



Families like mine

A guide for parents and families of young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, gender diverse or who are questioning their sexuality or gender identity

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We recognise the diversity of identity among families living in Australia including families who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or of migrant or refugee background. We have attempted to be as inclusive of this diversity as possible without referring to specific strengths and concerns of individual cultures or religions.

The development of this guide included consultation with blueVoices members, *beyondblue*'s national reference group for people who have personal experience of anxiety and depression, or support someone who does. Their contributions have been invaluable, including to the Project Advisory Group, which was established to help lead the development of this guide. For more information on blueVoices, visit www.beyondblue.org.au/bluevoices

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INTRODUCTION

When people reveal to their family that their sexuality or gender identity is not as expected, it can be a challenging time for everyone involved. As a parent, you will now be asking yourself a lot of questions or maybe wondering how to behave around your child or loved one.

Research around people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) and gender diverse tells us that a supportive family can make all the difference at the time of coming out, and beyond. Strong and embracing family relationships are important in supporting good health and mental wellbeing for LGB and gender diverse people. While this can be a hard time for a family, it's crucial for them to support their LGB and gender diverse family members so that they can create environments that are inclusive of sexual and gender diversity.

As with young people coming out or forming their identity, family members are on a journey too. Some families, or individuals within a family, may have more understanding and knowledge of LGB and gender diverse people and communities than others. For some, it will be a steep learning curve as they encounter LGB and gender diverse people, culture and issues for the first time. Some people may feel unsure about how to create an environment that supports their child or loved one or where to go for information and support for themselves.

This guide offers perspectives from LGB and gender diverse people and families, evidenced-based information and links to community networks to help you support your child or loved one as you move forward together.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

The purpose of this guide is to provide families with information about creating a supportive and inclusive family environment for young people who are questioning their sexuality or gender identity. It's divided into two primary sections:

1. For families of young people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) or who are questioning their sexuality.
2. For families of young people who are gender diverse, transgender or questioning their gender.

Some young people may be exploring both their sexual and gender identities and therefore, some families may find it useful to read both sections.

This guide is designed for all family members. Throughout, we often use the terms, 'your child or loved one' when we talk about a young LGB or gender diverse person in the family and acknowledge that this might speak more directly to parents. However, the content of this guide will be of use to all family members, including parents, grandparents and siblings.

In this guide, we use the term coming out as a way to talk about the experiences of disclosing information about sexuality and/or gender identities. We acknowledge that coming out has historically been more commonly linked with sexuality than with gender identity. However, when young people start to tell others that they are questioning their gender or are expressing a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth, this is a process of coming out. For some people, coming out occurs each time a person meets someone new and decides to tell them they are LGB or gender diverse. This may happen almost every time they go out somewhere new.

A note about families with intersex young people

This guide does not include a detailed section of information specifically for families with intersex children or loved ones. 'Intersex' is a broad term used to describe a set of conditions where a person is born with reproductive organs or sex chromosomes that don't fit typical definitions of 'male' or 'female'. Intersex differences affect a wide range of people with varied life experiences. For example, some intersex people have experienced medical interventions and ranges of social exclusion as they have matured, while others may not even know they are intersex until later in life. **Families like mine** was developed to cover issues related to sexuality and gender diversity during childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. The broad range of experiences of intersex people and their families is beyond the scope of this guide and we recognise it will not cover many of the issues that families will face.

For some intersex people, particularly if biological sex was incorrectly determined at a young age, gender questioning might be part of their teenage or young adult experience. We know that there are many other issues families of intersex children face; however, this guide may provide some useful information regarding gender questioning and sexual identity.

A guide for parents of intersex children that considers the variety of histories and experiences intersex people and their families face is being planned for the future. A list of organisations that may provide further information for families of intersex children or loved ones can be found in the **Resources and references** section of this guide.

A note about language

Language can tell the world how people wish to be seen and how they feel about identity. We have chosen to use the term LGB in this guide to refer to lesbian, gay and bisexual people. The term gender diverse is used to describe people whose gender identity differs from the traditional understanding of male or female or man and woman.¹ Sex and/or gender diverse people include many different groups of people with an almost infinite range of identities.

We acknowledge that not everyone uses, or is comfortable with, these terms.

Some people prefer other terms or choose not to use labels at all. Younger people, in particular, may identify with the letter Q for Queer or Questioning. You may come across some other terms with which you are unfamiliar, so we have included a **Glossary**. Because this guide is aimed primarily at parents of children and young people, we have included 'Q' for Queer or Questioning into the term 'LGBQ' to remind readers that for some young people, LGB alone does not represent the way about they feel or the questions they are exploring about their sexuality.

Understanding the difference between sexuality and gender identity

Although the terms are often used interchangeably, gender is not the same as sex. Gender consists of two components – our internal sense of gender (our gender identity), and how we express our gender or present ourselves to the world (our gender expression/presentation). Gender identity and gender expression/presentation are best understood as continuums (see Figures 1 and 2). Gender identity is different from sexual identity.

Sexuality or sexual orientation can be defined as 'each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender'.² Thus sexuality includes both sexual attraction and sexual orientation and can be identified along a continuum (see Figure 3).

Figure 1 The gender identity continuum

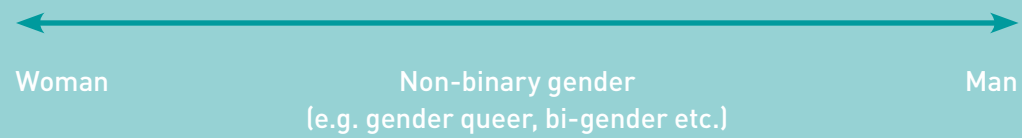


Figure 2 The gender expression/presentation continuum



Figure 3 The sexual orientation continuum





Being gay or lesbian means people have romantic and sexual attractions to other people of the same gender identity. Being bisexual means they have romantic and sexual attractions to people of more than one gender.

Being gender diverse or transgender means that a person's inner sense of gender identity is different from their biological sex assigned at birth. For example, someone born as a man, may identify as a woman. They may have a strong sense of this throughout early childhood or become aware during adolescence or later. People who identify as having no specific gender may use terms such as 'gender queer', 'gender neutral', 'gender fluid' or 'gender diverse' to indicate they feel they don't fit into traditional gender categories of male or female.

Gender diverse people may be gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual, may choose to identify as queer or describe their sexual identity in other terms. They may identify in a variety of ways that don't fit neatly within any of the categories outlined above. They may use language not covered in this guide, and how they identify may change over time as they develop their own understanding of themselves. It's important to find out how a young person identifies, and use the same language they use. If you are in doubt about the correct terminology, ask your child or loved one how they would like to be addressed and what pronoun is appropriate (i.e. 'he', 'she' or by the person's name).

Because there is an assumption in our society that people will adopt behaviours that are typically associated with being male or female, people who don't fit neatly into these categories they may be subjected to discrimination or harassment, or just feel left out, because they are different.

It's important to note that many bisexual people are discriminated against by both the heterosexual and gay/lesbian communities, and media portrayals may not be accurate or positive. As a result of the very hurtful and untrue belief that bisexual people can't make up their minds and are neither 'properly' heterosexual nor homosexual, they face increased exclusion and may struggle to find a sense of belonging. Evidence suggests that bisexual people are at particularly high risk of poor health outcomes.³

SECTION ONE: FAMILIES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL OR QUESTIONING THEIR SEXUALITY

Being LGBTQ in Australia

A major population-based survey of Australian adults conducted in 2001-2002, found that two per cent of the population identify as non-heterosexual. However, when a definition of sexuality, which included the three areas of identity, attraction and experience was used in the same study, it found up to 15 per cent of respondents had experienced same-sex attraction or had participated in consensual sexual contact with someone of the same sex, therefore potentially identifying as either lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB).⁴

In 2011, the Australian census recorded over 33,000 same-sex de-facto couples in Australia. However, as this figure includes only people who admitted to living with their same-sex partner, it could be a significant underestimation of the actual number of LGB Australians.⁵ Other Australian research suggests that up to nine per cent of secondary school students are not attracted exclusively to people of the opposite sex.⁶

“ Growing up, I didn’t really realise I was gay but I knew that I was different. All my friends started having crushes on boys or fancying famous people and I just didn’t understand it – I thought maybe they were just saying that they fancied so and so because that was what you were supposed to say. ” – Elizabeth, 28, VIC

LGBTQ communities

LGBTQ people have developed communities and generated activities that are both supportive and inclusive. There are opportunities for LGBTQ people to find friendship and a sense of connection with like-minded people.

The media’s coverage of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras or Pride marches across Australia is only one small part of the richness and diversity of LGBTQ life. There are many special interest groups and activities in which LGBTQ people can participate. For example, there are sporting teams, music groups, bushwalking groups, dance parties, family gatherings and film and arts festivals across Australia in both metropolitan and regional areas.

There are also many organisations that support the needs of LGBTQ youth – see **Resources and references**. Becoming involved with local Pride festivals is a great way to see the diversity of LGBTQ communities and to find out what is going on in your local area.

LGBTQ people have also developed strong community health and support networks to respond to the discrimination and negative attitudes that still exist and can affect people’s health and wellbeing.

There are many organisations throughout Australia that support LGBTQ people and their families by providing mental health services, sexual health services and social support groups.

Traditional media outlets and websites with an LGBTQ focus are also an important part of international and Australian LGBTQ communities. All of the different elements of LGBTQ communities provide resources for you to increase your understanding and knowledge of LGBTQ life.

Challenges for LGBTQ communities

Arguably, there is greater inclusion and visibility of LGBTQ people across Australia now than there ever has been. However, this is not universal and there are still many challenges facing LGBTQ Australians. Recent research tells us about the challenges LGBTQ people face:

- A 2011 survey revealed that around 25 per cent of gay men and lesbians have experienced recent verbal abuse or harassment.⁷
- Privacy and confidentiality are major issues for many LGBTQ people when seeking support around their sexuality, making accessing available services difficult. This is especially so in rural areas. Many LGBTQ people feel pressure to hide their sexuality in public, at work or at home for fear of discrimination or violence.
Inclusive environments, such as schools that specify sexuality and gender diversity in anti-discrimination policies are places where LGBTQ young people fare better.⁸
- LGBTQ people are at significantly greater risk of experiencing anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts.⁹ This risk has been linked to a range of factors including fear of, or actual experiences of, discrimination, rejection, social isolation or a lack of support faced by many LGBTQ people.¹⁰ However, research repeatedly shows that a supportive family environment minimises these possibilities.
- Depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts could be occurring long before coming out due to the lack of signs of an inclusive environment. The time before coming out is a high-risk time for young people. Therefore, being open to and supportive of diversity can provide a positive and inclusive environment for young people to discuss their feelings.
- LGBTQ young people in Australia may be up to six times more likely to try and take their life, with those in rural areas particularly being at risk. Fear of rejection, or being rejected, by family following disclosure of sexuality and experiences of bullying and violence, are shown to increase the risk of self-harm or suicide.¹¹ A sense of pride in identity is a protective factor for young LGBTQ people.¹²

- Without a supportive family, LGBTQ youth are more likely to experience anxiety or depression and may be more likely to engage in risky behaviours such as drug use or unsafe sex.¹³

Responding to challenges

There are many factors that support the health and wellbeing of people who are LGBTQ. Strong family relationships are hugely important to the wellbeing of LGBTQ young people. LGBTQ communities are themselves a response to the challenges faced by some of its members and provide a sense of safety, solidarity and belonging.¹⁴

A sense of connection to LGBTQ and broader communities as well as feeling pride in one's own identity are recognised as specific protective factors for the mental health of LGBTQ people. Other protective factors include:

- Close friendships with other LGBTQ people who can talk openly about their sexuality, their experiences and challenges.
- Having positive experiences with friends regarding sexuality/sexual identity.
- A supportive counsellor, teacher or a caring adult .
- Being involved with LGBTQ communities.
- Being connected to the wider community.
- Enforcement of diversity and anti-bullying policies including sexuality (and gender identity) at school.
- Involvement with supportive recreational clubs or other activities that young people enjoy and where they feel safe and supported.
- Positive portrayals of LGBTQ people in mainstream media and entertainment.

COMING OUT IN FAMILIES

What is it like for young people to come out as LGBTQ to their family?

Coming out will be a different experience for different people. Some young people will have struggled with their sexuality. Others may find it exciting and liberating to realise their sexuality. Some LGBTQ people might spend a long period looking for signs of inclusion among family and friends before coming out. Regardless, coming out to a parent, sibling or other family member can be extremely stressful.

