

SEXUALITY & IDENTITY

Helping your child become who they are
and accept others' sexual identity

THE FACTS

- The battle for equality is not yet won: 45% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) young people have experienced bullying, and very few teachers get training in how to deal with this (according to [Stonewall](#)).
- More than two thirds of LGBT respondents to this [Equalities Office survey](#) said they had avoided holding hands with a same-sex partner for fear of a negative reaction from others
- This targeting has serious consequences: more than half of LGBT 14-18 year olds had self-harmed, and most said the self-harm was related to their LGBT identity ([Anti-Bullying Alliance](#))

I WANT TO...help my *young* child become who they are

"I was always aware that I would never be able to live up to the ideals my family had set for me. Deep down...I had been planning my exit from the family for years."

- Navin Noronha, [Coming Out to your Homophobic Family](#), March 2019

What?

As with all delicate topics, begin young, converse lightly and repeat often. The key message: **it's not a big deal**

Why?

Values are the first and most entrenched thing our kids learn from us - and they do so mostly through observation

How?

Be **gender-neutral** about relationships. Mention LGBT in lots of contexts. **Emphasise the similarities amongst people**

What the experts say:

- Be gender neutral when discussing romantic relationships. Try to resist assuming that relationships are always between a man and a woman. In order to blur the lines, you

could use gender-neutral names like "Sam" and "Alex" rather than using obviously gendered names when you're giving an example.

- Be comfortable talking about lesbian and gay relationships in the knowledge that you won't necessarily have to talk about sex. Talking about LGBT identities is about the diversity of modern families – and about people loving each other – not about the mechanics of sex. And that's how most children will see it.
- Teasing about boyfriends and girlfriends at a young age is making assumptions, and in doing this we may not only be accidentally sexualising friendships between the genders but also forbidding same-sex sexuality.
- Studies have shown how important it is for mothers to talk to sons, and fathers to daughters. For one thing, a message is only half as strong if it comes from one half of a parenting unit. For another, parents can lead by example in helping difference to become familiar.

I WANT TO...encourage my child to be accepting and inclusive

"We raise better human beings when we help them understand that the skin suits we wear and the identities we label ourselves with are mortal wrapping around the same universal need to be loved and to have belonging"

- Stacey Pulice, [Ally Kids...](#), June 2019

"Children are born without bias. As infants, they don't care about race, gender, religion (or lack thereof), sexual orientation or cultural identity."

- Julia Cook, [Raising a Nonjudgmental Child](#), September 2016

What?

Teach inclusivity in a **context wider than just LGBT**, as the specific message can get old and stop being heard

Why?

Children don't see unnecessary differences as easily as adults, but they learn to do so quickly at school

How?

Bring LGBT people and families into your child's cultural view, and **visibly champion rights** campaigns

What the experts say:

- Talk about friends, public figures and families that are different from you - without always referring to that difference first and foremost. Wrapping LGBT into general human rights is the best way to enshrine inclusive values. Model respect. Everyone deserves to feel safe and know that they are welcome.
- The culture your child accesses is their window onto the world. The more books, videos and plays you can bring into view, the better your chances of balancing out negative messages. There are countless great examples including *When Emma Became Emma*, *Worm Loves Worm* and *Julian is a Mermaid*
- Speak out and demand inclusive relationships and sex education at school. If authorities only acknowledge 'penis in vagina' sex, it is not only damaging to LGBT children but it also alienates children with same-sex parents and is a missed opportunity for non-LGBT kids to learn. People need to see themselves and others validated and represented! A vocal minority opposes LGBT inclusivity, so your voice is urgently needed.

I WANT TO...show my gay child they are loved and accepted

I felt, as I was trying to figure it out, "I hope it's a phase" ...while "hoping it is a phase" is a natural reaction, it also reflects the lack of my understanding of the depth of gender and sexuality.

- Audrey Benedetto's Mum, [Interviewing my Mum](#), *My Kid is Gay*, May 2019

The first thing to realise is that your child's sexuality isn't a big deal. Talking it over won't bring about a big change in your relationship and supporting them isn't complicated: they just need to know you're there to help if they need it

- [I think my Teen might be Gay...](#), *Relate*

What?

Respect your child as an adult, including their privacy. Show love and respect without prying

Why?

Being LGBT, people can feel the difference between **tolerance and support** acutely, and it matters which you show

How?

