I love you, and I will always love you.

When he began transitioning he felt much better about himself and has gained in confidence and pride as he has settled into a more fluid gender. He is so much more comfortable and the whole family has become involved not only in his transition but meeting a range of his very diverse friends which has made our lives so much richer than before.

A parent talks about their daughter/son undergoing physical/hormonal changes to match the gender they identify with.

You need to talk to?

8000 OUTLINE 0800 688 5463

For families of young people who are queer, lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual or questioning.

One Mother’s Experience

Where we least expected we found support. Most of all as a family we have grown through this and have developed a stronger family and we continue to navigate the road together and we are all richer for the experience. J is our wonderful son so we could not compromise or change any part of who he is or we very proud.

It takes courage for young people to come out to their parents. It may take us by surprise

When a person expresses their sexuality or gender identity to those close to them, it is known as ‘coming out’. When your child comes out to you, it is perfectly natural to be feeling a wave of different emotions including confusion, guilt, shame, anger, remorse and fear. This pamphlet may help you to ease some of these tensions and begin a pathway towards acceptance.

It is most important to listen

It may help you understand better to ask your child some questions such as:

How did you know?

How long have you known?

How are you feeling about all this?

How did you know?

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How long have you known?
I am sure my child is gay or transgender, but they haven’t come out to me

There is an element of bravery towards opening your eyes to the possibilities of your child being gay/gender diverse. This is a journey of exploration that your child has to figure out by themselves – it is usually best for them to come out in their own time.

The best thing you can do for your child is to listen, talk and engage with them about any feelings that they may have. This is the basis of the beginning of a strong relationship between you both.

People have different feelings about coming out

Some young people do not want to tell everybody at once but come out over a long period of time. Your support to enable them to take it slowly will be just as important as supporting the one who wants to tell everybody and may be discriminated against.

“I felt pretty scared to tell anyone but realised after telling my best friend that I needed to tell my Mum and Dad. After all this was me.”

How parents feel about their child’s coming out

As a parent of a newly out young person you are likely to experience a mixture of emotions. You might feel relieved that your child is opening up, along with some confusion, worry and possibly even guilt or anger. Use this experience as an opportunity to get close to them. Treat them with compassion and reach out to talk with your partner or close friend and with others as you will not be the first to have these mixed feelings.

Your reactions may be like some of these – “They are mistaken”, or, “It’s just a phase”. You might think it is a mistake – “It’s not happening in my family”. You may feel anger, shame and disappointment or question where you might have gone wrong. You may want to set some boundaries such as “Please don’t bring anyone home to meet us”.

This type of bargaining is a way of setting up some boundaries to enable you as parents to feel more comfortable. These boundaries may change over time. You may feel down, even depressed, because you do not know what to do. You may feel that all your dreams for your child have been squashed. It might feel like a huge loss. Some of these feelings will pass quickly and you will be able to accept your youngster’s identity.

I don’t understand but I want to understand

Acceptance does not mean you do not feel a sense of loss but it is an attempt to live with this reality. A couple may experience differing levels of acceptance which can bring tension to a marriage as one feels the other one is not accepting what is happening and is therefore unsupportive to the other partner, their child and the family.

These feelings do not make you a bad parent. Remain honest and frank with all the family and you will be rewarded with the confidence that your young person has found their self. Throughout their questioning and coming out, young people need to know that you love them no matter what and hear you say – “I love you and want you to be happy”.

Will it bring shame on our culture?

Some cultures are more at ease with LGBTQ people than others. Diverse sexualities and genders occur in all races, cultures and religions. While some cultures may be less tolerant of differences in sexuality, others may be more inclusive. Seek information both within your community and from the internet. If your feelings of shame are overwhelming seek a assistance from counsellor, perhaps from outside your cultural group.

Our family’s religion forbids homosexuality

Strong religious beliefs can present an extra layer of complexity for LGBTQ people and their families. There is no easy answer to resolve conflicting beliefs about religion and sexuality. Some LGBTQ people feel confident that spiritually they are who they are meant to be and are able to maintain their religious practices and beliefs. Others may find spiritual fulfillment within new organisations or network with fellow LGBTQ people of faith. Still others find it hard to integrate and disconnect from religious communities.

Why does my child feel this way? Have I done something wrong?

Being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer identified is a natural and normal identity. LGBTQ people are raised in all kinds of homes within every culture and society in the world, regardless of socio-economic, religious or ethnic factors. They are able to live meaningful and successful lives and have strong loving relationships.

As understanding grows and acceptance becomes more common, being LGBT is no longer becoming the barrier that it used to be.

What caused it?

No one knows why some people are gay, bisexual, heterosexual, or transgender. But we do know that no one, including parents can make you queer. Sometimes it can be helpful to recognise relatives who never married or wore clothing not usual to their sex and wonder if they too were queer. Our young people may need our help to feel safe and find their way in the world and they need the support of the broader LGBTQ community.

How can my child be sure? Maybe they’re just rebelling or experimenting

It is natural to try to think of this new information as ‘just a phase’. It is important to remember that being LGBT is not a choice. It is challenging for LGBTQ people in a society that still has a long way to go towards embracing diversity.

Your child who has come out to you, has usually gone through a long and hard process of acknowledging their own sexual orientation and gender identity. The fact that your child has told you shows their love for you and desire to have an honest relationship with you. It may also be a sign that they need your support.

1. Engage with your child
   - They need the same support and care as your other children. Listen, ask questions, empathise, share and be there for your child. Do the same activities that you have always done together.

2. Ask your child
   - Ask your child before you talk to others on your child’s behalf. Be respectful of what your child wants at this time.

3. Inform yourself
   - Get the facts about sexual orientation and gender identity. Learn new words and challenge yourself about stereotypes you may have about LGBTQ people. For example, sexual orientation describes a person who feels attraction to people of the opposite gender, to same gender or both genders.

4. Get to know the community
   - Are there gay resources for your young person? Is there a straight gay (queer straight) alliance at the local high school. Offer transport for them to go groups. Encourage them to bring their friends home. Your home can be a welcoming place for them to meet without verbal or physical harassment. Transitioning and coming out can take a long time as they come to understand their sexuality, gender and self. There is still discrimination particularly for gender diverse young people so welcoming and safe groups and spaces are very important.

5. Other Parents
   - Find out if there are other parents of gay, transgender, queer, lesbian youth you may know but talk to your child first before you talk to other parents.

6. Find out more
   - Explore the internet, check out the LAGANZ timeline and famous LGBT New Zealanders – entertainers such as the Topp Twins, writers including Witi Ihimaera and Katherine Mansfield, well-known artists like Frances Hodgkins; a number of past and current politicians including Georgina Beyer and Louisa Wall; and medal-winning athletes such as equestrian champion Mary Taint.

7. Don’t make it all there is
   - Just because your child has come out as LGBTQ does not mean their world revolves around gender identity or sexual orientation. Continue to talk about all the other things you used to talk about.

8. Praise your child
   - Praise your child for coming to you to discuss their personal information.

9. Find out about support services
   - Is there an anti-bullying programme at school? What is involved in transitioning? What health supports are there?

10. Educate yourself
    - Find out about the laws and policies regarding LGBTQ people.