“ I felt a sense of panic, as I expected my life would change and everyone would look at me as the ‘gay guy’, but at the same time I also felt a great sense of relief, that I could finally be myself and let my true personality come out to everyone. ” – *Liam 27, VIC*

Conversations about sexuality require people to reveal very personal feelings and desires with which they may still be coming to terms with and and that they know others may not understand. Deciding to tell a family member about being lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning, brings with it a risk of rejection and loss of family connection – it can be an incredibly scary thing to do. Therefore, young people preparing to come out will really notice when parents or other family members show inclusive and positive feelings towards same-sex attracted people or practices.

Sometimes young people are ‘outed’ before they are ready. A parent or sibling may have found a young person searching for LGBTQ information online or a young person may have been outed at school. If this has happened, it’s likely that your child will be anxious about how people are going to react. It will be important to acknowledge and understand how distressing this may be for your child or loved one.

It’s useful to remember that not every young person will want to celebrate their coming out. Some may disclose their sexuality because they want to, others because they need to. It’s important to recognise this so your child or loved one can guide you in relation to how they feel about coming out and what they want and need at this time.

“ I felt relieved and scared and of course it was really the beginning of my true self. ”
– *Owen, 37, NSW*



ROSIE'S STORY

<https://youtu.be/Oghigl8bwIA>

“ A lot of parents are so shocked they forget those quality things that need to happen, which is, ‘I want you to be happy and I love you’. And that’s really all I needed to hear. ”



When a young person in your family comes out

Some parents or family members may feel a sense of relief that their child has told them – whether this is because they had a sense they might be LGBTQ or just because they are pleased their child felt comfortable to talk to them. Some parents describe feeling shocked, paralysed or like ‘a bomb has dropped’ on the family. Some people feel a sense of shame, sadness and/or grief. These feelings and reactions are not uncommon.

“Be open, honest and frank with your kids, encourage communication from an early age. Allow them to feel like they can come to you with problems or questions, no matter how difficult. Don’t shy away from the elephant in the room and above all else, love and support them with every fibre. They will go through enough difficult times without you adding to them.” – Stephen, 52, VIC

Coming out — common thoughts and questions

My child or loved one seems more happy and confident in themselves. How do I reinforce this even if I am still feeling shocked and struggling with my own feelings?

For some LGBTQ young people, coming out about their sexuality allows them to express openly who they are and what they feel, often for the first time. Coming out is often described as ‘a weight off their shoulders’, as they no longer have to hide a ‘secret’ from their parents and others or struggle alone with questions about their sexuality. Coming out has been shown to have a positive effect on a young person’s self-esteem, especially if it’s supported by positive family reactions. Some young people will be

going through a process of working out what their sexual attractions mean for them. Sometimes, telling someone about what they are thinking, even if they are confused, helps a young person feel more comfortable. If you notice this in your child or loved one, you might say you’ve noticed they seem happier and that this makes you happy.

I’m struggling to come to terms with my LGBTQ child’s identity... does this make me a bad parent?

Initially, it’s not uncommon for parents and family members to experience a range of confusing emotions (some of which may be negative) when their child or loved one comes out. Feelings of guilt, shock, shame, disappointment, denial or grief may be experienced by you or other family members. As a parent, you may feel some or all of these emotions, but it’s important to remember that this does not make you a bad parent because you are struggling to understand your child or loved one’s sexuality. It’s OK for you to take some time to process your feelings. While having a range of emotions might make this a difficult time for you, remember that coming out is a really hard journey for your child or loved one too.

Remember that your child or loved one is the same person they were before they told you, and they need to know you can see that. While it might take some time for your emotions to settle, it’s important that you remain close and supportive, so your child or loved one is reassured that your love for them has not changed.

“It was very scary. I had always had the impression my father was homophobic so I told my mother and we told my dad. Surprisingly it brought us closer.” – Owen, 37, NSW

Will my child or loved one still have a good life with loving relationships?

Being LGBQ is not a barrier to a happy life. Many families worry that their LGBQ child is in for a lonely or difficult life, but the opposite may be true. While most LGBQ people encounter discrimination or social exclusion at some point, this is not likely to be a dominant part of their life. In fact, a lot of LGBQ people find it easy to make friends and find partners because LGBQ communities offer so many opportunities to connect with others. More likely, your child or loved one will be surrounded by friends and in time, develop romantic relationships that are meaningful and fulfilling. Of course, they might also have the typical trials and tribulations that all people experience when negotiating romantic relationships. You can help your child or loved one have a good life by being supportive and including them, their friends and partner(s) in your family.

“... her life has been far from lonely.”
– John, 66, VIC

Our family’s religion forbids homosexuality. How can I accept my child or loved one and still maintain my faith?

Many religions have strict views about homosexuality and it can be seen as sinful or going against religious teachings. Strong religious beliefs can present an extra complexity for LGBQ people and their families. There are no simple answers as to how people can resolve conflicting beliefs about religion and sexuality. Some LGBQ people feel confident that spiritually, they are who they’re meant to be and they’re able to maintain their religious practices and beliefs. Other people may find spiritual fulfilment within new organisations or networks with fellow LGBQ people of faith. For some LGBQ people, religion and sexuality are hard to integrate and they become disconnected from religious communities.

Some families worry that by accepting that their child or loved one is LGBQ, they are encouraging a life without faith. Alternatively they may worry they will have to give up their own faith, but this is not the case. You can search for other people with similar

experiences to you on the internet or through community organisations. Within LGBQ communities, there are many support, social and prayer groups from a range of religions that may be helpful.

I’m worried this will bring shame on my culture or community.

Some cultures are more inclusive and familiar with LGBQ people and issues than others, but it’s worth remembering that diverse sexualities are found in all races, cultures and religions. While some people within your community may be against homosexuality, others will be more inclusive. Nevertheless, if you fear that your culture or community will find it difficult to accept or understand the sexual identity of your child or loved one, you may feel isolated and unsure where to turn for support. Sometimes, people find it useful to look outside their close community to find information and support. Again, the internet can be a good place to find information and you can also consult the [support groups](#) and [Resources and references](#) at the back of this guide. Remember, sexuality is nothing to be ashamed about. You, your child or loved one have done nothing wrong. If your feelings of shame are overwhelming, talking about them to a professional counsellor, perhaps outside of your local community, may be useful.

Did I do something wrong?

We do not know what determines sexuality. Many people feel that they were born gay, lesbian, or bisexual even if they do not realise this until they are older. What we do know is that LGBQ people are raised in all types of families, societies and cultures. There is no evidence that different parenting styles have a bearing on the sexuality of children or that anything parents do influences their child’s sexuality. Try to remember that there is nothing wrong or abnormal about being LGBQ. There is no one to blame and it’s no one’s fault when it comes to human sexuality. Sexuality and diversity are a natural part of life.

“Always be there and display your love and support. Listen to [your child] and their feelings.”
– John, 66, VIC

I wish my child could have told me earlier. Why didn't they? How did I miss the signs?

Young LGBTQ people may take a while to understand their sexual identity themselves. They may have deliberately hidden their feelings from you until they were ready or comfortable to share this information. This does not mean they do not love or trust you or that you did anything wrong by not knowing. Your child or loved one may have been concerned or scared about how family members would respond. Coming out to a parent or parents can be difficult, and young people may choose to tell others first.

Some young people will tell certain people in a family first, maybe one parent or one sibling, or a trusted aunt or uncle. They might then ask that person to tell others or to keep the information to themselves until they feel more self-assured and ready for others to know. By telling only one adult in the family, your child or loved one might have felt safer. The trusted adult could tell other family members so initially, the young person is shielded from potential prejudice and/or misunderstanding from other family members. The trusted adult could also talk to family members about the young person's fears and concerns. As your child or loved one has come to you now, make the most of this opportunity to reassure them and provide support.

“My sister told my dad while I was in my room, and when she had finished explaining to him, my dad called me upstairs while my sister walked down crying. I was expecting a bad situation, but my dad hugged me and asked why I didn't tell him this myself, and I am his son and he will love me no matter what.” – Liam, 27, VIC

If asked, how do I tell my partner and/or other family members?

Understandably, some LGBTQ young people might be very wary of coming out. They might tell only one parent, and expect that parent to tell the other parent, or others in the family. This is probably because they are fearful about the reaction of that individual. It's understandable that this might cause anxiety or concern for you. Make sure that you have support, someone to talk to or seek advice from and some strategies in place if your partner has a negative reaction. Sometimes, a young person might need to stay with a friend or other family member for a few days if they feel unsafe or unwelcome at home.

Also, you could tell your partner what you have learned from this guide and explain how important a positive, supportive response is for your child or loved one's wellbeing.

Some LGBTQ people will leave it to the parents to tell extended family members because parents are more likely to have a better understanding of the potential reactions of their own parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts or uncles. It's important to remember that how you react and inform others will influence how they form their own opinions and reactions to the news that your child or loved one is LGBTQ. Positive responses from you will demonstrate to others that you support your child or loved one, even if you are still struggling with the news yourself. Advocating for your child or loved one in this way demonstrates that you are on their side and want the best for them.

At the time of coming out or soon after, take some time to talk and 'negotiate' the next steps with your child or loved one – develop a plan and assess the risks of adverse reactions from others.

“It was not something we 'announced' to others, but it was not hidden and if it raised its head it was just discussed and we moved on. If no big deal is made by us then others seemed to not see it as a big deal.”
– John, 66, VIC

Is my child or loved one at risk of HIV or AIDS or other diseases? Should I talk with them about sex and sexual health?

All people need correct information about sex and sexual health. Being LGBTQ does not automatically mean your child or loved one will engage in unsafe sexual practices. It's the activities in which a person engages, not their sexual identity, that puts them at risk of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. HIV is transmitted through blood, semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk. It can be transmitted through sharing needles, unsterile tattooing or body piercing, unprotected sex and from mother-to-child during childbirth or breastfeeding. Practising safe sex and not sharing needles is the best protection against HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections and blood-borne viruses. Although it may be new for you, it's important to talk to your child or loved one about staying safe in all types of intimate, sexual relationships. This includes practising safe sex, as well as building healthy, respectful relationships.

“Sexual health is something we are very attuned to. We encourage [our son] to get regular check-ups.”
– Stephen, 52, VIC

Information about safer sex can be easily provided by Sexual Health Clinics and AIDS councils in your State or Territory.



JULIE'S STORY

<https://youtu.be/bPGGyDQsUms>

“ I couldn't support him if I wasn't OK, so I had to go on that little search and journey to find some answers.”



THE POWER OF FAMILY: SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD OR LOVED ONE WHO IS GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL OR QUESTIONING THEIR SEXUALITY

Ways to support your child or loved one

There are many ways to support and encourage your child or loved one, even if they aren't yet comfortable talking directly about their sexuality. Spend time with them, engage in general conversation and continue to do things you have always enjoyed doing together. Just hanging out will demonstrate to your child or loved one that you love them as always and that any new information has not fractured your relationship. It will also ensure you have relaxed times together which may help them initiate conversations if they wish. Let them know the door is open for them to talk to you about how they are feeling and what they experience. Try to avoid being over-protective and let them live their life. Regardless of where your child or loved one is at, all young people need to know that they are loved, respected and trusted. Anything you can do to demonstrate this to them will be valuable.

“I know it came as a surprise and I understand that Mum may not have known what to say on the spot but I wish my parents could have followed up with a letter or an email to say that they still loved me and were ok with it.” – Elizabeth, 28, VIC

You could also:

- Act the same around them as you always have – keep telling them you love them and show affection in the same ways you have before.
- Provide space if they need it, but leave the door open to further conversations.
- Recognise this is not likely to be a single conversation, but a series of conversations and a continual process.
- Ask questions and acknowledge that your own level of knowledge is limited and be honest if you don't understand.
- Be respectful about who you talk to about your child or loved one being LGBTQ. Let them take the lead on this. Some young people may want you to tell everybody so that they don't have to continue to have the coming out conversation. Other young people will not want you to tell anyone.
- Be honest with your child or loved one. If you are concerned or confused, you can tell them this, but reassure them they don't need to worry about you.
- Encourage your child or loved one to introduce you to their friends or partner(s) and make sure they know their friends are welcome at home.
- If your child or loved one is keen to make connections with other young LGBTQ people, you could offer to give them a hand by helping to find relevant groups, driving them to group meetings or events and offering to host a meeting at your place. Being engaged in their life will also help you make sure they are reaching out to people in safe and supportive environments.

Tips for communicating with your child or loved one

In many cases, young people coming out will have had a long time to think about what they will say and how they will handle the situation. They may even have had professional or peer support. This is usually not the case for parents and family members. You may not know what to say or what questions to ask. This is common. It's OK to take your time, do some reading, talk to people and allow the conversations to happen over time.

When initiating conversations:

- Pick a suitable time and place. If the house is not suitable, find a neutral calm place outside the house, such as a park or quiet café.
- Make sure you have time. If you start to open up to each other, it would be a shame to have to cut it short to do other things.
- Understand that after coming out, a person may need some time alone and may not be ready to talk. Let them know that when they are ready, you will be there. You may need to try again gently at a later date. Don't give up.
- Don't initiate conversations when you are feeling upset or anxious. Try to find time when you are feeling calm. It's OK for you to get support elsewhere if you need to talk things through first.
- When talking to your child, encourage them to talk freely, remain quiet and let them direct the conversation. If they feel like it's an interrogation, it will diminish their willingness to talk.

