

# BE YOURSELF:

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR  
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL,  
TRANSGENDER, QUEER, AND  
QUESTIONING YOUTH



**PFLAG**  
[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)



We at PFLAG National are pleased that you are reading this booklet. It will provide you a great deal of useful information that you can use when you are ready.

**If you need immediate assistance, please call one of the telephone helplines listed below.** We encourage you to seek out help now if you need it, or think you might need it, especially if you are in danger or have thought about harming yourself in any way.

**Contact The Trevor Project online at**  
[thetrevorproject.org/pages/get-help-now](http://thetrevorproject.org/pages/get-help-now), or call one of the following:

## HELPLINES

**The Trevor Project:** (866) 488-7386

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** (800) 273-8255

**Ali Forney Day Center:** (212) 206-0574

**CDC-Info:** (800) 342-AIDS (2437)

Spanish service: (800) 344-7432

TDD service for the deaf: (800) 243-7889

[10:00am till 10:00pm EST, Monday through Friday]

**The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender National Hotline:**

(888) 843-4564

**The GLBT National Youth Talkline**

(youth serving youth through age 25): (800) 246-7743

**The National Runaway Switchboard:** 1-800-RUNAWAY (786-2929)

Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, **PFLAG** is the original family and ally organization. Made up of parents, families, friends, and allies uniting with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT), PFLAG is committed to advancing equality through its mission of support, education, and advocacy. PFLAG has more than 350 chapters and 200,000 supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas in all 50 states. This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced, and supported by the PFLAG National office (located in Washington, DC), the National Board of Directors, and the Regional Directors Council. PFLAG is a nonprofit organization that is not affiliated with any political or religious institution.

For non crisis–related assistance, to order copies of this publication—or to find the PFLAG chapter nearest you—please contact us or visit us on the web.

And be sure to connect with us via social media for the most up-to-date information on our programs and policies.

(Or write to us, snail-mail style!)

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**About this publication:**

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# PFLAG NATIONAL GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

**Ally:** A term used to describe someone who does not identify as LGBTQ but who is supportive of LGBTQ individuals and the community, either personally or as an advocate.

**Bisexual:** An individual who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to men and women. Sometimes stated as “bi.” People who are bisexual need not have had equal sexual experience with both men and women and, in fact, need not have had any sexual experience at all; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**Cisgender:** A term used to describe an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Coming out:** For people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, the process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one’s life. Sometimes referred to as “disclosing” by the transgender community. People often establish a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender/gender-nonconforming identity to themselves first and then may choose to reveal it to others. Coming out can also apply to the family and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender youth or adults. There are many different degrees of being out: some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves. It’s important to remember that not everyone is in the same place when

it comes to being out, and to respect where each person is in that process of self-identification. It is up to each person, individually, to decide if and when to come out or disclose.

**Gay:** The adjective used to describe people whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, “lesbian” is often a preferred term for women. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**Gender expression:** The manner in which a person chooses to communicate their gender identity to others through external means such as clothing and/or mannerisms. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity or sexual orientation. While most people’s understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless combinations that may incorporate both masculine and feminine expressions—or neither—through androgynous expressions. The important thing to remember and respect is that every gender expression is valid.

**Gender identity:** One’s deeply held personal, internal sense of being male, female, some of both, or neither. One’s gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex (i.e., a person assigned female at birth identifies as male or a person

assigned male at birth identifies as female). Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced in infancy and reinforced in adolescence.

**Gender nonconforming** A person who views their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly female or male. Other terms for gender nonconforming include “gender creative,” “gender variant,” “genderqueer,” “gender fluid,” “gender neutral,” “bigendered,” “androgynous,” or “gender diverse.” Such people feel that they exist psychologically between genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the male and female binary paradigm. Gender nonconforming people sometimes prefer using gender-neutral pronouns such as “their,” “ze,” or “hir,” and are usually comfortable with their bodies as they are regardless of how they express their gender.

**Homophobia:** An aversion to lesbian or gay people that often manifests itself in the form of prejudice and bias. Similarly, “biphobia” is an aversion to bisexuality and people who are bisexual, and “transphobia” is an aversion to people who are transgender. “Homophobic,” “biphobic,” and “transphobic” are the related adjectives. Collectively, these attitudes are referred to as “anti-LGBTQ bias.”

**Homosexual:** An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the preferred terms, “gay” and “lesbian.”

**Intersex/disorders of sex development (DSD):** Individuals born with chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. In the past, medical professionals commonly assigned a male or female gender to the individual and proceeded to perform gender assignment surgeries beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child was able to give informed consent. The Intersex Society of North America opposes this practice of genital mutilation on infants and children. Intersex/DSD is unrelated to, but often confused with, LGBTQ issues. Please note: the medical term “hermaphrodite” has been used in the past, but is no longer an acceptable term.

**Lesbian:** A woman whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**LGBT:** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender which refers to these individuals collectively. It is sometimes stated as “GLBT” (gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender). Occasionally, the acronym is stated as “LGBTQA” to include allies, “LGBTQ,” with “Q” representing queer or questioning, or “LGBTI,” with the “I” representing intersex.

**Pansexual:** A person whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of all gender identities and biological sexes. People who are pansexual need not

have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**Queer:** A term currently used by some people—particularly youth—to describe themselves and/or their community. Some value the term for its defiance, some like it because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and others find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, “queer” is disliked by many within the LGBT community, who find it offensive. Due to its varying meanings, this word should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer (i.e. “My cousin self-identifies as genderqueer.”)

**Questioning:** A term used to describe those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

**Sexual orientation:** Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. People who are straight experience these feelings primarily for people of the opposite sex. People who are gay or lesbian experience these feelings primarily for people of the same sex, people who are bisexual experience these feelings for people of both sexes, and people who are asexual experience no sexual attraction at all. Other terms include (but are not limited to) pansexual and polysexual. Sexual orientation is

part of the human condition, while sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one’s sexual orientation. One can have sex with someone and even have children, but that doesn’t necessarily define or align with their sexual orientation. Many LGBT people have first married an opposite-sex partner and had children with them, sometimes out of a sense of obligation or cultural expectation, before coming out as gay or lesbian. It is important to remember that one’s sexual activity does not define who one is with regard to one’s sexual orientation; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**Transgender:** A term describing the state of a person’s gender identity which does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Other terms commonly used are “female to male” (FTM), “male to female” (MTF), and “genderqueer.” Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity (also referred to as “transsexual.”) This word is also used as a broad umbrella term to describe those who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression. Like any umbrella term, many different groups of people with different histories and experiences are often included within the greater transgender community—such groups include, but are certainly not limited to, people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse, and androgynous.

# INTRODUCTION

**Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are complex concepts and discovering your own unique identity can be confusing.** Deciding to come out as LGB or queer—or disclosing yourself as transgender—can be challenging and puzzling, and leave you filled with questions.

Think about it: you're becoming an adult, which can feel both exciting and frustrating, especially when you don't yet have an adult's rights. You're becoming more independent, and your relationship with your parents, guardians, or family members is changing. It's a new experience for them; they're learning to accept that you're not a little child anymore.

Then, all of a sudden, your peers realize that the opposite sex isn't that bad and couples start popping up all over school. Soon such relationships might seem like the most important things in the world.

But what if you can't relate? If you're a teen who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or gender nonconforming—or wondering if you are—you may feel unprepared, uninformed, and even excluded.

Maybe your friends and family have talked to you about dating, falling in love, and getting married. But they probably have never talked about what happens when a boy falls in love with another boy or about what you can do when your physical anatomy just doesn't "match up" with how you feel inside. In fact,

***Realizing that I'm not straight was the least expected thing to happen to me. One night I was journaling, and without thinking, wrote down "I'm bisexual". Since then, I've realized that I don't really like labeling myself.***

***- Anonymous, 16, Cleveland, Ohio***

a lot of what you've heard about LGBTQ people might have come from people at school, where "gay," "lesbian," "queer," "fag," "dyke," and "tranny" are words sometimes used to harass and insult other people; you may even have experienced this discriminatory language within your own family.

