's anti-LGBTQ+ political and social climate. Other common emotions include anger, denial, guilt, shame, and feeling isolated. Regardless of what you may be feeling, know that these reactions are all valid. Take some time to process and remember that your child coming out to you is not a crisis.

Even if your child asks you not to tell anyone, it is okay to find someone to talk to, but do your best to respect their privacy. For example, instead of talking to a close family member, consider talking to a therapist of your own. Or, discuss with your child to determine a trusted friend or family member that they are okay with you talking to. There are also a number of groups and organizations where you can talk to other parents of LGBTQ+ kids. For example, the local San Diego PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapter holds monthly support groups.

VALIDATE YOUR OWN FEELINGS AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF CONT.

When you have the emotional capacity to do so, reflect on some of these emotions and ask yourself some hard questions. These are also great questions to explore with your own therapist or a supportive friend or family member. For example:

- **What am I feeling guilty about? Why do I think this is my fault?**
- **Why don't I want my child to come out to the rest of our family? Am I afraid or ashamed of their identity? What does that mean if I am?**
- **What am I really grieving right now?**

In the end, remember that this is also a journey for you and the entire family, not just for your LGBTQ+ child. Many families experience a period of re-adjustment as they react to a child's coming out. Take the time to process your feelings and reactions, even if you felt immediately okay right after your child came out. And once again, do your research and educate yourself.



GLOSSARY: SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexual Orientation: An enduring emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to other people. Sexual orientation is independent of gender identity. It is not a choice and cannot be changed.

Aromantic (Aro): A person who experiences a partial or complete lack of romantic attraction.

Asexual (Ace): A person who experiences a partial or complete lack of sexual attraction or interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality falls on a spectrum.

Bisexual: A person who is attracted to more than one gender. Some define bisexuality as attraction only to men and women while others use it interchangeably with pansexual.

Gay: A person who is attracted to members of the same gender. Can be used by a person of any gender although it historically has been used to describe men attracted to other men.

Lesbian: A woman who is attracted to other women.

Pansexual: A person who is attracted to people of any gender. Sometimes used interchangeably with bisexual.

Queer: An umbrella term to describe individuals who do not identify as straight and/or cisgender.

GLOSSARY: GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION

Gender Identity: A person's internal concept of their own gender. Can be the same or different from the sex assigned at birth.

Gender Expression: How an individual expresses their gender identity including through physical appearance, clothing, voice, chosen name, pronouns, etc.

Agender: A person who has no gender identity or a neutral gender identity.

Binding: The act of flattening one's breasts, often to appear more masculine.

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.

Deadnaming: Calling a trans person by an incorrect name, often the name they were given at birth and no longer use. Whether intentional or accidental, deadnaming can be harmful and invalidating.

Genderqueer: A person who rejects societal constructs of gender norms. Can describe someone who is neither male or female, a combination of genders, or is beyond gender. Some use this term interchangeably with nonbinary.

Gender Affirming Care: Social, psychological, and medical interventions designed to support an individual's gender identity.

Gender Binary: A system of thinking where there are only two genders, male and female, with no fluidity in between. Many cultures do not subscribe to this.

GLOSSARY: GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION CONT.

Gender Dysphoria: The clinically significant psychological distress caused when a person's gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender Fluid: A person who has an unfixed gender identity or does not identify with a single gender.

Intersex: A person who is born with differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy.

Misgendering: Incorrectly classifying another person's gender, either through using incorrect pronouns or other incorrect gendered language. If this happens, apologize quickly and move on.

Neurogender: An umbrella term for people who experience their gender as closely linked to or inseparable from their neurotype, e.g. Autigender.

Nonbinary: A person who rejects the gender binary and does not identify exclusively as male or female. Can describe someone who identifies with both male and female, somewhere in between, or completely outside the binary. Some nonbinary individuals also identify as transgender.

Sex Assigned at Birth: The sex (male, female, intersex) that is assigned to a child at birth based on their external anatomy.

Transgender: A person whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth. Replaces the antiquated medical term transsexual.

Transitioning: The process through which some trans individuals change aspects of themselves to be more aligned with their true gender. May include medical transition, social transition, and/or legal transition.

GLOSSARY: ADDITIONAL TERMS

Ally: A person who is actively supportive of LGBTQ+ people. Includes both people who are straight and cisgender and those within the LGBTQ+ community supporting one another.

Cisnormative: The assumption that being cisgender is and should be the norm.

Closeted: An LGBTQ+ person who has not disclosed their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, often due to stigma and fear of discrimination.

Coming Out: The process by which an LGBTQ+ individual accepts their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and shares that identity with others. This is a lifelong process for most queer individuals.