'Door-opening' questions to get the conversation going

- Sometimes, asking about others' experiences is less confronting than asking your child and loved one about themselves. You could ask questions such as, "Do you know other young people who are LGBTQ?", "How has it been for them?" or "Have you read any books about LGBTQ young people or their parents? What do they talk about?"

- "Is there anything I can do to help you or make things easier for you?"
- "Do you have any friends you would like me or the rest of our family to meet? They are always welcome to come over to our place."
- "Are there any books or websites you would like me to read?" Or perhaps tell your child or loved one about books or resources you have read and what you thought.
- "Is there anything you'd like me to know that I don't already know?"

Showing support — common thoughts and questions

I think that my child or loved one might be attracted to people of the same sex, but they haven't said anything to me. Should I ask them?

It's important to let young people take the lead about what they choose to tell you. Your child or loved one will talk to you about their sexuality when the time is right for them. The most helpful thing parents or loved ones can do for children is to create an environment where children know they will be supported no matter who they are. Challenge any negative statements you hear about LGBTQ people and make it clear you are OK with LGBTQ people.

I don't know anything about LGBTQ life. How can I support my child or loved one?

It's OK that you may not know much about LGBTQ life; you can still celebrate your child or loved one's achievements with them and be involved in important milestones in their life. You can learn about LGBTQ life from your child or loved one, their friends and their partners just by being interested in and engaged with their lives. You can also support them through periods of difficulty or heartache as you would any other child. Most relationship experiences are similar for both LGBTQ and heterosexual people – draw on your own experience to give advice and support.

“My mum accepted it and my father was great. He realised that the reason we hadn’t bonded wasn’t a failure on his parenting but that I was different to him and my brother. He wishes me success and happiness.” – *Owen, 37, NSW*

I’m worried about discrimination my child may face because of their sexuality.

Unfortunately, there are people who feel uncomfortable with LGBTQ people and LGBTQ communities. Some people may even make deliberately hurtful or aggressive remarks or actively exclude people who are not, or who appear not to be, heterosexual. Others will be unaware that their heterosexism (assumptions that all people are or should be heterosexual) is an issue. However, there will be plenty of people in the community who will be supportive and admire your child or loved one because they want the best for them.

The more open and inclusive your family environment can be, the greater the chance your child or loved one can talk about any negative experiences they’ve had and ask for help. Your child or loved one may have developed already some strategies for coping with bullying or discrimination about their sexuality. You can ask your child or loved one how it’s going for them. Ask if they have had any negative reactions and if there is anything you can do to help. You can find out about your child or loved one’s legal rights and ways to report discrimination if they choose to do so. Your child or loved one might also want time and privacy to process any hurtful or humiliating experiences.

Remember that your worries and concerns about discrimination should not be a reason to hold your child or loved one back from living the life that makes them happy. Often, parents’ fears and concerns are worse in their minds than the reality. Make sure you have plenty of support so you can talk openly about your worries and fears with trusted friends or a health professional.

“Regardless, we worry as parents that these things will happen. My comment to my son when he came out was that he needed to be aware that there will be detractors and hurtful people in his path some times and that it was a challenge that he may have to face. But I am glad to see so much in the media and general community that this sort of behaviour is being discouraged at large.” – *Stephen, 52, VIC*

Research shows that rejection by family members based on sexuality can have very bad consequences for a young person’s health and wellbeing. Coming out about sexuality is a high-risk time for young people.¹⁵ Unfortunately, some young LGBTQ people contemplate suicide before they find the courage and strength to tell their family and/or friends. Some will act on these suicidal thoughts. During this precarious time, the reactions you have to new information and the efforts you make to communicate with your child or loved one can have a significant impact on how they move forward.

MATT'S STORY

<https://youtu.be/JV5ZUXnuvwM>

“ That’s the protective factor in my family – it’s love... it allowed me to be me and that was the most important thing that my family could have done.”



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Ways to support yourself

It's OK to give yourself some time to make sense of the new information and emotions you feel when your child or loved one comes out. It's important to look after yourself at this time. You may have to give yourself time and space to let go of some of the ways you perceived your child or loved one, now or in their future. This does not mean you are not being supportive or inclusive. It's possible to feel shocked or challenged, while also reassuring your child or loved one that you love and support them. In the longer term, it will be important that you support and affirm your love for them as they move through life.

Recognise that as a parent or loved one, you will also need to go through a coming out process alongside your child or loved one. Therefore, coming out provides an opportunity to develop a shared experience with your child or loved one that can draw you closer together over time. It's also important to remember that how you react and inform others will influence how they form their opinions and reactions to the news. Positive, inclusive responses from you will show others that you affirm and support your child or loved one.

Moving forward together

It's important to remember that how you feel today may not be how you feel tomorrow. You may have good days and bad and the more you strive to understand, the more confident you will feel. Supporting, understanding and appreciating your child or loved one's sexuality is an ongoing process. If you feel confusion or even shame about your child or loved one coming out, don't assume you will always feel this way. There are ways of moving forward, and you and your child or loved one may want to be on this journey with you together. Taking some positive action is important; make an effort to learn and be prepared to change your ideas and opinions.

- Read books and online articles about LGBTQ people and communities. (Appropriate novels with LGBTQ characters as well as non-fiction may be good).
- Access LGBTQ community media.
- Get to know LGBTQ people, this may be your child or loved one's friends or it may be adults with whom you have contact.
- Speak to other parents or families with LGBTQ children. This is where groups like [Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays \(PFLAG\)](#) can be helpful.
- Remember that your child or loved one may be moving between positive and negative feelings about their sexuality, just as you may be. A positive attitude about the future can help your child a lot.

Tips for taking care of yourself

- Knowledge is power. Seek information about LGBTQ people and culture; there are many resources available online, through services and from LGBTQ specialist bookshops. See [Resources and references](#).
- Seek information about how other families have moved forward when their child or loved one came out. Organisations such as [PFLAG \(Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays\)](#) provide resources and emotional support for parents. There are also many books and online resources available about families' experiences.
- Be kind to yourself. You will not always get it right when you have difficult conversations with your child or loved one, no matter what the topic. If your child or loved one knows that you love and support them no matter what, then you are allowed to make mistakes. As uncomfortable as it can sometimes feel, mistakes can be a way we learn and get closer to people, so don't be afraid to 'open up' with your child or loved one.
- Talk to your friends. You may be worried about how your friends will react, but if you need to talk through issues, then having friends you can talk to is really important. They may be more understanding than you expect. Think about who is likely to

have the most supportive response and contact them. As with your child or loved one, supportive friendships and positive responses help protect your mental health and general wellbeing. If your child or loved one has asked you not to talk about their sexuality, it's still possible to tell your friends that you are struggling with the challenges of parenting and seek support, without giving the precise reason.

- When your child or loved one is LGBTQ, you may feel you have to tell others. There will be times when you are comfortable with this and times when you might feel a sense of discomfort or shame. This is common and may be similar to what your child or loved one is experiencing. Some days you feel brave about being different, some days you don't. Go easy on yourself. Coming out about your child or loved one's identity is likely to get easier the more times you do it.
- Seek professional advice and support if you need more help or just want to talk things through. There are many counsellors experienced with LGBTQ people and their families. Speak to your GP about whether you may be eligible for Medicare rebates to see a trained mental health professional. If possible, make contact with an LGBTQ-friendly professional; LGBTQ community groups and organisations can help with referrals. See [Resources and references](#).

Taking care of yourself — common thoughts and questions

Can I still be a grandparent?

Changes in social attitudes regarding LGBTQ parenting, changes to laws relating to the availability of assisted-reproductive technologies to lesbian and single women and increased surrogacy options for gay men, have all contributed to the so called 'gayby/gabie' boom phenomena. This phenomenon describes the ever-increasing number of LGBTQ people who are embracing parenthood. A recent survey of 3,835 LGBTQ and transgender individuals found that 33 per cent of women and 11 per cent of men had children or stepchildren living with them. Close to 40 per cent reported wanting to have children or more children.⁵ Therefore, reproduction and other avenues for starting a

family can and does happen in LGBTQ couples. As with the heterosexual population, however, some LGBTQ people will choose to become parents and some will not.

“Mum and Dad had their period of sadness, knowing that I would have social difficulty growing up now, that they would never get grandchildren from me etc. but they always supported me. Mum understood it more, whereas dad had more difficulty coming to terms that this was not a phase, and over time he saw that it was just me and part of who I was. I guess he had a lot more to learn than mum did.” – Liam, 27, VIC



I feel like the only one. I don't know any other families with LGBTQ people in them.

Tens of thousands of families in Australia have members who identify as LGBTQ. If you do not know anyone else with a LGBTQ family member, then seek people out. There are many other families who initially have felt isolated, but who have made new connections and friends as they support their LGBTQ child or loved one. If you are in a rural or isolated area and cannot meet face-to-face with others in a similar situation, the internet has many resources, forums and chat groups that you can join. See [Resources and references](#).

My child just came out to me, but does not want me to tell other family members. What do I do?

Sometimes, young LGBTQ people feel comfortable to come out to one or two people in their family, but not others. This may be because they fear how other people will react or because they want to come out slowly. Some young people may be struggling with their own feelings about their sexuality and may need time to process these feelings before telling others.

“I came out to my oldest sister first, as she was in secondary school at the time and had a lot of gay friends; I guess she was more of the ‘free-spirited’ sister.” – Liam, 27, VIC

It's important to respect your child's wishes about who they do or do not tell, but you may need to let them know if it puts you in a difficult or uncomfortable position. For example, you may worry that your partner will become angry if and when he or she discovers that you didn't tell them or it becomes too difficult for you to keep the secret. Use your judgment on whether it would be a help or hindrance to your child or loved one for others in the family to know, including their other parent/s. If you think it may be beneficial, talk to your child or loved one about ways you could speak

to family members together or about other support you could offer. Talk to friends or a counsellor about how to manage this.



DON'S STORY

<https://youtu.be/Hejc07KNVfl>

“I don't know why society built up this homophobia, it just seems really absurd to me now.”



MYTHS AND REALITIES ABOUT SEXUALITY

Myth	Fact
Same-sex attraction is a choice or is 'just a phase'.	We do not know what determines sexuality. Many people do not realise they are same-sex attracted until they are older. This does not mean they chose to be this way; rather, it's likely it became clearer to them over time. If your child or loved one comes out to you, it's unlikely their sexual identity is a phase. People are capable of having insight into their sexuality even at a young age. It's important to respect this.
Same-sex attraction can be 'cured'.	Same-sex attraction cannot be cured because it's not a disease. Research has consistently shown that attempts to 'cure' same-sex attraction do not work and often leave participants with increased feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, isolation and psychological damage. Listening to people and showing them love and approval is the most supportive response when they come out.
LGBQ people cannot sustain long-term relationships.	<p>People who are LGBQ are no different from other people in the community when it comes to wanting meaningful and fulfilling relationships. As with heterosexual people, LGBQ people have a variety of relationships. However, the lack of cultural support and acknowledgement of same-sex relationships can make it more difficult for some couples to cope with difficult times in their relationships – particularly if their families are not supportive of their relationship. This does not mean that LGBQ people are incapable of commitment, but they often experience less recognition about the importance of their relationships.</p> <p>Like heterosexual people, LGBQ people may choose to enter many different kinds of relationships including non-monogamous relationships. What is important is that relationships are healthy and respectful.</p>

Myth	Fact
Bisexual people can't make up their minds.	Bisexual people have made up their minds; they are attracted to people of more than one gender identity. People who identify as bisexual often experience invisibility because if they have a relationship with someone of the opposite gender identity, people assume they are heterosexual and if they have a relationship with someone of the same gender identity, people assume they are gay or lesbian. Because of increased exclusion, bisexual people are at particularly high risk of poor health outcomes. ¹⁶

KEY MESSAGES

- Your child or loved one needs to know they are loved unconditionally especially when they are asking fundamental questions about who they are and also changing the way they present to the family and the outside world. It's crucial you remind them repeatedly that you love them and are proud of them.
- Your child or loved one has decided to trust you by coming out. Be honest about how you are feeling. You can tell them you might be worried or concerned and/or very proud and pleased for them.
- It's not up to your child or loved one to look after you or listen to anything that might increase their sense of isolation or guilt. Reassure them that you are OK and that you love them.
- It's normal for parents, grandparents, siblings and extended family members to experience a range of emotions when a young person comes out. These emotions may be different, depending on their relationship with the young person. There are many good resources and supports you can access if you need more information or are struggling to understand your child or loved one being LGBTQ. See [Resources and references](#).
- Many people know from an early age that they are attracted to people of the same sex. Young people are capable of having insight into their sexual attractions and this should be respected. However, young people may be vulnerable as they come to understand their sexuality. As a family member, you are in a really strong position to support your child or loved one and greatly reduce their risk of any negative health outcomes.
- Sexual attraction is not a choice that a person makes, but people should be free to choose how they express their sexuality and how much information they share with others.

