

### 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. We are very proud.

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.

### Note to my kid from a Dad

You will always be my son no matter what. I was surprised to hear you say you are gay and I have had to have some time to think about this but realise it changes nothing in how I feel about you as my son. I would like to meet your friends and learn about any problems you may have when people have a negative attitude towards you. You are a beautiful person so never forget that.  
Love from Dad

## Resources

### Support Group

Holding Our Own is a support group for parents of LGBTQ people.  
Please go to: [www.holdingourown.co.nz](http://www.holdingourown.co.nz)

### Documentary

Lead with Love is a documentary directed by Jenny McKenzie that follows four families who have recently learnt their child is gay. It is available online at: [www.leadwithlovefilm.com/film](http://www.leadwithlovefilm.com/film)



Need someone to talk to?

OUTLINE NZ-0 0800 OUTLINE 0800 688 5463



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



### 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?

You may need to accept that you were not the first person your child has told. Usually a person comes out to themselves, then to a friend and then to a sibling before they feel strong enough to tell their parents. The most important thing is to be supportive, help keep your child safe and let them know that you love them unconditionally. Make it clear that that hasn't changed by telling them "I love you, and I will always love you".

### What is LGBTQ?

The group of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer is often abbreviated to LGBTQ.

Gay, lesbian and bisexual are terms used to represent same-sex attraction – when a person is attracted to and loves someone of the same gender. It's not always this black and white: the person might be attracted to both genders and identify as bisexual. An asexual person does not express sexual desire.

Transgender or trans is a general term for gender-diverse people. Gender-diverseness occurs when a person's own sense of gender identity does not match the sex they were born as.

Queer is a general term that can cover all types of sexuality including gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, transgender or people who not be sure about who they are attracted to.

To understand this it is useful to understand the difference between sex identification at birth and gender identity. Sex identification at birth is often determined by chromosomes and external appearance of reproductive organs.

Gender identity refers to how a person identifies. Someone can identify as male, female, in between, both, or neither. A person's own gender identity is influenced by culture, feelings, thoughts, clothing, people around us, and more. It is helpful to think of gender as a continuum, with male and female at either end.

Transgender is usually used to describe people who were assigned a sex at birth and identify with a different gender identity.

People who are gender questioning find traditional gender roles are too restrictive for them.



### Being LGBTQ in Aotearoa

At least a quarter of the New Zealand population experience attraction to the same sex, have sexual experience or question the identity they were assigned at birth. LGBTQ people in New Zealand enjoy marriage equality and are protected in law from discrimination. Despite this, some people do not understand, or feel threatened by, people who are different from themselves.

### LGBTQ Communities

There are a number of LGBTQ organisations throughout the country with many interest groups that your young person can participate in. These may include cultural and film festivals, music groups, art, sports teams, tramping, dance parties and health support groups and resources. There are newspapers as well as online groups.

These groups such as OUTline, Q-topia (in Christchurch) and Rainbow Youth (in Auckland) help your young person feel included and lessen the sense of being different.

There is a group for parents in Auckland 'Holding Your Own' with a website: [www.holdingyourown.co.nz](http://www.holdingyourown.co.nz). There is also a national data base for Queer and trans resources: [www.curious.org.nz](http://www.curious.org.nz).

## 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 fulfilment 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.

# COMING OUT!

As understanding grows and acceptance becomes more common, being LGBTQ 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 LGBTQ 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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 to 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 their self. There is still discrimination particularly for gender diverse young people so welcoming and safe groups and spaces are very important.

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### 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.

# TEN Tips for Parents of LGBTQ

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### 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 Blyth Tait.

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### 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.

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### Praise your child

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

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### Find out about support services

Is there an anti-bullying programme at school? What is involved in transitioning? What health supports are there?

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### Educate yourself

Find out about the laws and policies regarding LGBT people.