Heteronormative: The assumption that being straight is and should be the norm.

Homophobia: The fear, hatred, and discomfort of people who are attracted to others of the same sex.

Polyamory: The practice of having multiple, consenting, intimate relationships, whether they are romantic, sexual, or both. Polyamory is more common within the LGBTQ+ community.

Transphobia: The fear, hatred, and discomfort of people whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth.

Outing: The deliberate or accidental disclosure of an LGBTQ+ person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity without the individual's consent.

Questioning: Describes people who are exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

THE BASICS OF LGBTQ+ SEX EDUCATION

Comprehensive sex education is critical to the safety and health of LGBTQ+ youth as they begin to explore their bodies, dating, and sex. Unfortunately, LGBTQ+ inclusive sexual health education typically isn't covered in high schools and in some schools, it is outright banned. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ youth experience more negative sexual health outcomes, including being more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, a younger age at first intercourse, and higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. Thus, it is important to help educate your child and provide them with appropriate resources. This resource guide is not intended to provide detailed sexual health information for you to pass on to your child. Instead, the aim is to present a list of major topics that should be included when you discuss sexual health with your child and/or provide them with resources. It is also important to make sure this is an ongoing conversation and not a one time "birds and the bees" discussion.

Consent:

For any child, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity, introduce the concept of consent thoroughly and as early as you deem appropriate. Discuss consent as a spectrum beyond "yes is yes" and "no is no" and the fact that it is ongoing and not a one time thing. The F.R.I.E.S. acronym (freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, specific) from Planned Parenthood may be helpful. Include information about how to set and respect boundaries, safe words, and navigating consent while under the influence of alcohol.

THE BASICS OF LGBTQ+ SEX EDUCATION CONT.

Intimate Partner Violence:

LGBTQ+ individuals are at an increased likelihood of experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) including physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological abuse compared to their straight, cisgender peers. IPV for queer individuals often begins in youth or young adulthood with partners weaponizing stigma, homophobia, and transphobia to instill fear and enact control. LGBTQ+ individuals are also less likely to reach out for help or be able to access help compared to straight, cisgender individuals. Make sure your child knows the signs of IPV and how to ask for help. There are many resources online for how to leave unsafe relationships.

Healthy Communication:

Effective communication is a foundation for positive, healthy relationships. Communication related to intimacy should not end at consent. Discuss ways to communicate about likes and dislikes, sexual requests and desires, family planning and use of contraception, navigating body image and gender dysphoria, and sexually transmitted infections.

Self-Pleasure:

Normalize self-pleasure and discuss how masturbation can help an individual learn about their own body and what they do and don't like. Talk about how self-pleasure is healthy, decreases stress hormones, and releases endorphins. This may also be a good starting point for discussing sexual shame and how to overcome it.

THE BASICS OF LGBTQ+ SEX EDUCATION CONT.

Ethical/Consensual Non-Monogamy:

Non-monogamy is more common in LGBTQ+ relationships. But, emphasize that there are ethical, consensual ways to engage in non-monogamy where all partners agree to romantic, intimate, and/or sexual relationships with multiple people. Healthy communication is vital to the success of non-monogamous relationships to help deal with feelings like jealousy and shame and to ensure safe sex practices.

Sex:

Expand the definition of sex to be more than the heteronormative pattern of kissing > foreplay > clothes off > oral sex > penis-in-vagina penetrative sex. Talk about different types of sex acts rather than just “lesbian” or “gay” sex. Discuss how every individual gets to self-define what counts and does not count as sex to them. Talk about different ways to have sex and different sexual acts including, but not limited to, kissing, foreplay, oral sex, penis-in-vagina penetrative sex, anal sex, fingering, using (and cleaning!) sex toys, lube, orgasms, and virginity. Discuss how gender identity and presentation do not have to match up with how someone engages in sex. Also talk about aftercare – cleanliness, post-sex intimacy like cuddling, and checking in with partners about how it went.

Alternative Forms of Intimacy:

Non-sexual forms of intimacy can be just as important and fulfilling as sexual intimacy. This may be an especially important topic if your child is on the asexuality spectrum. Talk about how all forms of intimacy are valid and serve to deepen one's connection and trust with their partner(s). Examples include cuddling, holding hands, gentle touching and caressing, giving each other massages, having deep conversations, sharing secrets, and planning a future together.

THE BASICS OF LGBTQ+ SEX EDUCATION CONT.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):

De-stigmatize sexually transmitted infections. Talk about how they are incredibly common and not something to be ashamed about. Discuss the major different STIs, their symptoms, how they are contracted, and how they are treated. Include how many STIs may not present with major symptoms so it is always important to get tested regularly. Offer to drive or accompany your child to get tested.