- Many LGBTQ people become aware of their sexuality around the time of puberty, but when they choose to open up about this is different for each individual.
- Living as a LGBTQ person is not a barrier to a happy life. Parents, grandparents, siblings and extended family can all be included in the rich and diverse experiences of the LGBTQ person in your family.



SECTION TWO: FAMILIES OF GENDER DIVERSE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Being gender diverse in Australia

The term 'gender diverse' is used to recognise people whose gender falls outside the traditional binary categories of male and female/masculine and feminine. Gender diverse people behave and define themselves in ways that are not generally expected, based on their biological sex as assigned at birth. This may include people who identify with a gender different from the one ascribed to them at birth, people who identify at different times with both genders, or with neither gender, describing themselves as 'gender neutral'.

The terms 'gender variant', 'gender atypical', 'gender nonconforming' or 'gender queer' are also used. Some gender diverse people will have made firm decisions about which gender is best for them, while others live in a more fluid way, moving between gender categories. For many young people, the term 'gender questioning' best describes how they feel about themselves. People who are gender questioning are clear that the traditional gender categories are too restrictive for their gender expression, but may not yet have found a way to describe their gender that feels right to them.

Transgender (or simply 'trans') is another umbrella term used to describe a person whose gender expression or identity does not correspond with the sex assigned to them at birth.

“Making the transition... it positively affected his well-being because before that he was so uncomfortable in who he was as a female... but as he's embraced his transition; his well-being has improved because he's comfortable in who he is.” – *Mother of a transgender son, 59, VIC*

How many gender diverse people are there?

A limited amount of available data makes it difficult to estimate accurately the number of gender diverse people living in Australia. This lack of data is in part due to the difficulty of collecting accurate numbers across a broadly-defined group of people and because social stigma makes people reluctant to disclose their gender diversity or take up services for gender diverse people where they might be counted.

Some research from overseas that uses a broad definition of 'gender diversity' suggests that as many as one in 150 people might have strong and persistent feelings about identifying as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth. One in 200 people might transition to another gender without undertaking surgery and one in 500 might transition to another gender using surgery.¹⁷

This broad definition of gender diverse people included people who identified as transsexual, transgender, cross-dressing and people who felt that their gender identity differed from their sex at birth or felt their sex was not right for them, but did not seek to transition.

Australia has vibrant and active communities of gender diverse and transgender people. Not all of these people will identify publicly with a transgender label. Many gender diverse and transgender people simply identify as male or female most or all of the time, without referring to their gender history. This is part of the reason why gender diversity may seem to be less common than it is in reality.

The increased inclusion and visibility of gender diverse and transgender people in Australia is supported by a number of recent law changes and initiatives. For example, in 2013 changes to the Federal Sex Discrimination legislation included gender identity and intersex status as protected attributes as well as changes to passport applications have made it easier for people to obtain a passport in their preferred gender. Two examples of recently published guideline documents that support the inclusion of gender diverse and transgender people are: *Australian Government Guidelines on the Recognition of Sex and Gender*¹⁸ and *Guideline: Transgender people at work: Complying with the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 in Employment*.¹⁹

Challenges for gender diverse people

While there is greater inclusion of gender diverse people within Australian society, there are some significant challenges and obstacles for gender diverse and transgender people and their families. Recent research tells us that:

- Gender diverse and transgender people often experience great difficulty in living as their affirmed gender and learning to be comfortable with their own expression of gender. For many, this journey can be long and lonely as they seek to clarify their gender and understand their true selves.
- Transgender people experience discrimination in many areas of life. This can include discrimination at school or work, in the provision of goods and services (in particular health), using public transport, accommodation and in sporting and recreational environments.²⁰
- Verbal abuse, harassment or violence is not uncommon. A 2011 survey revealed that up to 46 per cent of transgender people had experienced recent verbal abuse and 11 per cent of transgender men and 15 per cent of transgender women had experienced threats of physical violence.²¹

- Gender diverse and transgender people are at significantly greater risk of experiencing anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts.²² This risk has been linked to a range of factors including fear of, or actual experiences of, discrimination, rejection, social isolation or a lack of support.²³ A supportive family environment is a significant factor in reducing these risks.
- Rejection by family following disclosure of gender diversity and experiences of bullying and violence increase the risk of self-harm or suicide.²⁴
- Gender questioning young people are at higher risk of homelessness, physical abuse, self-harm and suicide. These risks have been linked with high levels of exclusion and discrimination in both the private and public spheres.²⁵

“Initially there was total rejection by everyone, which had a very depressing effect on me.”
– Rebecca, 68, VIC

Responding to challenges

There are also many factors that can support the health and wellbeing of people who are gender diverse or transgender. Research that includes the experiences and voices of young people is helping us understand more about how to support gender diverse and transgender young people.

Strong family relationships are extremely important to the wellbeing of gender diverse and transgender people. Research shows that without a supportive family, gender diverse and transgender young people are more likely to experience anxiety or depression. They may also be more likely to engage in risky behaviours such as drug use or unsafe sex, and be involved in self-harm.

In addition to strong family relationships, things that promote good health and wellbeing of gender diverse and transgender people include:

- Being connected and involved with gender diverse or transgender communities, including having access to LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer/questioning) media (although not all media may represent trans and gender diverse people accurately)
- Close friendships with others who are gender diverse or transgender
- Having positive experiences with friends regarding gender diversity
- A supportive counsellor, teacher or caring adult
- Being accepted as your affirmed gender identity by your family and the wider community, including use of your preferred pronouns (i.e. 'he', 'she' or by the person's name)
- Access to the internet. Research has identified gender diverse and transgender young people as being more reliant on the internet and related technologies than their peers, in order to find a supportive peer group and social support system. While there are many good online communities, not all are supportive; face-to-face interaction can be very beneficial (if it's available in your local area).

- Enforcement of diversity and anti-bullying policies for gender diversity at school
- Visible and positive portrayals of gender diverse and transgender people in mainstream media and entertainment
- Finding medical professionals who are knowledgeable and experienced in working with gender diverse or transgender people.



ROSALINA AND SIMONE'S STORY

<https://youtu.be/O1P9gmiX0ss>

“ You don't have to change your whole lifestyle just because one of your children or family members turn out to be gay, lesbian or trans. All they want is just to know that you love them. ”



TALKING ABOUT GENDER

It may not be easy for young people who are gender diverse, transgender or gender questioning to talk with their families about how they feel and what they are experiencing. In some families, a child or loved one's clothing, hairstyles or mannerisms make it obvious that they are questioning their gender or are gender diverse. In other families, there may be fewer signs that a child or loved one is gender questioning. Whatever families can do to provide a safe, inclusive space helps create opportunities for a young person to ask questions and seek help when they need it.

Discovering who you are and where you fit can be very confusing for some young people and a safe space for conversations and questions is always valuable. It's never too late to start talking with your child or loved one about their gender expression. It may not be easy to start new or difficult conversations, but remember that the young person's journey to become 'who they are' is as new for them as it is for you. You, your child or loved one and other family members are all learning together. You do not need to have all the answers and you will no doubt make mistakes as you move forward with your child or loved one. This is typical and OK. Any attempts you make to understand your child or loved one's experiences will demonstrate to them that you care and that home is a place where they can be themselves and belong.

“The last 10 years has been quite a life-changing experience...it's taught me that it's really, really important to continually be open to, to what life throws at you. You don't know what life is going to throw at you, but be open to it and embrace it with passion and with love and with patience and openness of communication.” – *Mother of a transgender son, 59, VIC*

Questioning gender

Many young people will have been aware from a very young age that their sense of their own gender differs from gender expectations of their assigned sex. Others will have become more aware of this as they grow older. Many young people will not be certain about what this will mean for them in the short or longer term. For some, being gender diverse or transgender may mean they choose not to dress or identify as any particular gender. Others may look to change their gender identity through medical interventions such as hormone treatment or surgery.

Puberty may be a particularly difficult time for young people who are questioning their gender because it's a time when bodies begin to change and the characteristics of a person's biological sex may become more obvious (such as the development of breasts or facial hair). Gender diverse or transgender prepubescent children may be very worried that future physical changes during puberty will not align with the person they really are.

Letting a person know that there are medical interventions that can help stop the effects of puberty can be very reassuring for them. For parents of young people who are questioning their gender, it's important to note that puberty blockers at adolescence are reversible, whereas changing gender characteristics after adolescence is often an invasive process.

What is it like for a young person to tell their family they are gender diverse or transgender?

Young people who are questioning their gender or who identify as transgender may disclose this information to families in different ways. Some may tell family members in a casual conversation; others might make a more formal time to tell a sibling, parent or grandparent and others may need a bit more distance and use a letter, an email or text to disclose to family that they are transgender or gender questioning. Coming out as gender diverse or gender questioning will be a different experience for each person. Some young people may feel nervous and vulnerable about discussing their gender identity with their family; others may find it liberating to express their gender identity to others.

Sometimes, young people are outed before they are ready. A parent or sibling may have found a young person searching for information online or a young person may have been outed at school or in their social group. If this has happened, it's likely that your child is anxious about how people will react. It will be important to acknowledge and understand how distressing this may be for your child or loved one.

For some people, gender diverse behaviour may have started at a very early age and a coming out process might therefore be a confirmation of something parents or loved ones had suspected or are already supporting, rather than the sharing of new or surprising information.

Some families are pleased their child or loved one has opened up about their gender diversity and are eager to support them. Therefore they may experience a sense of relief that their child or loved one has decided to trust them and seek their support to explore or become who they really are. Nevertheless, having a conversation about gender might still be very new and uncomfortable and may elicit a range of feelings for everyone in the family.

Telling a parent, sibling or other family member can be extremely stressful. Conversations about gender require people to reveal very personal feelings with which they may still be coming to terms, and which they know others may not understand.

It's not uncommon for parents and family members initially to experience a range of emotions (some of which may be negative) when their child or loved one discloses that they are gender questioning. Feelings of guilt, shock, anger, shame, disappointment, denial, grief and embarrassment may be experienced by you or other family members. Deciding to tell a family member about gender questioning or transitioning, brings with it a risk of rejection and loss of family connection – it can be an incredibly scary thing to do. As such, young people will really notice when parents or other family members demonstrate inclusive and positive feelings towards gender diversity.

To help ensure the best health and wellbeing outcomes for your child or loved one, it's important to reassure them that you love them. You can work through any negative reactions with a trained counsellor or your own support networks; it's not up to your child or loved one to help you process any negative feelings.

Your child or loved one will experience a range of emotions at this time and the more you can do to create an inclusive, open environment, the more they will be able to talk to you about the doubts and the changes they are going through and ask for help and support from within the family when they need it.

You cannot underestimate how stressful it can be for people to disclose that they are gender diverse, transgender or gender questioning. Up to now, your child or loved one has been living (and acting) a role that is expected of them, rather than feeling free to be themselves. It's not easy to go against society's expectations of how 'boys' and 'girls' should behave or to feel that your biological sex at birth is not right for you. Most people would not change their gender if they felt they had a choice, and to get to this point, your child or loved one will have already had a difficult process to accept themselves and the journey ahead. This is not because being transgender, gender questioning or gender diverse is bad or wrong. It's because of your child or loved one's expectations of negative reactions from family and community, the fear of rejection and the unknown. It has been shown that positive affirming responses and an inclusive family environment are important factors that help protect gender diverse, transgender and gender questioning young people from developing feelings of low self-worth and despair.

“All I really needed to know at the time was that what I felt was OK and part of the process. That I wasn't an awful daughter for feeling confused and unhappy about this huge change that made her so happy. I felt for a while like I'd lost my dad and I needed to grieve that. And then I felt terribly guilty, because really, my dad was still there, just repackaged and with an upgrade.”

– Helen, 33, NSW

Common thoughts and questions

My child seems more happy and confident in themselves. How do I reinforce this even though I am still feeling shocked and struggling with my own feelings?

There are many ways to reinforce the increased sense of self-worth and self-esteem that a young person might feel when they begin to affirm their gender identity. For some young people, gender transitioning is a time when they show publically who they are for the first time. This might involve dressing differently, choosing a new name or asking the people around them to address them with a different pronoun, going from 'she' to 'he' or from 'he' to 'she', or using gender-neutral pronouns such as a first name.