Our culture is dominated by heterosexual and gender-conforming images and messages. Television, movies, and magazines mostly show men and women together, most music is about falling in love with someone of the opposite sex, and many of your friends are probably talking about the opposite sex. And, while most people your age seem to fit neatly into expected gender roles, you may feel you don't—or don't want to.

This publication aims to help you understand yourself and the LGBTQ community by answering some of your questions and recommending supportive resources. The questions other youth have asked about being LGBTQ shape this publication; we hope it will help you find answers of your own.

First, three major points:

**One:** There is nothing wrong with being LGBTQ; it's as normal as being left-handed. It's just another part of who you are. Everyone has a

sexual orientation, a gender identity, and a gender expression.

**Two:** It takes time to know who you are. It's okay to be confused, it's okay to be unsure, and it's okay to take your time finding out. There's no need to rush the process.

**Three:** You're not alone. Right now, there are tens of thousands of out LGBTQ youth, and thousands more who are wondering if they are LGBTQ too. It may seem hard to imagine, especially if your community isn't exactly LGBTQ-friendly. However, there are ways to reach out to other LGBTQ young people. If you call any of the numbers at the back of this book or log on to any of the websites listed, you can reach thousands of other youth who have already gone through, or are currently going through, their own journeys of self-discovery. They're people with whom you can talk openly, compare unique life experiences, and ask advice.

Obviously, this publication cannot ask or answer every question, but we hope it gives you a place to start. You don't have to be alone when learning about and identifying your sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. The resources beginning on page 35 will give you a place to continue your own journey—to find information, to find answers, to find friends, and to get support.

Our best advice?  
**Be yourself.** If you are LGBTQ, you'll soon find that you have the power to shape and define your identity and the way you choose to express it. While

*Once I came to terms with being male, I felt so much better. I accepted who I am and immediately wanted others to do the same.*

*- Anonymous, 15, Jasper, Georgia*

coming out will present you with questions and situations you have never faced before, you'll also find great joy and comfort in the journey of self-discovery.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## DANGER/SELF-HARM

- I am in danger, and sometimes think of harming myself. I need help!

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- How do people become straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other orientations?
- I think I might be lesbian, gay, or bisexual. How do I know for sure?
- How can I be sure of my sexual orientation if I'm not sexually active?
- I thought LGB people act a certain way. If I don't fit the stereotype, am I still LGB?
- I have a crush on my same-sex best friend. Does this mean I'm LGB?

- I have a crush on someone at my school. How can I tell if they're LGB too?

## GENDER IDENTITY/ EXPRESSION

- What's the difference between sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression?
- What's the difference between being transgender and being transsexual?
- When do transgender people know that they are differently gendered?
- What is the typical process of "transition" for transgender people?
- What does it mean to be gender nonconforming or gender variant, and how is that different from identifying as transgender? And what does it mean to be genderqueer?

- Aren't there only two genders?
- I think I might be transgender (also known as “gender variant,” “gender creative,” or “gender nonconforming”). How do I know for sure?

## MENTAL HEALTH

- Is being lesbian, gay, or bisexual a mental disorder?
- Is being transgender a mental disorder?
- What about “ex-gay” ministries and so-called “reparative therapy”—can they help me?

## THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

- I don't see other LGBTQ people around me. Am I the only LGBTQ person in my community?
- Sometimes I don't see myself reflected in the LGBT community. Are there resources for youth of color?

## COMING OUT

- Should I come out?
- How should I come out?
- Should I come out to my parent(s) or guardian(s), and how should I do it?
- I can't come out to my parent(s) or guardians(s). Whom should I tell?
- Will people accept me after I come out?
- Will I lose my non-LGBTQ friends? Where will I find LGBTQ friends?
- Can I have a family of my own?
- I feel so alone, are there people I can talk to?

## STAYING SAFE

- What if I'm harassed at school?
- What if I'm harassed outside of school?
- Do I need to worry about HIV/AIDS?

## DANGER/SELF-HARM

**I am in danger, and sometimes think of harming myself. I need help!**

**THE SHORT ANSWER:** If you are in crisis or thinking about self-harm or suicide, you need immediate support. Please turn to the inside front cover of this publication for important contact information to get the help you need.

You are a unique person, worthy of love, friendship, and support. Regardless of how you identify or whom you love, you have the right to feel safe and secure. If you feel unsafe, if you feel unsure, if you feel like you have nowhere to turn, there are people who can help.

*Turn immediately to the inside front cover of this publication for important helpline numbers, including The Trevor Project.*

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

**How do people become straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other orientations?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER:** No one really knows for sure. However, the vast majority of credible professional experts believe that sexual orientation is not a choice

but rather part of our human condition, like handedness.

Remember, everyone has a sexual orientation. There is more than one school of thought about why some people are LGB. Most experts believe that we are born with our sexual orientation—a concept called the “nature” argument. Other believe that being LGB is a choice, influenced by upbringing, cultural influences, and other external factors—the “nurture” argument. And some believe it is a combination of both nature and nurture. Regardless of how our sexual orientation develops, the majority of evidence states that it is nearly impossible to change.

The American Psychological Association (APA) is the largest association of psychologists worldwide. In its online Psychology Help Center, which discusses “Sexual orientation, homosexuality and bisexuality,” the APA confirms its stance—declared publicly in 1975—that: “...most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.” The APA goes on to explain that sexual orientation is created by a complicated mixture of genetics, hormones, development, and influences both cultural and social; no single factor solely determines one’s sexual orientation. To read more about health, emotional awareness, and sexuality, visit the APA’s Online Help Center at [www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx).

## I think I might be lesbian, gay, or bisexual. How do I know for sure?

**THE SHORT ANSWER: You'll know when you know. It could take a while, and it's OK to remain unsure. There's no need to rush.**

There are hundreds of different ways to realize you are not straight. Some LGBT people say that from the time they were very young they “just felt different” or “just knew” they weren’t like their friends. Some didn’t share the same opposite-sex grade-school crushes and some were more interested in their same-sex classmates.

People who are LGBT often say it took a while to put a name to their feelings. Once they learned what being LGBT was, it started to make sense to think about their own sexual orientation in those terms. It fit with the feelings they’d had while growing up.

Many don’t begin to think about their sexual orientation until they’re teenagers or adults. This is completely normal. We figure out our identities in our own time—sometimes it takes months; other times it takes decades.

*Since first realizing three years ago that I am bisexual, and coming out to most of my family and friends in the intervening years, I have grown tremendously as a person. I am on my way to living a more authentic life.*

*- Lauren O., 24, Frisco, Texas*

If you think you’re LGBT, try not to hide your feelings from yourself. Yes, figuring out who you are can be stressful, emotional, and a little scary—you may not want to deal with it—but taking some time alone to think about how you feel is the first step toward accepting yourself. Give yourself permission to explore your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Remember, everyone is unique and perfect in their own way.

## How can I be sure of my sexual orientation if I’m not sexually active?

**THE SHORT ANSWER: You don’t need to have sex to discover who you are. It is the attraction that helps determine sexual orientation.**

It’s important to know that you don’t have to have had a sexual experience

to know that you’re lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Most people experience crushes when they are quite young, before they become sexually active. Think about your own past

crushes: your feelings and your emotional and physical attractions will help tell you who you are.

## **I thought LGB people act a certain way. If I don't fit the stereotype, am I still LGB?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER:**  
Ignore the stereotypes. Some people fit them, some people don't. Be yourself.