Make sure to talk specifically about HIV/AIDS and how it is possible to contract HIV even if you are not a gay man. Talk about the history of the AIDS crisis and how far we have come since then. Discuss how HIV is no longer a death sentence, and how undetectable = untransmissible. For gay and bisexual teens in particular, talk about and help them acquire PreP, a class of prophylactic drugs that can prevent infection after exposure. However, do not over-exaggerate the likelihood of contracting HIV for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Safe Sex and Family Planning:

Related to STIs, make sure to discuss safe sex practices and go above and beyond using condoms. This includes talking about how lube can decrease chances of acquiring an STI and use of dental dams, latex gloves, or plastic wrap for two people with vaginas who are having sex. In regards to family planning, talk about condom usage, different methods of birth control for people with vaginas, and how the withdrawal method is highly ineffective for individuals engaging in penis-in-vagina penetrative sex. Also discuss how gender affirming hormone therapy like testosterone and estrogen can decrease the risks of unwanted pregnancy but should not be the only form of birth control.

THE BASICS OF LGBTQ+ SEX EDUCATION CONT.

Grooming and Fetishization:

Children can be groomed online or in-person by anyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, or other characteristics. Increasingly, youth are being groomed online through social media, text apps like WhatsApp, video games, and chat forums. Ensure your child knows to talk to yourself or another trusted adult if they are receiving inappropriate messages. However, children often do not know they are being groomed, so familiarize yourself with common signs of grooming such as your child being very secretive about how they are spending their time, having much older partners, a change in drug usage, or having unexplainable money, clothes, or other material goods.

This is an especially important topic because of how pervasive queer fetishization is. Fetishization is when a person is found to be attractive due solely to certain characteristics, like being part of the LGBTQ+ community. For example, some men fetishize lesbian women, thinking they can “turn them straight.” Keep this in mind as your child begins to date and have discussions with your child about how their LGBTQ+ identity does not define them and how healthy relationships should make them feel loved for all that they are.

Kinks:

Kinks and BDSM are a large part of queer history and continue to be common within the LGBTQ+ community. It is important to help de-stigmatize kinks and to also provide your child with education about how to engage in kink behaviors safely and with consent always in mind. This helps send a message that non-traditional forms of sexuality, intimacy, and sexual expression are all valid and should not be something to be ashamed about.

THE BASICS OF LGBTQ+ SEX EDUCATION CONT.

Online Dating Safety:

Although minors are not allowed on online dating apps, many teens will lie about their age to create profiles and evade these rules. Online dating also takes place through social media apps such as Instagram and Discord. Talk to your child about the dangers of these apps, including topics of sexting and other sexually explicit messages and of meeting strangers in-person. If your child is firm about wanting to meet someone they met online in-person, have a discussion about setting certain boundaries and protective measures in place like meeting in a public place and being a chaperone. Talk to them about scammers, catfishing, and cyberstalking. Teach them how to set their privacy settings to the highest controls on every platform and about what information should be kept private.

Youth may also seek information about dating, relationships, and sex from online forums like Discord and Reddit. Misinformation and normalization of unhealthy behaviors in these forums is rampant and they may also be exposed to grooming and exploitation. Set parental privacy controls and talk to your child about media literacy. Consider directing them to [Scarleteen](#), a safe, queer-led sexual education website built specifically for teens and young adults.

Porn:

For many people, porn is their first introduction to sexual activities. This is especially true for LGBTQ+ youth who do not feel like they are receiving adequate sexual health education in their schools and turn to porn for advice and education. However, this often causes many LGBTQ+ teens to have an unrealistic view of bodies, sex, and pleasure. Talk to them about this and ensure they understand that sex in porn is not the same as real sex. Discuss how they can ethically consume porn if they want to and also provide other resources for LGBTQ+ sexual education.

NAVIGATING LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES AND RELIGION

Navigating LGBTQ+ identities and religion is undeniably complex and incredibly personal. According to the Pew Research Center, nearly 50% of LGBTQ+ community members are religious. Historically, many orthodox religions have taken an unfavorable view towards the LGBTQ+ community, with many deeming queer relationships, sexual activity, and non-traditional gender expression and identities as unnatural and/or sinful. However, there are now religious subgroups across all major religions that are more supportive and welcoming of LGBTQ+ community members.