Transitioning can be a very positive time, especially when a person is supported by family and friends. You can affirm your child or loved one by respecting the decisions they are making, even though this might be challenging for you at first. Some young people will be going through a process of working out what their gender identity means for them. Sometimes, telling someone about what they are feeling – even if it's confusing – helps a young person feel more comfortable. If you notice a more positive attitude in your child, you might tell them they seem happier and that this makes you happy.

I'm struggling to come to terms with my gender diverse or transgender child's identity... does this make me a bad parent?

You and other family members may experience feelings of guilt, shock, shame, anger, disappointment and/or grief. You may feel afraid you are losing your son or daughter or you may not understand why your child or loved one can't be content in their biological body. It may be a struggle to see your child or loved one as a person with a different gender or a person who may come to look different from how you have always known them. Even if your child or loved one begins to wear different clothes or wants you to use a different pronoun with them (i.e. 'he', 'she' or by the person's name) or even call them by a different name, it can be hard to see that they are still the same person.

For some family members there can be very strong feelings of grief and loss as they grieve for the daughter or son they are losing/have lost, before they can welcome the new gender identity. This process is understandable and can be very painful. You are not a bad parent because you are struggling with the transition of your child or loved one, and it's OK for you to take some time to process your feelings. It's also worth remembering that we don't know why some people will question or transition their gender. There is no point in you feeling that as a parent you did something wrong to contribute to your child questioning their gender. This is not the case. You have nothing of which to be ashamed or embarrassed. If negative feelings are getting on top of you or adversely affecting the family, it may be helpful to seek professional help from a counsellor who is familiar with the journey taken by friends and family of gender diverse or transgender people.

While it's typical for parents and loved ones to have a range of emotions during this time, remember that to express their real gender, it's a very hard journey for your child or loved one to take. It might be useful to remember that as your child or loved one is changing their gender identity, they are on a journey to becoming their true self. It's also worth remembering that every person explores and changes their identity over time and this is completely natural.

Once your child or loved one has talked to you about their gender, they have invited you on that journey with them. You can look forward to getting to know them even better. As you are working through your emotions, it's important that you remain loving and supportive so your child or loved one is reassured that your love for them has not changed.

Does my child being gender diverse mean that they are gay?

Sexuality and gender are two different things. Gender diverse and transgender people may be gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual or may choose to identify as queer or describe their sexual identity in other terms. As with all young people, your child or loved one might need time to explore their own sexual feelings and decide what is right for them in the future. The most helpful thing parents or loved ones can do is to create an inclusive environment where children know they will be supported no matter who they are. Challenge any negative statements or stereotypes you hear about LGBTIQ people and make it clear you are OK with LGBTIQ people.

Will my child still have a good life with loving relationships and family?

Gender diverse or transgender people are not different from other people in their desire to love, be connected with others and create long-term significant relationships. Being transgender is not a barrier to a good life. Many families worry their gender diverse or transgender child or loved one will have a lonely or difficult life, but this isn't necessarily the case. Gender diverse and transgender communities may provide your child or loved one with new social networks in which otherwise they may never have been included. The strong sense of support and community that gender diverse people and their allies have created means there are many opportunities for gender diverse people to make friends and be part of a supportive community.

As with the non-gender diverse population, some gender diverse and transgender people will choose to become parents and some will not. Some will marry and others will not. You can help your child or loved one have a happy and fulfilling life by being supportive and including them, their friends and partner(s) in your family.

I am worried this will bring shame on my culture or community.

Some cultures are more inclusive and familiar with gender diversity than others. Across many non-Western cultures, the community recognises more than two genders (e.g. Fa'afafine of Polynesia or Indigenous North American 'Two-Spirit' people). In the history of many Western cultures, there are also references to the existence of gender diverse people. It's worth remembering that gender diversity is found in all races, cultures and religions.

Nevertheless, if you fear that your culture, religion or community will find it difficult to understand your child or loved one's gender expression or identity, you may feel isolated and unsure where to turn for support. Sometimes, people will need to look outside their close community to find information and support.

You can use the internet to gather information or contact the groups and read the resources listed in this guide – see [Resources and references](#). Remember that gender diversity is nothing to be ashamed about. You and your child or loved one have done nothing wrong.

If your feelings of shame are overwhelming, talking to your GP or a professional counsellor, perhaps outside of your local community, may be useful.

Our family's religion has strict expectations around gender roles. How can I accept my child or loved one and still maintain my faith?

In some religious environments, the gender roles of men and women are strictly enforced. Strong religious beliefs can present an extra complexity for gender diverse or transgender people and their families. There are no simple answers as to how people can resolve conflicting beliefs about religion and gender diversity. Some gender diverse people are able to maintain their connection with their religious practices and beliefs; others find new spirituality within new organisations. Many people find their religion and gender diversity harder to integrate or they find the experiences of exclusion and discrimination make formal religious participation too difficult. As a result, they become disconnected from their religious communities. It's important to remember that being gender diverse does not mean your child or loved one has to give up their faith or spiritual practice.

“My husband and I come from a Christian background and from a fairly liberal, progressive Christian outlook. And at times I was challenged by not so much my faith, but the response from other, more conservative Christians to what we were going through. My close Christian friends... grew with us... as we were beginning to understand this, they would understand with us and be very supportive.”
– Mother of a transgender son, 59, VIC

Did I do something wrong?

It's not helpful for you (or your child or loved one) to blame yourself or wonder if you did (or did not) do something that contributed to their gender questioning. There is no evidence to suggest that different parenting styles or family situations contribute to a person being gender diverse or transgender. In fact, there is no clear answer on why one person may question their gender and why another may not. Even though you might look for evidence to explain why your child or loved one is questioning their gender, the truth is, we just don't know why some people do not find a match between the sex they are born with, or were assigned at birth, and the gender with which they identify. Blaming yourself or feeling like you 'caused' your child to question their gender reinforces a sense that there is something wrong with your child's gender expression. This is not true. The important influence that you and your family can now have is to create and maintain an environment that supports your child or loved one to explore and determine their own gender identity.

I wish my child could have told me earlier. How did I miss the signs?

There are many reasons why gender diverse or transgender people might choose not to disclose their identity to others, including those they love deeply. The messages that all people get about gender conformity and gender nonconformity are very strong. It can be very hard for a gender diverse or transgender person to accept what lies ahead of them and it may have taken your child or loved one a long time to come to know or understand their own gender identity. Some young people will be very worried about negative reactions and choose not to tell others because of this. Even when families appear to be accepting and inclusive, it can still be very scary for a young person to risk their sense of security and belonging.

Because being gender diverse or transgender is not that common, families generally don't expect to have a child who is gender diverse or transgender. You may have missed some signs because you did not know what to look for and because your child or loved one had felt pressured repeatedly by society to hide the signs from you. In addition to

this, most people don't think about their gender identity because their biological sex and their gender have always been consistent. Because most people never have to consider what it's like not to fit into the expected sex and gender 'boxes', it makes it more difficult for a gender diverse person to be 'out' and to discuss their own thoughts and feelings. You are not to blame that you did not know earlier.

Some young people will tell certain people in a family first, maybe one parent or one sibling or a trusted aunt or uncle. They might then ask that person to tell others or to keep the information to themselves until they feel more self-assured and ready for others to know. By telling only one adult in the family, your child or loved one might have felt safer. The trusted adult could tell other family members so initially the young person is shielded from potential prejudice and/or misunderstandings from other family members. The trusted adult could also talk to family members about the young person's fears and concerns. As your child or loved one has come to you now, make the most of the opportunity to reassure them and provide support.

How will my child be affected by the requirements of legal documents?

If your child wants to, there are a number of legal documents that can be changed to affirm a person's gender identity, including their name and sex. This includes passports and birth certificates. If a person is under the age of eighteen, they will need consent from their parents.

For further information on obtaining a new birth certificate or changing a name, contact the Birth, Deaths and Marriages office in your state or territory or see Transgender Victoria's guide 'Sex and gender diverse people and identity documents'.

For further advice on passport changes, contact the Australian Passport Information Service on 13 12 32 or the Passport Policy Section passports_policy@dfat.gov.au. All State and Territory passport offices have trained staff in sex and gender diversity policy who can assist with information and passport application.

THE POWER OF FAMILY: SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD OR LOVED ONE WHO IS GENDER DIVERSE

Ways to support your child or loved one

By disclosing to you, your child or loved one is asking you to help them in the process of becoming true to themselves. There are many ways to support and encourage your child or loved one, even if they aren't yet comfortable talking directly about their gender questioning. Spend time with them and engage in general conversation. Let them know the door is open for them to talk to you about how they are feeling and what they experience. Try to avoid being overly protective and let them live their life. Regardless of where your child or loved one is at, all young people need to know that they are loved, respected and trusted. Anything you can do to demonstrate this to them will be valuable.

Part of being a parent or carer is encouraging your child or loved one to be who they are and helping them on their journey. There are many practical ways to create an inclusive and supportive environment. These will vary depending on their age. Letting a young child choose the clothes they want to wear or the toys they want play with without questioning if they are 'appropriate' to the child's assigned gender provides a supportive environment to a child who is gender diverse.

If your child or loved one is going through a gender transitioning process, you can help them affirm their gender identity by doing simple things like calling them by their new name (or assisting them to choose a new name), taking them shopping for the clothes they want and ensuring you use the correct pronoun (i.e. 'he', 'she', by the person's name or none) when required if that is what your child or loved one prefers. These things let them know that you support them and want the best for them.

“I think it took quite some time for everything to settle; for our family to find a new way of relating and working together, for our future to become clearer and for us to get used to the new normal. I also found that the more proactive I could be about our new family the easier it was.” – Helen, 33, NSW

Other things you can do to create a supportive and inclusive environment are:

- Assist with transitioning by emphasising name changes and appropriate pronouns to friends and extended family (if your child or loved one agrees) and talk with family members about the use of inclusive and respectful language and behaviour.
- Provide space if they need it, but leave the door open to further conversations.
- Recognise this is not likely to be a single conversation, but a continual process.
- Ask questions and acknowledge where your own level of knowledge is limited and be honest if you don't understand.
- Continue to do the things you have always done together that your child or loved one enjoys – they are still the same person you have always loved.
- Take down photos of your child or loved one as their old gender if they want you to.
- Get support for yourself, if you need it.
- Find articles or personal stories about others going through a similar experience to help your understanding and also to help with conversations with your child or loved one – these stories can work as great prompts and conversation starters.

- If this is something your child would like, consider talking to supportive teachers and other school staff to see if the gender affirming behaviour you are developing at home can be carried out at school too.
- Respect your child or loved one's need to surf the internet as this may be a vital way to connect with other young people on a similar journey.
- Help your child or loved one research the steps they need to take to affirm their gender identity. You may need to find an appropriate doctor or counsellor who is experienced with the needs of gender questioning or gender diverse young people (or who is LGBTIQ friendly) to explain what is involved and who can help.
- Respect confidentiality. It's really important to remember that if you are aware that someone's gender is different from the one assigned to them at birth, it's never OK to disclose this information to others without that person's consent. All people have the right to decide who does and doesn't know about their gender history. However, it's also important to recognise your own needs. If you do feel you need to talk to someone about how you are feeling, be honest with your child or loved one about this and discuss with them who you would like to talk with, so they know who else is aware, and they have some control of the situation. It can be useful to talk with a trained counsellor.

Remember: When a child or young person is asking fundamental questions about who they are and is making changes to how they present to the family and the outside world, it's crucial that they are told and reminded repeatedly that you love them and are proud of them.

Tips for communicating with your child or loved one

In many cases, by the time a young person discloses, they will have had a long time to think about what they will say and how they will handle the situation. They may even have had professional or peer support. This is usually not the case for parents and family members, although you may have noticed your child or loved one's gender

diverse behaviour from an early age. You may not know what to say or what questions to ask. This is common. It's OK to take your time, do some reading, talk to people and allow the conversations to happen over time.



When initiating conversations:

- Pick a suitable time and place. If the house is not suitable, find a neutral, calm place outside the house such as a park or quiet café.
- Make sure you have time. If you start to open up to each other it would be a shame to have to cut it short to do other things.
- Remember that using the right pronouns (i.e. 'he', 'she' or by the person's name, or none, depending on what you child wants) up front will get the conversation off to a good start. Talk to your child or loved one about what terms they would like you to use.

- Understand that after sharing information about gender diversity, a person may need some time alone and may not be ready to talk at greater length or depth. Let them know that when they are ready, you will be there. You may need to try again at a later date. Don't give up.
- Don't initiate conversations when you are feeling upset or anxious. Try to find time when you are feeling calm. It's OK for you to get support elsewhere if you need to talk things through first.