People who are LGB, like people who are straight, can act in many different ways, and might or might not fit stereotypes. If you don't fit a common stereotype for an LGB person, it doesn't mean you're not really LGB—there is a wide range of diversity within that community, just as there is throughout every part of society. People use stereotypes to help them understand what to expect from certain groups of people. However, some stereotypes stem from a lack of experience with the type of person in question or from ignorance and/or prejudice, and are simply incorrect. For example, you might hear that gay men aren't strong or athletic. Or that lesbians appear or act more masculine. But these are stereotypes, and aren't one-size-fits-all. Visit [www.lgbthistorymonth.com](http://www.lgbthistorymonth.com) for a searchable database of LGB icons and note the diversity of the people listed there.

Bottom line: don't worry about the stereotypes, and don't let labels define you. There are as many different ways to express your LGB identity as there are people in this world.

Remember: you don't need to prove anything to anybody. Be yourself.

## **I have a crush on my same-sex best friend. Does this mean I'm LGB?**

**SHORT ANSWER:** Not necessarily.

Enjoying intimate experiences—like cuddling, kissing, or holding hands—with someone of the same sex doesn't automatically mean you're lesbian, gay, or bisexual, just as enjoying intimate experiences with someone of the opposite sex doesn't automatically mean you're straight.

Many people develop crushes on someone of the same sex at some point in their lives, and we often explore or identify with different gender roles and expectations throughout our lives. Many LGB people have some sexual experiences with someone of the opposite sex, and many non-LGB people have some same-sex sexual experiences. Those who enjoy such experiences with both sexes often identify as bisexual. However, sometimes it takes some trial and error to determine what we like and what we don't like.

Think of sexuality as a range, or “sexual continuum.” At one end of the range are many people who are attracted only to the same sex. At

the other end of the range are many people who are attracted only to the opposite sex. And in between are people who are attracted to both sexes in varying degrees.

Again, remember that our sexuality develops over time. Don't worry if you aren't sure. Your early years are a time of learning, bit by bit, what works for you, and crushes and experimentation are often part of that process. Over time, you'll find that you're drawn mostly to men, women, or both—or neither!—and then you'll know. You don't have to label yourself.

## **I have a crush on someone at my school. How can I tell if they're LGB too?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER:**  
**You can't definitely, without asking—which presents its own unique challenges.**

It's impossible to know for sure whether someone identifies as LGB just by looking at them. We shouldn't assume people are LGB because of the way they look, dress, or act. Doing so would mean making assumptions about the

person based on hurtful and often unsupported stereotypes (see our answer to “I thought LGB people act certain ways. If I don't fit a stereotype, am I still LGB?”).

People sometimes joke about having “gaydar,” a “radar” that senses who is LGB. Figuring out if someone is LGB if they're not completely “out” is like figuring out if someone is interested in you. Sometimes you can tell; sometimes you can't. It can be an extremely frustrating and stressful process, but it is part of getting to know the people around you. It takes time and sometimes more patience than you think you might have!

Asking your friends or theirs won't guarantee an accurate answer. And while you can casually observe them to try to find some clues—do they have pro-LGBTQ stickers on their backpack or locker? Are they a member of the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at your school?—these things mean that they may be LGB, or they may be a supportive ally. The only way to find out someone's sexual orientation is to talk to them about it directly. However, it's extremely important to respect another person's privacy.

***When I was a sophomore in high school I realized that my attraction to girls was stronger than some ordinary “girl crush.” I didn't think I could be gay because I am very feminine. I love fashion and makeup, and it was hard for me to push past the stereotypes.***

***- Rachel, 17, Highland Park, New Jersey***

They may not want to talk about it, could be upset that you asked them, or may not want to be recognized as LGB. As a general rule, be very careful when asking someone such a personal question unless you know them very well, and even then, be sensitive to the other person's privacy. Approach them the way you would want to be approached about the subject.

Remember, you can't expect someone else to come to terms with their sexual orientation any quicker than you are coming to terms with your own. But be patient. One day (if it hasn't happened already), someone will have a crush on you and they will be wondering whether you're LGB or straight (or neither!) too.

## **GENDER IDENTITY/ EXPRESSION**

### **What's the difference between sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER:**  
Every person in the world has a sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. One describes our sexual attractions; one describes our internal feeling

**or sense of being male, female, some combination of both, or neither; and one describes how we present ourselves outwardly to others.**

It's pretty common for people to see the acronym "LGBTQ" and think it's all about sex or sexual orientation. But it's not! The "transgender" portion of the acronym represents gender identity and is completely separate from sexual orientation and sexual behavior.

Many people think that all transgender people or all people with nonconforming gender expressions are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. They aren't!

In fact, just as each of us has a sexual orientation (straight, gay, or bi), we all have a gender identity and a way of expressing it. Our gender identity is how we feel inside about being a girl, a boy, something in between, or neither; our gender expression is how we dress and act to express or communicate our gender outwardly (which may or may not correlate with our gender identity); and our sexual orientation describes to whom we are attracted. Sexual orientation is separate and distinct from gender identity, and gender expression is separate and distinct from both sexual orientation and gender identity.

## What’s the difference between being transgender and being transsexual?

**THE SHORT ANSWER:**  
Transsexual people often, but not always, use medicine and surgery to help their bodies match their gender identity, while most transgender people do not.

The term “transgender” is an umbrella term, often used to refer to anyone who falls somewhere on the gender spectrum, including people who have gender identities and expressions that don’t mesh well with their assigned sex at birth, such as transsexual and genderqueer people. “Transsexual” is a lesser-used term (considered by some to now be outdated) which refers to people who are transgender who use (or consider using) medical interventions such as hormone therapy and/or surgery as part of the process of expressing their gender.

The words “transgender” and “transsexual” do have one thing in common: they are both adjectives (used to describe something) not nouns (used to identify

something). Just as you wouldn’t say someone is “gayed” or “straightened,” so too you wouldn’t say someone is, or has been, “transgendered.” Saying “Alice is a person who is transgender” is correct—just like saying “Alice is blonde”—but saying “Alice is a transgender” or “Alice is transgendered” is not. Using these adjectives as nouns or verbs is considered offensive, so avoid using them in those ways.

## When do transgender people know that they are differently gendered?

**THE SHORT ANSWER:** One’s sense of gender happens at different times for different people.

Many transgender people remember “feeling different” from their earliest childhood memories. But because of stigma and lack of information, they can struggle for many years to accept this

difference. As more information for transgender people becomes available, we are seeing transgender people openly expressing their true gender identity at younger ages.

*“When I came out to my parents as transgender, it was after thought and debate...I was tired of hiding myself at home and pretending being misgendered didn’t bother me.”*

- Anonymous, 17, Madison, WI

## What is the typical process of “transition” for transgender people?

**THE SHORT ANSWER:** There is no “typical” transition process, because there are many different ways to transition.

For transsexual people, the *Standards of Care* requires a “gender identity disorder” diagnosis, as defined by the American Psychological Association, in order to qualify for medical treatments, hormones, and various surgeries. This diagnosis is controversial in transgender communities because it perpetuates stigma and medicalizes what many believe is simply another natural human variation.

## What does it mean to be gender nonconforming or gender variant, and how is that different from identifying as transgender? And what does it mean to be genderqueer?

**THE SHORT ANSWER:** Identifying as transgender versus identifying as gender nonconforming (also called “gender variant”) are two different things. The first relates to one’s gender identity; the latter relates to one’s gender expression.

Gender nonconforming—or gender variant or gender creative—is a term for individuals whose gender expression is different from the societal expectations based on their assigned sex at birth. Just as with transgender people, gender-nonconforming people may or may not identify as transgender, male, female, both, or neither.

