

### **1. Don't: Ignore It**

So, your kid told you they were gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or a member, in some way, of the LGBTQ+ community. For many parents, this can be a difficult brain-shift. Perhaps no one in your immediate circle quite understands what you are going through. You might also feel guilty for not being able to immediately accept your child's identity. We get it. However, don't let those feelings create an environment where you avoid the topic entirely. Forgive yourself for having conflicting feelings, sure, but don't let those immediate concerns overshadow the fact that your kid just told you about a very important part of themselves. Acknowledge your feelings, but also acknowledge their courage. Ask them how they are doing, tell them that you are working on certain parts of this process, and — as we will touch on in the next point — talk with them, in a compassionate manner, about the things that are on your mind.

### **2. Do: Ask Questions**

Your kid's sexuality or gender identity may be new information for you, so it makes complete sense that you would have some questions! A lot of parents feel that they have no one to go to for answers, but the first thing you should know is that you have a great resource right in your home! Your kid has likely navigated through a bunch of wonderings themselves as they came to better understand their identity, so the first place you should go with many of your questions is directly to them. Ask them if there are particular things they want you to know or understand (like what a particular term means to them, personally), or if there are books they want you to read or shows they want you to watch. Ask them about other kids they know who they can talk to about their questions, and what things are like at their school (is there a Gay-Straight Alliance? Does their school address safe-sex practices for those in the LGBTQ+ community?) Ask them questions you feel comfortable asking, and then, for the questions either you don't want to ask or they don't want to answer, seek out resources! We have a website dedicated to answering questions from parents of LGBTQIA+ kids called [The Parents Project](#) and a book that came out today (!!!) called [This Is a Book for Parents of Gay Kids!](#)

### **3. Don't: Say "I Always Knew."**

Maybe you always had an inkling that your kid was gay or transgender, maybe you noticed your kid's affection for a certain someone before they even recognized what those feelings were, or you noticed certain role models that they chose and made some assumptions about what that meant about their identity ... and maybe you were right. That, however, doesn't mean that they picked up on the same moments that you did or that your observations had a direct correlation to them discovering their identity. What's important to know is that your kid went through a very specific journey to get to a place where they felt good coming out to you. Saying that you "always knew" can really diminish that journey and can also make them question their appearance and behavior in ways that can be very harmful. So, allow them that personal journey by asking them how *they* knew, instead of telling them how you might have!

### **4. Do: Talk About Telling Others**

It's possible that you feel comfortable telling your extended family about your kid's identity, but it's equally possible that your kid isn't quite at that step in their coming-out process. Maybe they want to tell the entire family, but they aren't ready for their friends to know; maybe they are comfortable with others knowing, but they feel it's important for them to be the one who conveys the information. It's also possible that they want everyone to know, but *you* don't feel quite prepared for that conversation! The combinations here are endless, but the point is: You have to talk to your kid first! There is no way

for you to know what your kid is comfortable with if you don't ask, and vice versa. Be honest with the way you both feel, and know that there is nearly always a way to find common ground. If you need a few weeks to get a bit more comfortable with your extended family knowing, just be specific about that length of time and explain why you need it; if your kid needs some time, be willing to give that to them.

### **5. Don't: Assume**

It can be very, very easy to start immediately making assumptions about what your kid's identity means about them as a person. We are here to tell you: Don't assume *ANYTHING*. Don't make assumptions about what your kid will start wearing, where your kid will start hanging out, or who your kid has a crush on. Rather than assuming, we can point you back to #2: Ask questions. Sure, maybe you won't get answers on everything you inquire about, but asking is always better than assuming and blocking that conversation completely. Your kid's sexuality and/or their gender identity does not inform all of their choices and preferences — it is just one facet of their very complex identity!

### **6. Do: Talk About Safe Sex**

Most educational systems are severely lacking in the tools to discuss safe sex, period, let alone addressing safe sex practices for the LGBTQ+ community. Even if your kid's school is ahead of the curve on this, most young people pay close attention to what their parents have to say about sex (even if they are hiding their head in their hands or rolling their eyes). As it turns out, safe sex is safe sex, no matter the gender of the people involved! The important thing to do is inform yourself on all kinds of safe-sex practices, and then find a way to get that information to your kid. Our book has an entire chapter dedicated to these conversations (and the facts that go behind them), and there are incredible websites like [Scarlet Teen](#) and [Advocates for Youth](#) that you can either use to inform yourself before your conversation or use as tools to give to them directly!

### **7. Don't: Ask Them First**

If you think that your child is LGBTQ+ but they haven't yet said anything, please know that they likely haven't told you because they either do *not* identify as LGBTQ+ or because they are not yet ready. If they haven't said anything, it is almost always best to allow them the time and space to become and better understand themselves. This understanding then allows them to become more comfortable in sharing that part of themselves with you, their parent. We've met so many kids through our work whose parents asked, "Are you gay?" — and so many of them said that, in a moment of panic, they replied said "No! I'm not!" This then made it a thousand times harder for them to come out later on, because they felt like they had lied to their parent in that initial moment. What you can do is create a welcoming and supportive home environment where you voice your support of the LGBTQ+ community, which will help them trust that, when they are ready, you will love them for exactly who they are.

### **8. Do: Be Mindful of Gender**

Your daughter wanting to date other women does not mean she wants to be a man, a father, a mechanic, or a person that wears a tux to her wedding. Now, maybe she *will* want some or all of those things, but you should not put her in any sort of gender box based on her identity. The same goes for gender identity: If your kid has come out to you as transgender, this does not mean that you can know what they will want to wear, who they will want to date, or what kind of career they will want to have! We tend to get very confused when it comes to gender and sexuality, but the easiest way to understand things is to remind yourself that every single person is unique, regardless of their gender identity or their

sexuality. Your kid's sexuality doesn't determine their gender identity, and their gender identity does not determine their sexuality — period.

#### **9. Don't: Place Blame**

Sexuality and gender identity are not ever parts of a person that are the “fault” of anyone else. It's not your fault, it is not your ex-wife's fault, it's not the fault of the friend group that your kid hangs out with, it's not the fault of the new nondenominational church your kid is going to — it isn't anyone's fault. Thinking in terms of *fault* or *blame* suggests that this part of your child is a “bad thing” that “happened” to them. That is simply not the case. Our identities are complex and deeply rooted things — they do not ever exclusively form because of the actions of those around us but are specific to each individual and shaped from a combination of myriad factors. What's more, the fact that your child is sharing this part of themselves with you and others is an extremely positive thing.

#### **10. Do: Tell Them You Love Them**

You can never, ever, ever say this enough. Even if your kid rolls their eyes and walks away, say it again. And again. They hear you — and you can believe us, because they *tell* us that they hear you. At the end of the day, the coming-out experience isn't perfect for most of us — we are human, after all, and we say and do things that we sometimes wish we hadn't. The one thing you will always have, though, is each other. Remind them of that every step of the way.