Door-opening questions to get the conversation going

- "What can I do to help you or make things easier for you?"
- "What name and pronoun/s would you like me to use with you?"
- Ask, "Do you have any friends you would like me or our family to meet? They are always welcome to come over to our place." Try to offer this only if you and your family would be comfortable with it; if not, it's likely to show and may make things harder for your child or loved one.
- "When did you start thinking about your gender identity?"
- "Are there any books or websites you would like me to read?" Or you could tell your child or loved one about books or resources you have read and what you thought about them.
- Sometimes, asking about others' experiences is less confronting than asking your child or loved one about themselves. You could ask questions such as, "Do you know other young people who are trans or questioning their gender? How has it been for them?" or "Have you read any books about transgender or gender questioning young people or their parents? What do they talk about?"

Remember, your child may still be figuring out things themselves so may not have answers to all of your questions. If they don't engage with your questions or respond to your attempts at conversation, they may need time to work it out themselves. Let them know that it's OK if they are not ready to talk about these things and leave the door open for future conversations.

Showing support — common thoughts and questions

Why is my child challenging their assigned gender?

Most people would describe their sense of gender as central to who they are – how they see themselves, how they interact with the world. People who are gender diverse or transgender feel their assigned biological sex does not match their sense of gender identity.

Transgender people generally feel deeply uncomfortable and distressed about their body and their sex. It's not simply an issue of what they wear or how they present to the world in terms of gender, but a much more fundamental need to feel that their body is consistent with who they are as a person.

People don't question their gender lightly. For many people, gender transitioning or living their gender differently to their biological sex is essential to their wellbeing. For these people, this is not a choice; this process of change is very hard and not something they would undertake if it weren't essential to their sense of self and often their survival.

I don't know anything about gender diversity. How can I support my child?

It's OK that you don't know anything about gender diverse or transgender experiences; you can still celebrate your child or loved one's achievements and be involved with important milestones in their life. As you and your child or loved one move forward together, you will learn more about their gender, meet their friends and be part of their life. You can ask questions of your child or loved one, let them know that you want to be part of their life and want to be involved in the things that are important to them, some of

which may involve other gender diverse people or communities, some of which may not. You can support your child or loved one through periods of difficulty or heartache as you would any other child or young person. The relationship and friendship experiences of your gender diverse or transgender child or loved one may be similar to the experiences you have had – draw on your experiences to give advice and support.

Remember that you won't always get it right and some mistakes will be made as you move forward. The important thing is to learn from them. Moving through this journey together will help strengthen your relationship with your child or loved one.

I'm worried about discrimination my child may face if they question or change their gender.

It's true that some people are very uncomfortable when gender norms are challenged and they may make deliberately hurtful or aggressive remarks. Others will be unaware that someone's gender not matching the biological sex assigned at birth is even an issue for people. Mis-gendering (for example, using 'he' when someone identifies as 'she') can also be an issue and can make someone feel unsupported. This is something parents or loved ones should try to remind others about as they help support their child. Remember there will be plenty of people in the community who will admire your child or loved one and want the best for them.

The more open and inclusive your family environment can be, the greater the chance that your child or loved one can talk about any negative experiences they've had and ask for help. Your child or loved one may have already developed some strategies for coping with bullying or discrimination related to their gender identity. You can ask your child or loved one how it's going for them and how they have handled any negative or challenging reactions if they have occurred – and if there is anything you can do to help. Your child or loved one might also want time and privacy to process any experiences of hurt or humiliation.

The Australian Sex Discrimination Amendment Act (2013) recognises and promotes everyone's right to a fair go and to be included in public life by making it unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of their gender identity. Therefore, your child or loved one does have rights protected by law. Remember that your worries and concerns about discrimination should not be a reason to hold your child or loved one back from challenging a gender that is not right for them. Make sure you have plenty of support for yourself so you can talk openly about your worries and fears. A support group can be helpful for you and your family.

I'm worried about the changes my child will face in puberty.

As we know, bodies change in puberty. For young people, who do not feel their biological sex fits with their gender identity, puberty can be a distressing time. Attributes of their biological sex will become more prominent, breasts grow larger, facial hair thickens and voices break. For those who live their gender differently or opposite to their biological sex, puberty may be a time where they find it harder to live their life in their affirmed gender identity. Even simple acts like using a public bathroom which is gender specific may become more challenging. If your child or loved one is yet to go through puberty, it's important to be honest about the physical changes they will experience. Ask them how they feel about this and if there is anything you can do to support them. You may not have all the answers to their questions or concerns. In some cases, you may need to seek medical advice with your child or loved one about how to manage puberty. Seeking supportive and experienced medical practitioners will be really important. Also, be aware that advocating for a child may involve arguing against medical norms.

Puberty blockers at adolescence are designed to prevent the onset of puberty and are fully reversible. This might enable longer-term and often irreversible decisions to be made, once your child or loved one has understood fully and confirmed the changes they wish to undertake.

How can I support my child to make decisions about the use of medications and other medical interventions?

Not all gender diverse people will need to undertake medical intervention to change how they align their body with their gender identity, but some will. There is a range of medical interventions that gender diverse people can use to change their bodies. Physical transitioning is a process that occurs over time and different people will make different decisions about what interventions are best for them. One way to support your child or loved one is to help them get as much accurate information about their options as possible. This might mean helping them find resources on the internet or doing some of your own research to find a transgender friendly GP with whom you and your child or loved one can consult.

When young people are making important decisions with future major consequences, people often advise them to wait until they are older and to see if they still feel the same. However, if a person is going to transition to their preferred gender, the earlier in life this happens, the more successful the transition will be. If a young person is clear that they are in the wrong body, this is unlikely to change as they get older. For young transgender people, it's best to start medical interventions for transition as early as possible. Both hormone therapy and sex or body reassignment surgery require parental consent if a person is under the age of 18.

“The advice that I think I would give to other parents who might be seeing that their son or daughter is struggling with their gender or their sexuality would be, ‘Go with it. Address it. Don’t put it under the carpet. Seek help, and try to keep the lines of communication and dialogue open, so that it gives the son or the daughter the freedom to not be ashamed’.” – *Mother of a transgender son, 59, VIC*



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Ways to support yourself

It's OK to give yourself some time to make sense of the new information and emotions you feel when your child or loved one comes out as gender diverse or starts to show you that the gender assigned at birth is not right for them. Self-care will be important at this time. You may feel a sense of loss and need to grieve for the loss of your child or loved one as you perceived them. Although it may feel hard initially to speak to others about your child or loved one's gender expression, it will be important for you to build a support network around you. This might be composed of other family members, close friends, neighbours, people from a support group or a professional like your trusted GP or a counsellor. Choosing in whom you confide at this time will be influenced by your child or loved one's wishes about whom they are comfortable for you to talk to about their gender identity expression.

It's important for your child or loved one that you can support and affirm the changes they are making. Try to share your more negative feelings of grief, anger, shock, concern, anxiety or confusion with your support network. This way, you can express those feelings without having a negative impact on your child or loved one or other family members. It's possible to feel shocked or challenged, while also reassuring your child or loved one that you love and support them.

Recognise that as a parent or loved one you will also go through a coming out process, when a young person discloses their gender identity. This provides an opportunity to develop a shared experience that over time, can draw you closer together. It's also important to remember that the way you react and inform others will influence how they react to the news and form opinions. Positive, inclusive responses from you will illustrate to others that you love and support your child or loved one and want the best for them.

Tips for taking care of yourself

- Knowledge is power. Seek as much information as you can about the experiences of gender diverse and transgender people.
- Seek information about how other families (with similar cultural or religious backgrounds) have moved forward with their child or loved one who is gender diverse or transgender.
- Be kind to yourself. You will not always get it right when it comes to having difficult conversations with your child or loved one, no matter what the topic. If your child or loved one knows that you love and support them, no matter what, they will be more forgiving if mistakes occur. As uncomfortable as it can sometimes feel, mistakes can be a way to learn and become closer to people, so don't be scared to 'open up' with your child or loved one.
- Talk to your friends. You may have some worries about how your friends will react, but if you need to talk through issues, then having friends with whom you can talk, is really important. Your friends may be more understanding than you expect. Think about who is likely to have the most supportive response and contact them. As with your child or loved one, supportive friendships and positive responses help protect your mental health and wellbeing. If your child or loved one has asked you not to talk about their gender, it's still possible to tell your friends that you are struggling with the challenges of parenting and seek support without being specific about the issue.
- If you need help or just want to talk things through, seek professional advice and support. There are counsellors in Australia who have experience with gender questioning, gender diverse or transgender people and their families. Your local support group or organisations that support gender diversity may be able to refer you to someone in your area. You can also ask your GP if you are eligible for Medicare rebates if he/she refers you to a trained mental health professional.
- Find a peer support group for you to attend and also one for your child or loved one (if this is something they are interested in).

Learning more

It's important to remember that how you feel today may not be how you feel tomorrow. This too may be the case for your child. While feelings around their gender identity are unlikely to change, their understanding of what it means and how it will affect their lives is something they need time to work out, just like you.

Understanding, appreciating and celebrating your child or loved one's gender is an ongoing process. It's also a similar process for young people coming to know themselves. If you feel confusion or shame about your child coming out as gender diverse, don't assume you will always feel this way. There are many ways to move forward. You and your child or loved one are on this journey together. It's important to be proactive, make an effort to learn and be prepared to change your ideas and opinions.

- Read books and online articles about gender diverse or transgender people and their communities which will give a good understanding of gender diverse and transgender life. Novels with transgender characters, as well as non-fiction books including biographies, will help you gain an insight.
- Access gender diverse or transgender-specific community media, groups or websites.
- Get to know gender diverse or transgender people – this may be your child or loved one's friends or it may be adults with whom you have contact.
- Speak to other parents with gender diverse or transgender children.
- Remember that your child or loved one may be moving between positive and negative feelings about their gender, just as you may be. Having a positive attitude about the future can help your child or loved one a lot.

Taking care of yourself — common thoughts and questions

I feel like the only one. I don't know any other families with gender diverse people in them.

It's not surprising that you might feel isolated at this time. Nevertheless, many families from many different cultural and religious backgrounds have been through a similar experience. If you do not already know anyone else with a gender diverse or transgender child or loved one, look around to see who you can find. You can connect with people who have had a similar experience via the internet or through relevant organisations and support groups – see [Resources and references](#).

There's a good chance that you do know someone in your community who is gender diverse, may have never noticed or been aware.

My child just came out to me, but does not want me to tell other family members. What do I do?

Your child or loved one may want only you to know at this point. They trust you enough to tell you, but may not have the same feelings of trust about how other people will react. It's important to respect their wishes, but you can explain to them that this may put you in a difficult situation. It will still be important for you get support for yourself and contacting a trusted friend or a professional may be useful. Remember however, that once you tell friends or peers, you lose control over what is done with that information. If you think it would be beneficial, perhaps you could speak to your child or loved one about ways you could talk to other family members together.



If asked to, how do I tell my partner and/or other family members?

Understandably, some transgender or gender questioning young people might be very wary of coming out. They might tell only one parent and expect that parent to tell others in the family. This is probably because they are fearful about the reaction of those people. It's understandable that this might cause anxiety or concern for you. In case your partner or family members have a negative reaction, make sure you have support, someone to talk to or seek advice from and have some strategies in place. Sometimes a young person might need to stay with a friend or other family member for a few days if their home becomes unsafe or unwelcoming. You could tell your partner or family members what you have learned from this guide and explain to them how important a positive, supportive response for their child or loved one is. Suggest your partner or family members read this guide and perhaps do some of their own research.

Some young people will leave it to the parents to tell members of the extended family as well, because parents are more likely to have a better understanding of the potential reactions of their own parents, brothers and sisters (i.e. grandparents, aunts and uncles) etc. Advocating for your child or loved one in this way demonstrates to them that you are on their side and want the best for them.

At the time of their coming out or soon after, take some time to talk and negotiate the next steps with your child or loved one – develop a plan and assess the risks of adverse reactions from others.

MYTHS AND REALITIES ABOUT GENDER DIVERSITY

Myth	Fact
Gender diverse people are confused	Just because a person is different from you and the majority of people, it doesn't mean they don't know who they are. Gender diverse and transgender people are not confused, they are clear that the gender assigned to them at birth is not right for them.
Gender diverse and transgender people are gay	Gender identity and sexuality are two completely separate characteristics. One is the gender identity we see ourselves as being. The other relates to which gender(s) and sex(es) we are physically and romantically attracted. Gender diverse and transgender people have the same range of sexuality as anyone else.
Gender diversity is a mental health condition	Gender diversity is not a mental health condition. Because of higher levels of discrimination and rejection, gender diverse people are more likely to experience depression and anxiety. However, providing a supportive family environment is a great help in preventing conditions like depression and anxiety.
"It's my fault."	There is no evidence to suggest that family upbringing or circumstances have any bearing on being gender diverse. We do not know why one person might question their gender and another may not. Looking for causes or attributing blame suggests that there is something wrong or shameful about being gender diverse or transgender. This is not the case. When it comes to gender expression, no one is at fault or to blame. Gender diversity and expression is a part of life.