Genderqueer people identify outside of the gender binary of being either a man or a woman. They may think of themselves as both man and woman, neither man nor woman, moving between two genders, or a third gender altogether.

## Aren’t there only two genders?

**THE SHORT ANSWER:** No. In America we tend to recognize only two genders, referred to as the “gender binary”—masculine/man/male and feminine/woman/female. But many cultures recognize many more than two.

The Bugis people of Indonesia recognize a total of five genders. In India and Bangladesh there is a third gender called “Hijra” that is neither male nor female. The Fa’afafine are a third gender, as well as a sexuality, in Samoa. The Muxe people are a third gender in Mexico. To learn more about how other cultures perceive gender, check out

this 2011 interactive map—and supplementary material—from PBS which shows dozens of cultures that recognize more than two genders: [www.pbs.org/independentlens/two-spirits/map.html](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/two-spirits/map.html).

Like our sexual orientation, our gender identity can be looked at as a continuum as well. There is a whole range of identities to be found on the “gender spectrum.” Throughout our lives, we can experience and express our gender in a variety of ways. Our gender expression can change over time as we have new experiences and become aware of new ideas.

Remember, gender is a label created by people. Labels like gender are used to help us figure out what to expect from one another. They aren’t set in stone, and there is no right or wrong gender to have or express.

**I think I might be transgender (or “gender variant,” “gender creative,” or “gender nonconforming”). How do I know for sure?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER: You’ll know when you know. It could take a while, and it is okay to remain unsure. There’s no need to rush.**

There are hundreds of different ways to realize you are not gender conforming and hundreds more to realize you are uncomfortable with your gender or physical sex. Some people say that from the time they were very young they “felt different” or “just knew” they weren’t like their friends, rejecting the stereotypical gender characteristics they were “supposed” to display.

People who are transgender or gender nonconforming often say it took a while to put a name to their feelings—it wasn’t until they learned what the terms meant that it made sense to think about their gender identity and/or expression in those terms; it fit with the feelings they’d had while growing up.

Many other people don’t begin to figure out their gender identity until they’re teenagers or adults. This is completely normal. We figure out our identities in our own time—sometimes it takes months; other times it takes decades.

*I came out to everyone at my school’s first-ever GSA meeting...instead of giving my feminine birth name, I introduced myself as Elijah and admitted that I was trans. I remember trembling with fear but everyone was brilliantly accepting.*

*- Anonymous, 16, Olmsted Falls, Ohio*

As with sexuality, some people know what their gender identity is at an early age, and know that it doesn't match the "boy" or "girl" label they were assigned at birth. For others, gender identity develops and changes over time. If you feel that your gender identity does not match up with the "boy" or "girl" label others assume you to have, it is completely normal to explore and learn about other ways to express yourself. Gender identity can be expressed in many ways—referred to as "gender expression"—and people use clothing, makeup, accessories, name changes, and sometimes medical procedures to express outwardly how they feel on the inside.

Try not to hide your feelings from yourself. Yes, figuring out who you are can be stressful, emotional, and a little scary—you may not want to deal with it—but taking some time alone to think about how you feel is the first step toward accepting yourself. Give yourself permission to explore your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Remember, everyone is unique and perfect in their own way.

## MENTAL HEALTH

### Is being lesbian, gay, or bisexual a mental disorder?

**THE SHORT ANSWER:**  
**Absolutely not.**

The American Psychiatric Association declared in 1973 that homosexuality is not a mental disorder or disease, and the American Psychological Association says that it would be unethical to try to change a person's sexual orientation.

### Is being transgender a mental disorder?

**SHORT ANSWER: Absolutely not.**

Being transgender or gender nonconforming is not a disorder. It is important to know, though, that in July 2012, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed the diagnostic term "gender identity disorder" from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and replaced it with "gender dysphoria," in the new edition, published in May 2013. The DSM says that gender dysphoria can be diagnosed when a person's gender identity/expression is different from their assigned gender at birth and at the same time associated with "clinically significant distress or impairment" in their social life, career, or other important areas of life. As a result of such distress, those with untreated gender dysphoria have a "significantly increased risk of suffering." However, gender dysphoria narrows treatment to those who experience

personal distress over their gender incongruity.

Therefore, gender dysphoria isn't about simply being gender variant. It has to do with the absence or presence of suffering and discomfort a person might feel if they are unhappy or uncomfortable with their gender identity or incongruity. As documented by empirical and clinical data, there are many transgender and gender-nonconforming people who are very happy and comfortable with their gender identity and don't need or seek treatment.

### **What about “ex-gay” ministries and so-called “reparative therapy”—can they help me?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER: No. Not only do these measures—like “pray the gay away”—not work, but also they are likely to harm you. Every major mainstream medical, psychiatric, and psychological association has denounced this type of so-called therapy.**

Because sexual orientation and gender identity are not chosen, you cannot “change your mind” or “pray the gay away” if you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. After all,

*I was raised in a Christian home, so homosexuality was off limits. I tried so hard to be straight, but it just didn't feel right. After having a boyfriend for three months, I just gave up and came out. Now I have a girlfriend and I am ecstatic.*

*- Anonymous, 20, Bloomington, Indiana*

did our non-LGBT friends and loved ones choose to be non-LGBT? These “reparative” measures have been proven to cause serious damage and potentially dire consequences for the patients involved.

A few things 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 reparative therapy, also known as “conversion therapy.”
- In 1998, the American Psychiatric Association declared its opposition to reparative therapy, stating that “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 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 U.S. Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior asserted that homosexuality is not “a reversible lifestyle choice.”
- In 2009, the American Psychological Association added a resolution stating “mental health professionals should avoid telling clients that they can change their sexual orientation through therapy or other treatments,” because there was no evidence that these efforts worked.
- In 2013, Exodus International—the world’s largest “ex-gay” ministry

organization—shut its doors, its founder issuing an apology for the many harms their methods caused over the years.

The practice of “reparative therapy” is deemed so harmful that there are now laws in California and New Jersey outlawing the practice for minors, with other states—and the federal government—considering similar bills. Many PFLAG parents have seen firsthand how damaging so-called reparative therapy has been to their children. PFLAG members believe that it is important that we 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 important. See page 37 for a list of some of them.

## THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

**I don’t see LGBTQ people around me. Am I the only LGBTQ person in my community?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER: No. You are definitely NOT the only one; you are one of many.**

According to a study released in 2013 by the Williams Institute, the percentage of adults in the United States who identify as LGBT ranges from 1.7% in North Dakota to 5.1% in Hawaii and 10% in the District of Columbia. According to this study, the average for the United States is roughly 3.5% of the population.

And these LGBT people are a widely diverse population: they're white, black, Asian, Pacific-Islander, Latino/a, Hispanic, and Native American.

They're Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Baptist, Protestant, Hindu, Mormon, Baha'i, and Buddhist. They're old and young, rich and poor, Democrat, Republican,

Green Party and independent. They're doctors and nurses, construction workers, teachers and students, secretaries, ministers and rabbis, store clerks, mechanics, business people, police officers, politicians, and athletes. And when they were teenagers, most of them probably felt the same way you do. If you get the feeling you're all by yourself, just remember: thousands of people have gone through the journey you are undertaking. You are not alone!

*I've told only a few people I'm asexual. I used to think there was something wrong with me, but my friends and my boyfriend are all supportive, and it's great to know I'm not alone.*

*- Kelly F., 21, Allentown, PA*

## **Sometimes I don't see myself reflected in the LGBTQ community. Are there resources for youth of color?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER:** Yes, there are more and more resources for LGBTQ youth of color and for others who have multiple identities (disabled youth, homeless youth, and others).