Accept your child's **approach and timeframe** as well as their identity. Ask, learn and show support openly and publicly

What the experts say:

- If your child hasn't disclosed a sexual identity – don't ask! Your child needs space to work things out and express their identity for themselves, and to themselves, first.
- What's more, "repress the desire to be their one and only confidant", says Kaitlin Menza, [paraphrasing](#) Davidson and Tobkes' advice in *When your Child is Gay: What you Need to Know*. Accept it if your child told someone else first: it's not necessarily that they don't trust you – maybe you're the most important person in their life and they need 'practice' first.
- To prepare yourself, read these [tips on how to react when your child comes out](#). *This is a Book for Parents of Gay Kids* by Owens-Reid and Russo also comes recommended.
- Educate yourself on current gay, lesbian or queer culture (you might start with the thousands of stories on the [It Gets Better](#) project). How do people prefer to self-describe? What might be the issues your child is facing? If your child is ready to talk, one of the best compliments you can pay is to ask for their opinions and advice.
- Show support for LGBT causes. Your child will feel beyond 'tolerated' but also accepted, validated and respected. Imagine the warm glow you'd get if your child turned campaigner for women experiencing menopause, high suicide rates in your profession or the mental-health issues parents are up against.

I WANT TO...show my trans child they are loved and accepted

"Since my son started his transition I have witnessed an amazing change in him – from being withdrawn and depressed to a young man who is full of confidence, will speak publicly, shows loads of affection to me and who has an incredible social life"

- Lucy Doyle, [When your Child Comes Out as Transgender](#), ParentZone

What?

Stay positive - affirm and validate. **Stick to the parenting role**, and trust clinicians, councillors, friends and support workers to do their thing

Why?

Even if you question your child's decisions, **it's not your remit to change their mind** and you're unlikely to succeed.

How?

Ask positive and caring questions. Be very careful not to say anything belittling. Your approach will earn their trust and desire to confide in you.

What the experts say:

- Educate yourself. Start with the [NHS guide](#) but these 'Good Sex Is' videos from [LGBT Youth](#) and this [advice for parents of trans children](#) are helpful too. Remember, you'll have a lot to [learn](#) from your kids too.
- Useful responses include reassuring your child that you're glad they have talked to you, asking how they've been feeling recently, asking them whether they've been able to talk to anyone else who's been helpful, and asking your child if they have chosen a name. See [this ParentZone interview](#) with the parent of a trans child for tips on staying positive, and [this Atlantic article](#) to explore complexities and doubts.
- Nothing says 'I've got you' like a body positive undergarment from [Your Open Closet](#) (so says the company). Be careful not to assume – how about a voucher, or just a link accompanied by a kiss and a suitable emoji?
- Look at public figures like Kellie Maloney, Andreja Pejic and Caitlyn Jenner with your child. Read about other trans-visible role models [here](#) – and look up your own! Writer Juno Dawson – author of *This Book Is Gay* and known as James Dawson when they wrote the excellent *Being a Boy* – talks about [transitioning](#).

MORE HELP WITH #SEXUALITY&IDENTITY

1. **Psychology Today:** this leading Psychology outlet has a section dedicated to *When Your Child Is Gay: What Parents Need to Know*, a publication by New York researchers Davidson and Tobkes. [Go to 'When your Child Is Gay' at Psychology Today >](#)
2. **Stonewall:** this thirty-year-old charity can be any individual's first port of call for guidance on sexuality. This link will take you to an advice page for parents of children coming out. [Go to Stonewall >](#)
3. **My Kid Is Gay:** factsheets, resources, personal coming out stories and even a book to help families understand their LGBTQ kids. [Go to My Kid Is Gay >](#)
4. **Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG):** national (UK) charity supporting local groups as well as offering online content for 'family and friends'. [Go to FFLAG >](#)
5. **Mermaids UK:** support for parents of transgender and gender non-conforming children, set up by parents themselves to empower families, reduce isolation and improve outcomes. [Go to Mermaids UK >](#)

There's more where this came from:
Visit OutspokenEducation.com

6. **It Gets Better:** See the thousands of It Gets Better© videos shared with them, along with their original content series. It Gets Better hope the diversity of their community is inspiring and empowering. [Go to It Gets Better >](#)

Remember: every child is different. Adjust these suggestions for the age and stage of your child. Children with special educational needs and disabilities, looked-after children and children who have experienced abuse may all need different support. If you're in doubt about a child's emotional, physical or psychological development, please seek the advice of a professional.