

Guidance for Parents who have Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual children

Learning that your son or daughter is Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) may come as a sudden surprise to you or you may have been wondering for some time about their sexual orientation. Initially you might be feeling many different things such as shock, disbelief, disappointment, sorrow, guilt or confusion, or there may be relief. The most important thing to remember is that he or she is still your child no matter what their sexual orientation.

Many parents believe that life will be difficult for their child and others may feel they have done something wrong or have failed as a parent in some way. It is important to remember that this may have been very difficult for a child to share this information and this is an opportunity to support and reassure them.

Is it my fault?

Parents often ask “What did I do wrong or what did I not do right?” – The simple answer is Nothing. While this may undeniably be a difficult time for you, it is also an opportunity. The opportunity lies in the fact that you now know your child better than you ever did, and so this situation affords you the opportunity to get closer to your child than you have ever been. If you can be honest with your child about your own feelings, you can use this situation to draw closer to your child and become more important to him or her than you have ever been. Both you and your child may need support at this time, and keeping open and honest channels of communication are one method of support.

We don't speak the same language

Now that your child has been open with you about their sexual orientation and you have started to learn more about them there may be words or terminology that is new to you:

Heterosexual – a person sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex

Straight – another word for heterosexual

Homosexual – a person sexually attracted to people of the same sex, although there are negative connotations associated with this word and many people prefer the term gay.

Gay – a male/female who is attracted to the same sex LGB – Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual

SSA – same sex attraction

Bisexual – a person attracted to both sexes

Lesbian – a female who is attracted to other females

Coming out – telling people that you are gay, lesbian or bisexual

What about the future?

Just as in heterosexual relationships your child may have a number of relationships before they settle with one chosen life partner. You may have concerns about whether you will ever have grandchildren, but remember there is no guarantee of this in heterosexual relationships either. Many same sex relationships have children as part of their family unit. This may be from previous relationships or, as a couple, they may choose to adopt children.

Most LGB youth grow up to be well adjusted, happy and emotionally fulfilled. Having a supportive and loving home environment will encourage this. Most have successful careers and happy family lives.

Helping your child

There are a number of things you can do to help your child. Being LGB means your child is sensitive to issues you may well not be aware of, and it is important for you to understand what those issues are. Talk to your child about their life and what it means to them to be LGB. This will hopefully give you an idea of how they are coping with life. When the time is right, discuss safe sex practices as you would with any other young person. If he or she is still in school you will need to be aware of any problems of loneliness, isolation, harassment or bullying they may be experiencing there. Otherwise there may be a serious problem you don't know about.

Who else should be told?

The decision to tell anyone else really belongs with your child. He or she has an enormous investment in many relationships that could be damaged or destroyed by such revelations, and for his or her own psychological well-being, it is important for him or her to be in control of who is told and when.

This is often difficult for parents as they may need to discuss this issue with someone other than their child, but it can be extremely difficult for a child to tell people as the fear of rejection or a negative response is foremost in their minds.

Another consideration is the fact that the child may have more experience in dealing with the issue of prejudice and discrimination than you may know. He or she may have told trusted friends before they told you. In so doing, your child may have learned far more about how to handle this kind of revelation than you may suspect.

You should not force this issue with your child, particularly when the consequences can be as devastating as outright rejection. Your child will know when the time is right for them.

Useful Contacts

If you or your child would like to talk to someone about any of the issues above the following organisations will be able guide you –

Parents Advice Centre
Floor 2 Andras House
60 Great Victoria Street
Belfast BT2 7BB
Phone: 028 90 310891 Website: www.parentsadvicecentre.org

Family Ties Project
The Rainbow Project and Cara-Friend
Belfast LGBT Centre
1st Floor
9-13 Waring Street
Belfast
BT1 2DX
Phone: 02890 319030 Website: familytiesproject.org.uk

If you would like help with any other family issue, Please ring **Parents Advice Centre** for guidance and support on **Freephone 0808 8010 722** or email parents@pachelp.org