As an LGBTQ youth of color you might face issues that affect how you experience, act on, and come out regarding your sexual orientation or gender identity—including cultural and family

traditions, access to resources, and immigration status. When deciding whether to come out, you might worry about jeopardizing your relationships with your family and friends in your racial/ethnic community, about being accepted as a person of color in white LGBTQ groups, and about potential racism and ignorance that you may find in some segments of the LGBTQ community.

However, there are people who are LGBTQ in all communities and in all cultures, as well as an

increasing number of resources available for you and your family. For a list of resources for LGBTQ youth of color, please visit [www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-glbtyouth\\_of\\_color.html](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-glbtyouth_of_color.html).

## COMING OUT

### Should I come out?

**THE SHORT ANSWER: Only if you want to, and only when you're ready and feel safe doing so. Don't come out just because someone else thinks you should.**

Think of yourself as a puzzle. There are thousands of little pieces which make up who you are. Your sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression are just three parts of that puzzle—but without them, your picture would be incomplete.

Realizing you're LGBTQ doesn't change who you are. It just fills in some of the blanks. Now, you can choose to keep your personal picture to yourself. Or you can display it for others to see; it's up to you.

If you're LGBTQ, keeping your identity to yourself is called “being in the closet.” Being open about it is called “coming out” (or sometimes “disclosing” in the transgender

community). You can come out to one person, to friends and family only, or to everyone you know.

There's no reason to come out if you aren't ready. Sometimes there are very good reasons not to come out. There are people who won't accept you if you're LGBTQ, people who will do and say terrible things. They could be your parents, friends or classmates, or teachers or coworkers, people you love or depend on for financial help, companionship, encouragement, or other support. Like any big decision we make, there are real risks to coming out.

However, there are also very good reasons to let some people know that you're LGBTQ. Hiding your sexual orientation or gender identity keeps the important people in your life from knowing about a big part of you. By coming out you can live with integrity in regard to your sexual orientation or gender identity, begin building community support, and form healthy relationships. At some point, many LGBTQ people find that the loneliness and isolation of keeping a secret is worse than any fear of coming out.

Whatever your reasons for thinking you should or shouldn't come out, it's your decision and no one else's. It's also one you should make at your own speed.

## How should I come out?

**THE SHORT ANSWER: Start by coming out to yourself. Then, choose those who are closest to you to tell first.**

Before you come out to others, you have to come out to yourself. It may sound strange, but it's actually very important. Knowing that you're LGBTQ is one thing, but being comfortable with being LGBTQ and being sure of who you are as a person is another. A lot of people have learned to say, "I'm not straight, and that's OK!" as a first step in the coming out process. Remember, any step forward is a step in the right direction.

There's no standard or correct way to come out. Sometimes people make a joke out of it, surprise their friends, or slip it into a casual conversation. Some kids decide to sit their parents down and talk about it, while others feel more comfortable writing their parents a letter or an email. It all depends on your relationship with your friends and family, how you communicate best, and how you feel most safe.

You may consider becoming more educated about sexual orientation and gender identity before you come out. By doing so, you will be able to respond to people who may have questions or wrong ideas about LGBTQ topics. You'll feel proud to know the facts if someone asks you a question or if you want to correct someone's incorrect information about people who are LGBTQ.

Explore the resources listed at the back of this publication. By learning about others' experiences and talking about yourself, you'll know more about who you are and what to expect when you come out. Let your

friends and allies know that you're getting ready to come out so they can support you.

A support system is important when you're coming out. You'll want people around you who care about you and will be there for you, whether it's just to talk or to give you a hug when you need one, or to give you a place to stay, if necessary. If you don't feel that you already have people like that, contact the nearest PFLAG chapter or one of the other groups listed at the back of this publication.

*My friend and I were discussing David Tennant from DR. WHO and I, then a closeted lesbian, said, "That man makes me question my sexuality." The friend asked, "Do you have something to tell me?" as a joke, and I replied, "Yes," with a complete deadpan. It was awesome.*

*- Anonymous, 16, Germantown, Maryland*

## Should I come out to my parent(s) or guardian(s) and how should I do it?

**THE SHORT ANSWER: If you're ready—and with care.**

Many youth who are LGBTQ say that their relationship with their parents was much closer after they came out because it was more honest. They say it was a relief to feel like they weren't keeping a secret any more.

Sometimes a child doesn't come out to their parents, but, rather, their parents discover that their children at a much earlier age—sometimes as young as two or three years old—are expressing signs of gender creativity. For these children, they and their parents work through the process together.

But it doesn't always work that way. Some teens are forced to leave home. Some parents are abusive. And some family relationships never recover.

Before you come out to your parents, there are some things for you to consider:

- Think about your parents' general reaction to LGBTQ people. Find out as much as you can by observing your parents or asking indirect questions. Do they have

friends who are LGBTQ? Do they read books or go to movies that include same-sex relationships? Is their faith community accepting of people who are LGBTQ? Have you heard them say that there's nothing wrong with being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?

- Think about your relationship with your parents. Have they shown that they love you even when they're upset with you? Have they stuck by you even when you've done something they didn't like?
- Think about having a plan in place if they don't respond well, including someone to call right away if you need support. If you had to leave home, do you have a place to stay? If your parents cut off financial support, do you have someone else who can help you?

You're the only one who can answer these questions. Weigh the balance of "yes" and "no" responses when you're thinking about coming out. Trust your gut. It's almost always frightening coming out to your parent(s) or guardian(s), but if you're terrified about it, you should pay attention to that. Not all parents will be accepting.

If your answer to all or most of the questions above is “no,” do not come out to your parents until you have a safe place to go to and a way to support yourself. You might be better off waiting until you’re on your own. If your answer to all or most of these questions is “yes,” then it’s probably safe to tell them.

If you decide you can and want to tell your parent(s), think about how you can make it easiest on them and yourself.

- Pick a time when your parents are relaxed and not pressured by work, family worries, or the holidays. Otherwise, they might react negatively because they feel they don’t have the time to deal with it.
- Visit [pflag.org/find](http://pflag.org/find) to locate your local PFLAG chapter and speak to a parent who can talk with you about how your parents might react. This firsthand support is invaluable. Be sure to ask that parent if you can have permission to put your own parents in touch with them, should they need that support.

***When I came out to my parents, my mother cried. She cried because she could no longer officiate my wedding ceremony which had been a dream of hers since I was a child. She would be defrocked if she attempted to officiate.***  
- Meg B., 22, Westerville, Ohio

- Visit our publications page at [pflag.org/publications](http://pflag.org/publications). There you will have access to two helpful booklets, both free for download. We highly recommend printing out the appropriate publication to give to your parents or family members:

*Our Daughters and Sons: Questions and Answers for Parents of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual People.*

One of our most popular publications, this booklet answers several commonly asked questions about having an LGBT child and includes a

list of related resources that will help your parents in their own journey.

*Welcoming Our Trans Family and Friends.* This publication is available for you and your parents if you identify as transgender or gender nonconforming.

**Most of all: be prepared for your parents to need some time to accept your being LGBT—just as you probably needed some time yourself.**

Even if they're accepting of LGBTQ people in general, your parents may be surprised to learn that you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. They may not want to believe it at first and may need time to adjust to a different future than they had envisioned for you. In the extreme, they may talk about bringing in a psychiatrist to "cure" you (see page 36 for more information about this situation).

Before the psychological and psychiatric associations concluded that being LGBTQ is perfectly OK, there were a lot of theories blaming parents for playing a role in influencing their child's sexual orientation and gender identity. As a result of such theories, your parents may worry about what you being LGBTQ says about them. They may worry whether they have failed you in some way as parents, and that worry can come out as anger and defensiveness.

Your parents could also feel that you've rejected them or their way of life by being LGBTQ, or that you've somehow changed their dreams for you. This feeling of rejection is very common among parents of all teens, as teens become more independent and parents have to let go of their image of who or what their child will be. Parents of children who are LGBTQ might feel this sense of loss and rejection even more strongly.