Myth	Fact
My child or loved one will be lonely and unhappy	Being gender diverse doesn't stop your child or loved one from having happiness, many friends, employment or a family of their own. While a high proportion of gender diverse and transgender people do experience exclusion and discrimination during their life, this does not mean that their life will be unhappy. Strong friendships, connections to gender diverse and other communities and loving family relationships are all possible. The chances are, your child or loved one will have many of the same experiences and opportunities for happiness as you. You can help increase their happiness by being open, inclusive and accepting of the path they take.
My child or loved one will never really look like the gender they want to be recognised as	This is not necessarily the case at all. Many gender-diverse people pass so well in the gender they identify with that no one would know that they once lived as a different gender. This may be part of the reason gender diversity is seen as less common. You may have met transgender people throughout your life and remained unaware. People who transition early in life usually have a better experience of physically transitioning to the opposite gender.

KEY MESSAGES

- Your child or loved one needs to know they are loved unconditionally. When a child or young person is asking such fundamental questions about who they are and is making changes to how they present to the family and the outside world, it's crucial they are reminded repeatedly that you love them, are proud of them and that you will support them through this time of change.
- Your child or loved one has decided to trust you by coming out about their gender identity or expression. Be honest with them about how you are feeling. You can tell them you might be worried or concerned and/or very proud and pleased for them.
- Being gender diverse is not a barrier to a happy and fulfilled life. In questioning their gender, your child or loved one is embarking on a journey of becoming who they truly are; this is something that the whole family can celebrate.
- It's not up to your child or loved one to look after you or listen to anything that might increase their sense of isolation or guilt. Reassure them that you are OK and that you love them.
- It's typical for parents, grandparents, siblings and extended family to experience a range of emotions when a young person is transgender, gender diverse or gender questioning. There are many good resources and supports you can access if you need more information or are struggling to understand your child or loved one being transgender or gender questioning.
- Many people know from a very early age that they don't identify with their biological sex. Young people are capable of having insight into their feelings about gender and this should be respected.
- Young people may be vulnerable as they come to understand their gender identity. Experiences of exclusion, rejection and discrimination are common for gender diverse people. These experiences can put the health of your child or loved one at

risk. As a family member, you are in a strong position to support your child or loved one and greatly reduce their risk of health and mental health problems.

- Respect confidentiality. All people have the right to decide who does and doesn't know about their gender history. However, it's also important to recognise your own needs. If you do feel you need to talk to someone about how you are feeling, be honest with your child or loved one and discuss with them who you would like to talk with, so they will know who else is aware and can feel they have some control of the situation.



GLOSSARY

Asexual: A lack of sexual attraction to other people or interest in sexual activity.

Biphobia: Fear and hatred of people who identify as bisexual or are attracted to people of more than one gender identity. Biphobia can come from both heterosexual and gay and lesbian communities.

Bisexual: Refers to a person who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender identity.

Brotherboy: A term used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe a person assigned female gender at birth, but who is masculine and lives as a man. Use and spelling of the term Brotherboy may vary across different groups and communities and other cultures will use different terms to describe gender diversity.

Cisgender: Describes a type of gender identity where an individual's self-perception of their gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

Coming out: The process of disclosing sexuality or gender identity to family and friends. People are used to hearing the term coming out in relation to disclosure about sexuality, but when a person tells others about their gender identity or starts to express the gender identity they are comfortable with, this is also coming out or 'coming in' to a new way of being. Coming out is not a one-off experience, but occurs each time a person meets someone new and decides to tell them that they are LGBTQ. For those who challenge conventional gender norms, it may be something they do almost every time they enter a public space.

Gay: A term mostly used to describe men whose primary emotional and sexual attraction is towards other men. However, it can be used to describe both men and women who are attracted towards people of the same sex.

Gender: Gender refers to a person's deep and personal sense of being masculine or feminine, both or neither. A person's gender expression refers to the outward signs they present to the world around them. This includes their name, use of pronouns, their style of

dress and outward appearance, their mannerisms and their hobbies and interests. Gender is considered a social category that is not necessarily related to a person's biological sex.

Gender dysphoria: Is a formal diagnosis used by physiologists or physicians that describes people whose gender identity is different from the one ascribed to them at birth. The development of a formal diagnosis for gender dysphoria is important as it ensures treatment access for people who undergo hormone therapy, surgery or counselling to support their gender transition. As a category, gender dysphoria is different from gender non-conformity or gender diversity, as it describes the presence of clinically-significant distress associated gender dissatisfaction.²⁸

Gender diverse: A term used to describe people whose gender expression differs from stereotypic expectations. The terms gender variant, gender atypical, gender fluid, gender questioning or gender queer are also used.

Gender expression: Relates to how a person chooses to show and communicate their gender identity to others through their name, use of pronoun, clothing, hair styles, mannerisms, activities and hobbies.

Gender identity: A person's inner sense of being male or female, combination of both or neither.

LGBTIQ: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer and questioning.

Heteronormative: Describes the ways that heterosexuality is viewed as the norm for all people in society. Heteronormativity describes a hierarchy where attitudes and practices that affirm heterosexuality are seen as better than those that don't. For example, believing that marriage should only be between a man and a woman is a heteronormative view.

Heterosexism: The assumption that every person is heterosexual and that all other sexualities are 'wrong' or do not exist. Heterosexuality is considered the norm from which all other positions are judged as different, secondary or 'other'.

Homophobia: Is a term describing the fear and hatred of people who are not heterosexual and of their sexual desires and practices.

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Homosexual: People whose sexual desire and emotional attractions are for people of the same gender identity. Historically, this term has been used to define same-sex attraction as a psychological condition. Because of this oppressive history, most same-sex attracted people describe themselves with other terms.

Internalised biphobia: The negative feeling and attitudes that bisexual people develop about themselves or other bisexual people as a result of being in a biphobic culture.

Internalised homophobia: The negative feeling and attitudes that gay and lesbian people develop about themselves or other homosexual people as a result of being in a homophobic or heterosexist culture. Internalised biphobia and internalised transphobia are similar in this regard.

Internalised transphobia: Describes negative feelings and attitudes transgender people may hold about themselves or other transgender people as a result of negative societal attitudes toward gender diversity.

Intersex: A general term used to describe a set of conditions where a person is born with reproductive organs or sex chromosomes that don't fit with typical definitions of male or female.

Lesbian: A woman whose primary emotional and sexual attraction is towards another woman.

Pansexual: People whose sexual desire and emotional attractions are for people of all gender identities and biological sexes.

Queer: Queer was once used as a negative term to describe people who seemed different from the heterosexual norm. These days, many LGBTQ people use the term queer to describe their sexual or gender identity as challenging heterosexual and gender norms. This might be especially so for those under the age of 25, who might add the letter Q to LGBTIQ to signify that they are queer or questioning.

Questioning: Refers to the process whereby a person questions their sexuality or gender. This might include people who do not feel heterosexual, but who don't identify

as gay, lesbian or bisexual or people who feel the categories of male/female and masculine/feminine are restricting.

Sex: Biological attributes that define people as either male, female, neither wholly female nor wholly male; a combination of female and male or neither female nor male.

Sex reassignment: When a person has their body and biological sex changed to that of the opposite sex through surgical procedures. This surgery is also referred to as gender-affirmation surgery.

Sistergirl: A term used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe a biological male who is effeminate or who lives as a woman. Use of the term Sistergirl may vary across different groups and communities, and other cultures will use different terms to describe gender diversity.

Transgender (or sometimes trans or trans*): An umbrella term used to describe a person whose gender identity or gender expression is different from that traditionally associated with the sex assigned at birth. Not all people who identify as transgender undergo medical procedures to change their bodies.

Transsexual: A person who identifies as the opposite gender to the sex assigned at birth. Transsexual people often use hormones or undergo surgery so their bodies match the gender with which they identify.

Transition/ing: Describes the process that a transgender person takes towards affirming their true gender identity. During this time, people adopt characteristics, including, for some people, the physical characteristics of their affirmed gender identity. A person may or may not seek sex-reassignment surgery as part of this process. Transitioning occurs over time and during this time, transgender people may require additional support from family, friends or professionals. Many people consider this process as one of 'alignment' or 'affirmation', rather than transitioning, as they are aligning their physical presentation with their true inner sense of gender.

Transphobia: The fear and hatred of people who are gender diverse or transgender.

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RESOURCES

National

QLife: 1800 184 527

www.qlife.org.au

QLife is a mental health telephone counselling service for people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status. Available across Australia seven days a week between 5:30pm and 10:30pm.

QLife also provides Self Help and a Web-based Support Program (Teleweb) via their website.

Androgen Insensitivity Support Group Australia (AISGA)
home.vicnet.net.au/~aissg

A peer support, information and advocacy group for people affected by Androgen Insensitivity (AIS) and/or other intersex conditions and their families

Australian Bisexual Network
members.optusnet.com.au/ausbinet

The Australian Bisexual Network is an information providing service for the bisexual community and provides some local activities.

Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council (AGMC)
www.agmc.org.au

AGMC represents the interests of Australian GLBTIQ individual/groups from a multicultural background. It does this primarily by recognising the interests of GLBTIQ multicultural individuals/groups and raising their profile within the wider GLBTIQ and multicultural communities. There is a community listing of groups on their website.

Australian Human Rights Commission
www.humanrights.gov.au

An independent statutory organisation that leads the promotion and protection of human rights in Australia. They investigate and resolve complaints of discrimination and breaches of human rights. Their service is free, impartial and informal.

Coming out Australia
www.comingout.com.au

Information and resources for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people coming out.

Genderqueer Australia
www.genderqueer.org.au

Genderqueer Australia specialises in the support of gender questioning and genderqueer people, their family, friends and professionals who they go to for help. They also support trans men and women and welcome anyone who feels they belong in the "gender" community in Australia.

It Gets Better Australia
www.itgetsbetter.org.au

It Gets Better Australia is an official affiliate of the US based, It Gets Better Project. The campaign was started to show young LGBTI people in Australia, the levels of happiness, potential and positivity their lives will reach – if they can just get through their teen years. It Gets Better Australia works to remind teenagers in Australia's LGBTI community that they are not alone – and that it WILL get better.

Lawstuff - National Children's and Youth Law Centre
www.lawstuff.org.au/lawstuff

Lawstuff supports children and young people, providing advice and information about legal rights and responsibilities.

Minus 18
minus18.org.au

Minus18 aims to improve the lives of same sex attracted and gender diverse (SSAGD) youth; to empower them, connect them with others and help them understand themselves. They do this through social events, resource production, partnering with other community groups, and awareness raising.

National LGBTI Health Alliance
www.lgbthealth.org.au

A collection of health-related information and resources for people who identify as LGBTI.

Organisation Intersex International Australia
oii.org.au

This website has a large range of information about intersex people in Australia.

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Australia
www.pflagaustralia.org.au

PLFAG is an international peer support group that has been operating in Australia for over 30 years with groups in all states of Australia operating independently and at different strengths.

They provide information and resources for family and friends of people coming out.

ReachOut.com
www.reachout.com

Information and support for young people who are going through tough times.



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SameSame

www.samesame.com.au

A news and information website for the LGBTI community.

Th!nk About It Project

www.thinkaboutitproject.org.au

Th!nk About It Project looks at the eight attitudes associated with the Riddle scale of homophobia, which are drawn upon as the eight young people's voices 'emerge' as they share their real life experiences (of loss and love, abuse and praise, hatred and hope, isolation and equality, vulnerability and strength), in the hope that the broader community will experience these short films, and then 'think about it'.

Transparenthood

transparenthood.net

A blog written by the mother of a young person who is transgender to help other parents of transgender children and to educate others.

Year 7 self

www.year7self.org.au

The 'Year 7 self' project shares the stories of straight Australians and their experiences of homophobia and transphobia in both online and offline worlds. This is an insightful and informative resource for all schools, community support services and young people.

ACT

A Gender Agenda

www.genderrights.org.au

This website is intended to be a community hub and informational resource for transgender, intersex, gender-queer and other gender variant people and their supporters.

AIDS Action Council of the ACT

www.aidsaction.org.au/aac

The AIDS Action Council of the ACT provides services to the ACT community, aimed at eliminating further transmission of HIV and minimising the personal and social impacts of HIV and AIDS.

Diversity ACT

www.diversityact.org.au/hub1

Diversity ACT is a community-based, non-profit organisation that exists to advance and support the aspirations, acceptance and human dignity of GLBTI members of the Canberra community. Diversity ACT is a service hub, a support network and a community resource that seeks to support the diverse experiences of all citizens of the ACT and to support equal rights and treatment of all Canberrans regardless of their sexual or gender orientation.

Qnet: Canberra's queer youth cyberspace

www.qnet.org.au

A website for GLBTI people under the age of 25. It's also a place for their friends, family, teachers, supporters and peers to offer support, get information and make new contacts.

springOUT Festival

www.springout.com.au

springOUT is the official pride festival of Canberra and the ACT.

