QFAMILY

Drummond Street Services

What to do if a young person comes out to you



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What to do if your child comes out to you.

The thing about rainbow families is that anyone can become a member of one at any time. A partner could come out as LGBTIQA+ later in life, and so could your child. We'll focus on the second scenario here.

Having an LGBTIQA+ child can bring some complicated feelings. If you are heterosexual and cisgender, it can feel like you're being thrust into a new world and a new community. You might be worried about saying or doing the wrong thing, and you might not know how to handle it. But if you're reading this, it means you're already on the right track, and that you're doing the best thing to support your child.

Mistakes can happen, particularly early on. It's a change, and all changes take time to get used to. Don't beat yourself up and definitely don't make it your child's problem.

Remember it's a sign of trust

If your child, or a young person in your life, shares that they have been thinking about their gender identity or sexuality, it's a sign that you're a trusted person. Make sure to honour that trust.

Always check with the child or young person before sharing it with others. This is especially true if you are a teacher or trusted adult. A young person may not be comfortable coming out to their family due to fear of discrimination. Whatever you think of the situation, trust the young person's judgement.

Even if there is no danger, telling other people before the child is ready to is a betrayal of trust. It's for them to share. You just need to support them as best you can.

Believe them

As a parent or carer, you know your child well, and if you're involved in their life, you probably know them well enough. It can be uncomfortable not knowing everything about your child but sometimes its important to sit with that unease. There is no point in dwelling that you didn't notice any signs - sometimes there aren't any. And the presence or lack of signs doesn't determine whether or not your child is LGBTIQA+. Somtimes coming out is a process. Your child might identify as something now and, over time, come to identify as something else later. Respecting this process is important.

As a parent or carer, it can be tempting to assume that you know your young person better than they do, but it's important to put ourselves in their shoes. Ask yourself - Did your own parent or carer know you better than you? Probably not, right? Now ask at what age you started knowing things about yourself that your parents didn't. It's probably about the same age, or younger, than your child is now.

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Be open and curious with them

Coming out is a big step for anyone, especially for a young person. Avoid casting any judgement, and try to show them that you're interested, and want to understand more.

You can do your own research, so don't bombard them with questions. Some details can be quite private, especially if it's about who they're attracted to, so respect if you don't want to share. It's okay to be curious and sometimes you need to sit with that until when or if they are ready.

As a rule, if the question is about them, or their relationship to their identity, it should be fine to ask. Just make sure it's not too private. But questions about the LGBTIQA+ community generally, or what a term means, or things which anybody could answer, can best be left to Google. For example, asking your young person what pronouns you would like them to use is fine. Asking them why people choose different pronouns at all can make it seem as if you disbelieve them.

Most importantly, make sure the child or young person in your life understands that they're loved. Be cautious with how you do this. Avoid saying things like "I love you regardless", since it can seem as if you disapprove of them being LGBTIQA+.

If your child is coming out as trans, avoid saying things like "You'll always be my daughter" if they're coming out as a trans man. Instead, make it clear that you accept and celebrate them for who they are, and that you will continue to love (if appropriate) or support them.

Offer support

It's important to offer support, but always check in with the child or young person in your life if they're comfortable with other people knowing, and if so who, rather than just assuming.

If a young person has come out to you as transgender or gender diverse, it can be good to check if they are comfortable with having their identity affirmed at school. You can offer to share name and pronoun changes with the school if they are comfortable with you doing so, but respect if they don't feel safe for this to happen.

Coming out at school requires coming out to all of their peers, which they may or may not be ready to do. The school is unlikely to share that information without the child's consent- it can be confronting to be outed before you're ready.

Neither you or the child in your life need to do this alone. There is supports available at Qfamily for young people and parents and carers.

Where to access further help

QFamily www.qfamily.org.au
Queerspace Queerspace.org.au
Family Relationships Advice Line 1800 050 321
Lifeline 13 11 14
Raising Children www.raisingchildren.net.au
Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelp.com.au