Even if they don't have those reactions, your parents are probably going to feel worried about you. In fact, they may have some of the same worries you once had or still do have: whether this will put you in danger, whether your life will be happy, whether you'll have a family of your own. These concerns can cause them to ignore or deny what you've told them.

They may worry about how they're going to tell other family members and their friends. Before they do, it is important that they have your permission to come out about you to others. That's right: when you come out, your parents will start a coming-out process of their own. And the best thing you can do is be ready with answers—or suggest people with whom they can talk. The more homework you've done, and the more self-assured you seem, the more you'll convince your parents that you're ready to take responsibility for yourself, and they may worry less. Ultimately, the more support you—and they—have, the better.

### **I can't come out to my parent(s) or guardian(s). Whom should I tell?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER: If not your parent(s) or guardian(s), tell only those people whom you want to know and whom you have reason to trust.**

**Coming out isn't something that you do once, and then it's over.** You might decide to come out now to family members and later to friends, or the other way around. Or perhaps you could come out to a sibling now, and later to the rest of the family and your friends.

If you are transgender or gender nonconforming, some people, including your teachers, principal, and classmates, might be uncomfortable with how you publicly express yourself, especially if it challenges people's sense of how they believe women and men are supposed to dress and act. How you express your gender is something to think about, discuss with people you trust, and evaluate in terms of your safety and what kind of community you have to support you.

The people you tell first should be the ones you trust the most. You need to be able to trust them not to hurt you, to accept you for who you are, and to respect your privacy and not tell anyone you don't want told.

Think about what you could lose by telling a particular person. If it's a friend, are they likely to withdraw

from you? Would they tell other kids at school? What would happen if they did? Do you have a support system to help you if this is the case? Having a strong support network is critical as you start the coming out process. The resources at the back of this publication—including your local PFLAG chapter—are a great place to start!

Think also about what you could lose by not telling a particular person. Is your relationship with your friend strained because you're keeping a secret from them? Would

you be closer with them and be able to get more support from them if they understood why you were acting withdrawn?

Think about what kinds of things you've been able to share with them in the past and how they have reacted.

If you want to come out to someone in particular, and you aren't sure how they'll react, try to feel them out first. You could get them talking about a current event, book, movie, or TV show about people who are LGBTQ.

Keep in mind, though, that someone's reaction to an LGBTQ person in a movie might not be the same as it would be if that person

***Lucky to be from a family of free thinkers, coming out to my parents was easy. What was not so easy was losing friends I trusted. But for every friend I lost all those years ago, I'm fortunate to have two in their place that understand and cherish me for who I am.***

***- Wain S., 21, Casper, Wyoming***

were their sibling or their friend. And it can work both ways: people might seem either more or less prejudiced in a hypothetical or fictional situation than they would when responding to someone close to them.

For example, because homophobia and transphobia are so common, a friend or a loved one might without thinking joke about an LGBTQ character in a movie—or might do so because they think you expect that—but show far more thoughtfulness and a desire to understand when responding to your coming out. On the other hand, friends and loved ones who seem accepting of LGBTQ characters in the media might be far less accepting of someone close to them who identifies as LGBTQ.

To get a sense of how someone might react to your being LGBTQ, try to keep your questions specific, personal, and thought provoking. If, for example, you have a friend who has an older brother off at college or in the military, you could say something like, “I’ve been reading about gay-straight alliances on college campuses” or “I’ve been reading about marriage equality for people who are gay and lesbian. Would you be upset if your brother came home and told you he was gay?” (Your friend might even surprise you and answer, “My brother is gay.”)

## Will people accept me after I come out?

**THE SHORT ANSWER: Some people will accept you and some won’t.**

Prejudice and discrimination are everywhere in America and around the world and it takes time to overcome bias and change attitudes.

If you are LGBTQ, it is more likely than not that you will run into prejudice. Our society has a “straight assumption.” We’re taught by our families, our schools, our religions, and the media to assume that everyone is straight, which often influences us to discriminate against those who aren’t or who don’t appear to be. That assumption has begun to change, but it is still real for many people.

Our society also has assumptions about what it means to be a boy or girl or a man or woman and may judge others by how they conform to those preconceptions. These are called “traditional gender roles” or “gender stereotypes,” and they refer to how people are “supposed” to behave. These biases are changing too—women in the workforce have transformed perceptions about the professions they “should” be in, for example. But roles remain rigid in many places. Men with long hair are more accepted now than in the past, but having long hair is not seen as acceptable in all areas of our culture.

The prejudice you run into could be fairly mild. For example, someone assuming you're straight and thereby embarrassing you (and themselves). Or it could be far more serious: people who are LGBTQ are sometimes kicked out of their homes, fired from their jobs—or worse—just for being LGBTQ.

Anti-LGBTQ biases are being challenged, however, as more and more people are getting to know people who are LGBTQ, because more of them are out than ever before. Attitudes are also changing because other people are standing up with the LGBTQ community to say, “They are my friends,” “they are my children,” or “they are my brothers”—and “I’m proud of them.” We call these supportive individuals “allies.”

Right now in the U.S., it is estimated that eight in ten people say that they personally know someone who is LGBT. If you choose to come out, you’ll be part of making that number even bigger, giving people the opportunity to get to know you. and transforming biased beliefs to ones of acceptance.

## Will I lose my non-LGBTQ friends? Where will I find LGBTQ friends?

**THE SHORT ANSWER: To the first question—probably not. And to the second—everywhere.**

It is usually easier to be close to someone who is not hiding anything and is comfortable with themselves.

When coming out, though, be careful to trust only those who you are confident will respect your privacy and confidentiality. Friends

who tend to gossip can cause problems, even if they don’t mean to hurt you.

Some friends will be supportive right away. One or two friends might have already guessed that you’re not

straight or that you are transgender, and you may find that you already have LGBTQ friends and didn’t know it.

Just as with your parents, consider how each friend is likely to feel when they learn that you are LGBTQ, and how you can let them see that you haven’t changed as a person; offering them some of the

*I came out as a lesbian to my sister, and it was easy. I came out as a lesbian to my mother, and it was okay. I came out as a lesbian to my father, and it was difficult. I came out as a lesbian to my friends, and it was near impossible.*

*- Anonymous, 16  
Hayle, Cornwall, United Kingdom*

resources listed in the back of this publication can help.

Talking to friends who are LGBTQ about their coming out experiences can also help. Finding new friends who are LGBTQ is really important. These are people who know exactly what you're going through because they've been there, or are in the process of coming out themselves.

LGBTQ youth organizations are a good place to start because you won't have to try to figure out whether another teen there is LGBTQ or an ally. Most major cities have LGBTQ youth organizations where you'll be able to meet people easily. You'll find new friends with whom you can share experiences and support, and learn more about yourself. Your school might have a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), and GSAs almost always have a supportive teacher or staff member as a sponsor. This is another excellent place to find not only peer support but also a trusted adult.

If you're in a small town or in a rural area, it may be harder to find groups like these. In that case, you can get in touch with peers through the websites and hotlines listed in the back of this publication. The organizations in the resource directory can also help you find more specific groups, such as organizations for LGBTQ African Americans, Arabs, Asian-Pacific Islanders, or Latinos/as or support

groups for LGBTQ people who are differently abled.

Even if it seems to you that you must be the only LGBTQ person at your school, you aren't. With as much as 3.5% of the population being LGBTQ, there are other LGBTQ students at your school whom you might already know (but not know that they're LGBTQ) or whom you might not yet have met. Remember this the next time you may feel alone.