NSW

ACON

www.acon.org.au

ACON promote the health and wellbeing of the LGBTI community and people with HIV and provide information and support for people at risk of or affected by HIV.

Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service (GLCS) NSW

www.glcsnsw.org.au

GLCS is a volunteer-based community service providing free, anonymous and confidential telephone counselling, information and referral services and support groups for GLBT people throughout NSW on sexuality and life issues.

The Gender Centre

www.gendercentre.org.au

The Gender Centre is an accommodation and counselling service for gender questioning people in New South Wales from the age of 16 and up. They also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers.

Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras

www.mardigras.org.au

Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is the non-for-profit member-based organisation that organises the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade and Festival as well as number of other events throughout the year.



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Tropical Fruits, Lismore

www.tropicalfruits.org.au

The Tropical Fruits Inc, established in 1988, is a GLBTI community group in the Northern Rivers in NSW. They are a not-for-profit, incorporated association that holds regular events including an annual festival.

Twenty 10 a place to be

www.twenty10.org.au

Support for young GLBTI people and their families.

NT

Alice Pride Festival

www.alicepride.com

Alice Pride creates opportunities for local LGBTIQ people and the wider community to celebrate together.

Darwin Pride Festival

darwinpride.com.au

Darwin Pride aims to promote equality and diversity through an annual Darwin Pride Festival.

NT AIDS and Hepatitis Council

www.ntahc.org.au

NTAHC is the key non-Government organisation working in the area of blood-borne viruses, education and support in the Northern Territory that is recognized as a source of informed and professional advice. They also run SMILE and Be Proud to Be You, a youth group for young same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people.

QLD

Brisbane Pride Festival

brisbanepridefestival.com.au

This festival is a celebration of LGBT culture through the arts, sporting, community and political events. The Pride Festival aims to bring LGBT people of Brisbane together.

Cairns Tropical Pride

www.cairnstropicalpride.com.au

An annual festival for the Cairns community.

Coast Out Festival

coastout.com.au

CoastOut is the Coffs Coast's annual gay, lesbian and friends festival that brings together people from all around Australia and beyond.

Gay and Lesbian Welfare Association (GLWA)

www.glwa.org.au

GLWA is a non-profit organisation with a focus on the wellbeing of LGBTI communities through operation of the Gay Line and Lesbian line, peer telephone counselling service.

Open Doors Youth Service

www.opendoors.net.au

Open Doors provides counselling and support services for LGBT young people aged 12 to 24 and their families who live in South East Queensland.

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Brisbane

www.pflagbrisbane.org.au

PLFAG Brisbane produces resources in many different languages to support family and friends of people coming out. Resources can be downloaded from the website by everyone.

Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC)

www.qahc.org.au

QAHC work to promote the health and wellbeing of LGBT Queenslanders. The website gives access to LGBT and HIV news from around Australia, LGBTI services and projects and monthly newsletters.

SA

Bfriend

www.unitingcommunities.org/Bfriend

Uniting Communities' Bfriend program provides social support for people of all ages who are wondering about their sexuality/gender identity and people who are newly identifying as LGBTIQ. The service offers peer support, facilitating groups with other newly identifying people, workshops, resources, and opportunities for social connection.

Feast Festival

www.feast.org.au

Community Arts festival for LGBTI communities and the broader South Australian Community.

Gay and Lesbian Community Services SA/NT

glcssa.org.au

GLCS operates a phone line service for LGBTI communities in South Australia and the Northern Territory. While services are currently suspended as the organisation finds new accommodation, it still provides information via email: glcs@glcssa.org.au.



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TAS

Be Proud Tasmania (BPT)

beproudtasmania.com

BPT provides a safe space for the Tasmanian LGBTI community to tell their stories about harassment, vilification and discrimination. BPT is a joint project of Working It Out, TasCAHRD and the Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group.

Tasmanian Council on AIDS, Hepatitis and Related Diseases

tascahrd.org.au

TasCAHRD works in partnership with communities to promote health and wellbeing that enhances the capacity of individuals to achieve quality of life and reach their full potential.

TasPride Festival

taspride.com

The TasPride Festival occurs each November, and the committee host events throughout the year and publishes a regular newsletter. They also promote a wide range of activities produced all year around by the many GLBTIQ organisations in Tasmania.

Working It Out (TAS)

www.workingitout.org.au

Working It Out supports LGBTI community members and their friends and family in Tasmania, providing a free and confidential service to people negotiating their sexuality and or gender identity.

VIC

Bisexual Alliance Victoria Inc.

www.bi-alliance.org

The Bisexual Alliance Victoria is a non-profit volunteer-run organisation dedicated to promoting the acceptance of bisexuals in LGBTI and mainstream society, providing a fun, safe space where bisexuals can meet, make friends, and talk. They also inform the bisexual community about relevant news and opportunities for activism.

Chill Out Festival, Daylesford

chilloutfestival.com.au

ChillOut has grown to become the biggest and longest-running Country Queer Pride event in regional Australia and the largest festival in Hepburn Shire.

Country Awareness Network Victoria

www.can.org.au

The Country Awareness Network Victoria provides information, education, support, referrals and advocacy to Victorian rural/regional communities regarding HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, other Blood Borne Viruses (BBVs) and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). They also have information for parents on how to talk with young people about safer sex.

Drummond St Services

www.ds.org.au

Drummond St is a non-government, non-denominational agency located in Carlton Victoria. They provide a safe space for individuals, couples, children and families to explore and work on those issues which impact on the quality of their relationships, as well as education and training and parenting support programs. Drummond street has a great history of service to the LGBTI Community.

Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV)

www.glhv.org.au

GLHV is an LGBTI health and wellbeing policy and resource unit that provides health information for LGBTI people and communities living in Victoria.

Gay & Lesbian Switchboard (Vic) Inc. (Switchboard)

www.switchboard.org.au

Switchboard is a volunteer organisation which provides a free, confidential and anonymous telephone counselling, referral and information service for the Victorian and Tasmania GLBTI community and its supporters.

Rainbow Families Council (RFC)

www.rainbowfamilies.org.au

RFC is a volunteer community organisation that supports and promotes equality for 'rainbow' families (parents and prospective parents who identify as LGBTI, and their children).

RFC also provides information resources for schools, services and the community as well as for families.

Transgender Victoria

www.transgendervictoria.com

Information and advocacy for all transgender people.

Midsumma

www.midsumma.org.au

Midsumma, Melbourne's annual Queer Celebration, is a federation of arts and cultural events spread over 85 different venues throughout Melbourne and Regional Victoria. The festival is presented over three weeks from mid-January to February and, having been held annually since 1988, is a significant attraction on the Melbourne festival calendar.



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Pride March Victoria

www.pridemarch.com.au

Pride March Victoria recognises and celebrates the people and events that inspire the courage, solidarity, pride, diversity and strong sense of community of Victoria's GLBTI people. They organise cultural activities that bring our community together in a safe and positive environment. The annual Pride March is the signature event and is held on the first Sunday in February.

Uniting Care Cutting Edge

www.ucce.org.au

UnitingCare Cutting Edge is a not for profit inclusive rural support agency based in Victoria's Goulburn Valley. It is committed to the provision of and advocacy for high quality services that empower individuals, support families and strengthen communities.

Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) – Gay Men's Health Centre (GMHC)

www.vicaids.asn.au

VAC/GMHC provides a range of services which include prevention education, treatment and professional, affordable counselling for individuals and couples who are affected by or at risk of HIV, and for members of the GLBT community.

Ygender

www.ygender.com

Ygender is a peer-led social support group who provide referral pathways and advocacy for trans* and gender diverse young people aged 15-30 in Victoria. Ygender has a commitment to the inclusion of all gender diverse communities including the Sistergirl and Brotherboy communities. Based in Melbourne, Ygender provides 3 social events per month in addition to a range of speciality events and projects throughout the year.

Zoe Belle Gender Centre (ZBGC)

gendercentre.com

ZBGC website currently functions as a 'virtual gender centre'. They provide online resources and knowledge sharing through the 'Questions and Answers' section of their website.

As well as providing support, information and referrals, ZBGC also run events, workshops and campaigns to inform, enliven and strengthen the gender diverse community.

WA

Freedom Centre (FC)

www.freedom.org.au

FC is for young people (under 26) to support each other and their communities to be informed, happy and healthy about their sexuality, sex and gender. FC have a drop-in centre, which is a safe space for young people to hang out, have fun, meet other LGBTIQQ young people and get peer-support and information.

Gay and Lesbian Community Services (GLCS)

glcs.org.au

GLCS focus is on providing essential services to the GLBT communities, including a peer counselling phone line and social support groups.

WA AIDS Council

www.waaidcs.com

The WA AIDS council, established in 1985, leads the Western Australian community in the provision of a wide range of services in the prevention of HIV, and the treatment and care of people living with HIV/AIDS.

WA Pride Festival

www.pridewa.com.au

Pride WA is Western Australia's largest community group, representing the LGBTI community. Pride WA run the Annual WA Pride Festival.

Resources for young people and their families living in regional/ rural Australia

Beyond 'that's so gay'

thatssogay.com.au/about

Beyond 'that's so gay' is a project exploring the experiences of young GLBTI people in rural and regional locations.

PFLAG Shepparton

www.pflagaustralia.org.au/locations.aspx

Regional support for parents and friends of loved ones coming out.

Wayout: Rural Victorian Youth and Sexual Diversity project

www.wayout.org.au

Information and resources for LGBT young people living in country Victoria.

Information for Indigenous Australians

2Spirits program (QLD)

www.qahc.org.au/atsi

The 2 Spirits program works to improve the sexual health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gay men and sisters through a 'Whole of Community Approach' to education, prevention, health promotion and community development activities.

Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet

www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au

Provides health related resources for all Indigenous people, includes GLBT and Sistergirl and Brotherboy relevant resources.

Open Doors Youth Service: QueerYarn (QLD)

www.opendoors.net.au/?page_id=1018

QueerYarn brings together Indigenous and Non Indigenous LGBT young people together to learn about culture, share stories, break down barriers and work together to as one voice in the LGBT community. QueerYarn is facilitated by Indigenous Elders from the Turrbal and Jagera tribes of Brisbane. The website also has useful information and resources for LGBT young people.

Other resources

Sexuality Is Not a Choice.

Email: pflagbris@hotmail.com or phone: (07) 3017 1739

This resource was written to help parents, families and friends understand the issues faced by young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people who are in the process of coming out.

Information for Parents with Transgender Sons and Daughters

www.pflagbrisbane.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Transgender-Info-for-Parents.pdf

A resource produced by PFLAG Brisbane for parents with transgender sons and daughters offering information and useful tips.

The Mourning After

www.the-mourning-after.org

The story of one family's experience when their son comes out.

GQ: Gender Questioning

www.glhv.org.au/files/GQv3.pdf

A resource produced by GLHV in conjunction with the Trans Melbourne Gender Project. It provides information for young people who are questioning their gender including information about talking to family and others.

You're Not Alone

www.freedom.org.au/images/stories/yourenotalone2012web2.pdf

Information for LGBTI and questioning young people.

GLBTI friendly churches and synagogues

Metropolitan Community Church

www.mccsydney.org (NSW)

www.mccmelbourne.com.au (VIC)

A diverse Christian community embracing all who feel excluded, especially LGBTI people and their families.

Catholic Acceptance

www.gaycatholic.com.au

Acceptance is a faith community supporting GLBT Catholics, their family and friends.

UnitingCare West (WA)

www.unitingcarewest.org.au

UnitingCare West offers peer support to young people with a diverse sexuality or gender in the regions of Bunbury and Albany as well as professional training and development to allied health and youth workers.

Uniting Network Australia

unitingnetworkaustralia.org.au

Uniting Network Australia is the national network for LGBTI people, their families, friends and supporters within the Uniting Church in Australia.

Gaychurch.org

www.gaychurch.org/list-churches-by-country/?loc=Australia

GayChurch.org is a website dedicated to ministering to LGBT Christian community members and friends and lists LGBT friendly churches in Australia and other countries.

Freedom2b

www.freedom2b.org

freedom2b assists LGBTI people from Christian backgrounds on their journey to reconciling their faith, sexuality and gender identity.

Dayenu (NSW)

www.dayenu.org.au/synagogues.htm

Based in Sydney, Dayenu exists to meet the needs of Jewish GLBTI people as well as their friends, families, partners and other supporters. They provide outreach through education, information, resources, social activities and other events, as well as lists of Sydney's GLBT-friendly synagogues.

Aleph Melbourne (VIC)

aleph.org.au

A social and support group for people living in and around Melbourne with Jewish heritage who identify as GLBTI as well as heterosexuals and those questioning their sexuality or gender. They offer confidential and anonymous support.

Also remember to look through your local community directories to find services and events in your area.



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