If your family is religious, have an open discussion about what religion means to your child and whether they are experiencing any negative thoughts or emotions surrounding their religious and LGBTQ+ identities. For many parents, a child's LGBTQ+ identity may also cause them to re-evaluate their own relationship with their faith. Take the time to process these feelings for yourself and talk to a trusted family member, friend, or religious leader for help. If possible, be open to exploring other denominations of your religion that are more welcoming of LGBTQ+ people. There are also a number of organizations and resources that specifically support LGBTQ+ families as they reconcile their faith with LGBTQ+ membership.

- **[PFLAG's publication Faith in Our Families](#)**
- **[The National LGBTQ Task Force resources on faith](#)**
- **[The Human Rights Campaign resources on faith positions for a wide number of different religions](#)**
- **[The Trevor Project on Navigating LGBTQ identities and religion with links to other resources that are religion specific](#)**
- **[LGBTQ Family Acceptance has faith based resources to connect LGBTQ+ families with supportive faith communities and places of worship](#)**

POLICIES TO BE AWARE OF

Federal, state, and local legislation surrounding LGBTQ+ rights is constantly evolving. It is important to always stay up to date. If you believe your child's rights have been violated, make sure to document everything such as any written communication with teachers and school administrators. You can contact Lambda Legal or your local ACLU chapter for legal resources. The following are some policies to be aware of:

Title IX:

This is a 1972 civil rights law that bans sex discrimination in educational activities. In April of 2024, the law was expanded to include specific language prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. All schools and educational activities that receive federal funding must abide by this new ruling.

First Amendment:

The First Amendment grants the right of free expression. As applied to schools, this means that dress codes cannot be explicitly discriminatory and all students must be allowed to wear clothing and accessories that align with their gender identity. Explicit discrimination includes having different clothing, hair, or accessory dress codes based on gender. This also applies to school events such as proms, graduation, and yearbook photos. It also means that students have the right to discuss LGBTQ+ topics in their schools and can bring same-sex dates to school sponsored events like proms.

California Education Code Sections 200 and 220:

This law goes above and beyond Title IX to explicitly prohibit discrimination in schools on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and gender expression. It applies to all public schools, including charter schools, and to all school activities and events.

Student Gender Identity and Expression Protections:

California laws provides students with the right to be treated in accordance with their gender identity. This includes the right to use restrooms, locker rooms, and facilities that align with their gender identity, participate in activities and programs consistent with their gender identity, and be addressed by their chosen name and pronouns. Schools are not permitted to disclose a student's transgender status to parents or others without the student's consent, except in very limited circumstances. Unfortunately, in March 2026, the Supreme Court banned California's SAFETY Act that prohibited schools from implementing forced outing of transgender students and protected teachers and staff from retaliation for supporting queer students. LGBTQ+–rights organizations are currently fighting this in court.

POLICIES TO BE AWARE OF CONT.

Dress Codes and Free Expression:

Under both the First Amendment and California law, school dress codes must be applied equitably and cannot discriminate based on gender identity or expression. Students have the right to wear clothing and accessories that align with their gender identity. This protection applies to everyday school settings as well as events such as prom, graduation, and yearbook photos. Students also have the right to express LGBTQ+ identities and discuss LGBTQ+ topics at school, including bringing same-sex dates to school-sponsored events.

California Healthy Youth Act:

The California Healthy Youth Act requires public schools to provide comprehensive, inclusive sexual health education that is medically accurate and affirms LGBTQ+ identities. Instruction must include information about sexual orientation and gender identity and be free from bias, stigma, or discrimination.

Transgender Youth Health Care Protections:

California protects access to gender-affirming health care. State law allows minors to receive gender-affirming care when clinically appropriate and with required consent. California has also enacted protections for families and providers against out-of-state efforts to criminalize or penalize gender-affirming care that is legal in California.

Safe Schools and Anti-Bullying Laws:

California's Safe Place to Learn Act requires schools to actively prevent bullying, harassment, and discrimination, including harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Schools are legally required to intervene and address reported incidents and may be held accountable if they fail to do so.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Organizations:

- **The Trevor Project**
- **Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)**
- **Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)**
- **Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)**
- **Gender Spectrum**
- **Planned Parenthood**
- **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)**
- **Lambda Legal**
- **Human Rights Campaign (HRC)**
- **My Kid is Gay**

Local Organizations:

- **San Diego LGBTQ+ Community Center**
- **North County LGBTQ+ Resource Center**
- **Trans Family Support Services**
- **San Diego Youth Services – Our Safe Space**
- **San Diego Pride – Youth**
- **PFLAG San Diego**

Books:

- **ABC's of LGBT by Ash Hardell**
- **Beyond the Gender Binary by Alok Vaid-Menon**
- **Queer: A Graphic History by Meg-John Barker and Jules Scheele**