## **Can I have a family of my own?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER: Yes.**

Throughout the world, same-sex couples form and build long-lasting families. Many same-sex couples hold ceremonies to celebrate their commitment to each other and to share their relationship with family and friends. As of May 2014, same-sex marriage is legal in Washington, D.C., and the following states: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington, with a number of other states moving ever-closer to legalizing marriage equality. Countries around the world are beginning to embrace marriage equality as well. As of January

2014, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Argentina, Denmark, France, Brazil, Uruguay, Nepal, New Zealand, England, Scotland, and Wales had legalized same-sex marriage. Additionally, same-sex marriage is legally recognized in Mexico City, Cancun, and in 11 Brazilian states.

A record number of companies, including a majority of companies in the Fortune 500, now treat same-sex partners the same as married couples and provide health-care coverage and other benefits for their LGBTQ employees' partners. Additionally, the United States federal government has extended to married same-sex couples all of the same services, rights, and responsibilities as married opposite-sex couples.

Many same-sex couples are also raising children together. Some couples and individuals have used assisted reproduction in order to conceive a child. Other LGBTQ people are raising children from previous opposite-sex relationships on their own or with their new partners. As people become more educated and society's attitudes

continue to change, adoption of children by LGBTQ couples is becoming more common. An estimated 110,000 adopted children live with LGBTQ couples, and an additional 2 million same-sex couples say they would be interested in adopting a child at some point in their lives.

While there are still many legal and legislative challenges for same-sex couples, LGBTQ people throughout the world are living with partners and/or spouses in happy, healthy, and thriving relationships and families. They also play a tremendous role in helping create a society in which these relationships receive support to thrive.

*Close friends were a very important and helpful support network. By surrounding myself with positive people, allies and volunteering with LGBT organizations I found comfort and confidence.*

*- Lauren M., 22, Phoenix, Arizona*

## **I feel so alone, are there people I can talk to?**

**THE SHORT ANSWER: You aren't alone. There are people out there who are ready to help.**

**First and foremost, if you have any thoughts of self-harm, turn immediately to the front inside cover of this book for a list of helpline numbers that you can call.**

The best thing you can do is find someone to talk to whom you can trust. Maybe it is an individual you already know—a friend, parent, sibling, or a friend’s parent or older sibling. Maybe it’s an adult to whom you have confided in the past and whom you know you can trust again.

If you don’t know anyone with whom you’re comfortable talking and who will be supportive and understanding, start by calling one of the helpline numbers or online help sections of the organizations listed in the back of this publication. You don’t have to give your name, and they won’t try to talk you into or out of anything.

If you don’t feel ready to talk with someone on the phone, you can learn more by reading resources and information from other youth on some of the websites listed at the end of this publication. Many organizations provide email addresses to which you can send questions confidentially. Others have live chat support. Please remember to use good judgment when making any contacts, whether on the phone, online, or in person. Your safety and well-being should always be your top priority.

One of the best places to find support is at a PFLAG chapter meeting. PFLAG has more than 350 chapters located in all 50 states, and can provide you—in confidence—educational materials as well as a

listing of youth resources in your community.

Start by visiting [pflag.org/find](http://pflag.org/find) to find the chapter nearest you. You can also contact the PFLAG National office by phone (202-467-8180) or email ([info@pflag.org](mailto:info@pflag.org)) for further assistance.

Whatever you choose, talking does help. Talking to others and being open and honest can be an affirming way for you to connect with your own feelings, connect with others in your life, and connect with those in vibrant and diverse LGBT communities. And best of all, you’ll learn that you’re really not alone.

## STAYING SAFE

### What if I’m harassed at school?

**THE SHORT ANSWER:**  
**You don’t have to deal with harassment at school; there are many resources available to help you.**

School can be a hard place for LGBTQ youth, who might hear jokes and insults on a regular basis not only from other students, but sometimes from teachers or school employees as well. Some people who are LGBTQ are physically assaulted at school or by classmates

off school property. For transgender youth, most schools do not have dress codes, bathrooms, locker rooms, gym classes, or athletic teams that meet their needs.

Regardless of your sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, you have the right to a safe learning environment, and there are lots of resources available to help you and your parent(s) or guardian(s) create such an environment. One of PFLAG's top priorities is to help students, parents, guardians, and educators create safe and affirming schools. To learn more about safe-schools programs available through a chapter near you, please visit [pflag.org/safeschools](http://pflag.org/safeschools).

If you are being harassed by your peers or finding barriers to being yourself at school, try talking to a supportive teacher or staff member or to someone else in your life who can listen and give you support.

Ask to see your school's harassment, bullying, and discrimination policies. Many states have laws

that require schools to respond to reports of bullying and harassment. In other places, courts are holding schools responsible for failing to provide remedies to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment. You do not need to endure this treatment from anyone.

If you are not getting support at school and are looking for help, you can contact PFLAG or one of the other organizations listed in the back of this publication. Visit [pflag.org/safeschools](http://pflag.org/safeschools) and [pflag.org/claimyourrights](http://pflag.org/claimyourrights) for more information and safe school resources.

*When I was in 8th grade, I was outed, endured bullying, and became depressed. My mom really struggled with my sexuality for years. Finally, through a lot of struggle, I accepted it and so did she. Five years later, I am a strong and proud member of the LGBT community and my mom started working for the PFLAG in our state.*  
- Magdalen S., 17, Fenton, Michigan

## What if I'm harassed outside of school?

**THE SHORT ANSWER:**  
**Harassment outside of school should be reported to the local police or to an adult you trust.**

If you are harassed, assaulted, or a victim in any way because of your sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, contact your local police or tell a trusted adult

as soon as possible. You may have been the victim of a hate crime.

Hate crimes occur when someone targets another person based on a characteristic they have or a group they belong to, like being LGBTQ or being a member of a certain race. In America, any violent assault against an LGBTQ person because of their sexuality or gender identity can be considered a federal crime. This is part of the *Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act*, which was passed into law in 2009.

Many states have their own hate crime laws which protect their citizens. Even if your state doesn't protect against crimes committed due to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression bias, you can still file a police report and seek justice.

If what happened to you wasn't exactly a crime, but it made you feel threatened, you can still file an incident report at your local police station. It's very important to tell the police what happened—imagine if the people who tried to hurt you try to hurt you again, or try to hurt another person in town. The police have a sworn duty to protect you, your friends, and your family, no matter who you are.

According to the National Crime Prevention Council, cyber bullying is using the Internet, cell phones,

video game systems, or other technology to send or post text or images intended to harm or embarrass another person. If you are at any time harassed, threatened, taunted, or teased via technology—no matter where you are—it is important to contact a trusted adult or authority as soon as possible.

Remember: You are not alone, and there are people ready to help. Visit [pflag.org/cyberbullying](http://pflag.org/cyberbullying) for more information. Additionally, the resources section of this publication will help you find organizations that can provide assistance.

While harassment and cyber bullying do not always elevate to the level of a hate crime, they are just as potentially detrimental and dangerous.

## Do I need to worry about HIV and AIDS?

**THE SHORT ANSWER:**  
Everybody needs to be informed about HIV and AIDS.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). Unlike some viruses, HIV cannot be eliminated by the human body: as of now, once you have HIV, you have it for life.

Doctors, researchers, activists, and others around the world are working hard to find one, but there is still no cure for HIV/AIDS. Improved treatments, however, are increasingly alleviating the symptoms and prolonging life.

Since the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, many people have viewed HIV/AIDS as strictly a gay issue. The LGBTQ community—including PFLAG’s founders and first leaders—mobilized early in the epidemic to organize a response. This response included educating communities, increasing LGBT visibility to reduce stigma, developing prevention strategies, and advocating for appropriate care and treatment options for people living with HIV/AIDS. Yet the epidemic has continued to progress and take its toll on many diverse communities globally. Still,

despite overwhelming statistics documenting the spread of HIV/AIDS in other communities, many people still choose to view HIV/AIDS as only a gay issue. Visit [www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/transmission.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/transmission.html) for a comprehensive list of how HIV/AIDS is spread.

The fact is that being LGBT does not infect a person with HIV or AIDS. Certain sexual behaviors, IV drug use, and other factors can put one at risk for becoming infected with HIV as well as other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

For the most up-to-date information on HIV/AIDS, including high-risk behaviors, testing, treatment, and more, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s HIV/AIDS website at [www.cdc.gov/hiv/](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/).

# RESOURCES

PFLAG National has several projects that support and inform, including Straight for Equality and A Note To My Kid. Please visit [pflag.org](http://pflag.org) for more information on these and other resources.

## Other Support and Advocacy Organizations

There are numerous other organizations that work on behalf of people who are LGBTQ. The following list includes just a few of the groups that may be able to provide you with information or services:

### Advocates For Youth

[www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)  
(202) 419-3420

### Ali Forney Center

[www.aliforneycenter.org](http://www.aliforneycenter.org)  
(212) 222-3427

### Bisexual Resource Center

[www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net)  
(617) 424-9595

### Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE)

[www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org)  
(415) 861-5437

### Deaf Queer Resource Center

[www.deafqueer.org/411/about/index.html](http://www.deafqueer.org/411/about/index.html)  
[planet.deafqueer.com/welcome/](http://planet.deafqueer.com/welcome/)

### EveryoneIsGay.com

[www.everyoneisgay.com](http://www.everyoneisgay.com)

### Family Acceptance Project

[fap@sfsu.edu](mailto:fap@sfsu.edu)  
[familyproject.sfsu.edu](http://familyproject.sfsu.edu)

### Family Equality Council (FEC)

[www.familyequality.org](http://www.familyequality.org)  
(617) 502-8700

### Gay Asian Pacific Support Network

[www.gapsn.org](http://www.gapsn.org)  
(213) 368-6488

### Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)  
(212) 727-0135

### Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network)

[www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org)  
(415) 552-4229

### Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)

[www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org)  
(323) 933-2240

**Hetrick-Martin Institute**  
(Home of Harvey Milk  
High School)  
[www.hmi.org](http://www.hmi.org)  
(212) 674-2400

**Human Rights Campaign (HRC)**  
[www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)  
(202) 628-4160

**It Gets Better**  
[www.itgetsbetter.org](http://www.itgetsbetter.org)

**Lambda Legal Defense and  
Education Fund**  
[www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org)  
(212) 809-8585

**Lavender Youth Recreation and  
Information Center (LYRIC)**  
[www.lyric.org](http://www.lyric.org)  
(415) 703-6150

**National Black Justice Coalition**  
[www.nbjc.org](http://www.nbjc.org)  
(202) 319-1552

**National Center for Lesbian Rights  
(NCLR)**  
[www.nclrights.org](http://www.nclrights.org)  
(415) 392-6257

**National Center for Transgender  
Equality (NCTE)**  
[www.transequality.org](http://www.transequality.org)  
(202) 903-0112

**National Gay and Lesbian  
Task Force**  
[www.thetaskforce.org](http://www.thetaskforce.org)  
(202) 393-5177

**National Queer Asian Pacific  
Islander Alliance**  
[www.nqapia.org](http://www.nqapia.org)  
(202) 422-4909

**Sexuality Information and  
Education Council of the United  
States (SEICUS)**  
[www.SIECUS.org](http://www.SIECUS.org)  
(212) 819-9770

**The Transgender Law Center**  
[www.transgenderlawcenter.org](http://www.transgenderlawcenter.org)  
(415) 865-0176

**The Trevor Project**  
[www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)  
[www.thetrevorproject.org/chat](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/chat)  
(866) 488-7386

**Unid@s**  
[www.unidoslgbt.com](http://www.unidoslgbt.com)

**Youth Resource**  
[www.youthresource.com](http://www.youthresource.com)  
(202) 419-3420

## **Publications, Periodicals, and Films:**

There are literally thousands of books, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, and films available that provide additional support and resources to parents and families of people who are LGBTQ as well as LGBTQ individuals themselves.

One great place to start is the CDC website for LGBTQ resources for youth and families, [www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm). Also, use your favorite search engine to research “lgbt youth resources.”

## **Anti-LGBT Organizations to Avoid:**

There are a number of groups that have formed to oppose basic civil rights and equality for people who are LGBT. 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-LGBT legislation.

**Knowing who they are and the harm that they pose to you 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](http://www.pfaw.org)) has a resource center that lists some of these groups, descriptions of their work, and archives of what they’ve advocated in their own words.

Some of the organizations covered include:

- 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
- Exodus International (as of 2013, shut down and renamed “Speak Love.” No information as of yet whether this organization holds the same views as the previous incarnation)
- Family Research Council
- 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 National membership:

- The *PFLAG Voice*, our monthly newsletter;
- A subscription to our annual newsletter, the *PFLAGpole*
- *Action Alerts* via email;
- 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 nation's largest network of parents, families, friends, and allies advocating for LGBT equality

To join as an at-large member, visit [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org) or fill in the application below and mail the application to: **PFLAG National, 1828 L Street, NW, Suite 660, Washington, DC 20036**

## Member Information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Payment Information:

Check enclosed made payable to PFLAG.

Visa    Mastercard    Discover    American Express

Please charge my card (minimum annual membership: \$50):

\$50    \$100    \$250    \$500    \$1,000    Other amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp.: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

*Important: For your membership payment to be processed, the member name and address must match what appears on your credit card billing statement. If you wish to purchase a membership as a gift for someone else, please call the PFLAG National office at (202) 467-8180, ext. 220.*

# OTHER PFLAG PUBLICATIONS

## *Our Daughters and Sons: Questions and Answers for Parents of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual People*

One of our most popular publications, this is a “must read” for parents who are forming new and honest relationships with a loved one who has come out to them. This publication answers several commonly asked questions about having a gay child and includes a list of related resources.

## *Welcoming Our Trans Family and Friends*

This publication is a resource for parents and friends of transgender and gender-nonconforming adults and youth. This guide will help answer some of your questions and concerns. This publication provides information, resources, and strategies on creating a safe space for transgender and gender-nonconforming family and friends, as well as addressing your own feelings.

## *Faith in Our Families: Parents, Families, and Friends Talk About Religion and Homosexuality*

Discovering that a loved one is LGBT can pose new questions about your faith and may prompt you to reevaluate 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. The booklet includes an updated list of gay and lesbian religious and spiritual groups to watch out for.

## *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 publication is a valuable resource for Spanish-speaking families coming to terms with LGBT loved ones who are coming out. It answers commonly asked questions about having a gay or lesbian loved one and includes Spanish language resources.

*guide to being a straight ally  
(2012 Edition)*

This guide will help you understand how straight allies fit in the effort to achieve equality for all. Learn more about what it means to be a straight ally and get some great tips and tools to being more supportive of your LGBT friends, family, and colleagues.

*read this before you put your  
metatarsals between your mandible  
and maxilla: straight for equality in  
healthcare*

This guide helps health-care professionals understand how they too can help move equality forward. By being more inclusive in their language and learning more about the unique challenges that LGBT people face, doctors, nurses,

and allied health professionals can change or save lives.

*be not afraid, help is on the way!  
straight for equality in faith  
communities*

No matter where your faith community falls on LGBT people and/or issues, Straight for Equality is here to help. Learn how to address your own discomfort when it comes to LGBT issues in the context of your religious beliefs, how you can become an ally, and how you can take small but important steps to express your support for the LGBT community.

All publications are available as a free download at [pflag.org/](http://pflag.org/) publications and also for purchase. Visit our website or call (202) 467-8180 for more information.



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